



Testimony

SB 1261

Testimony in Favor Before the Texas House Environmental Regulation Committee

by Brent Bennett, PhD
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Chairman Landgraf and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of SB 1261. I am the policy director of Life:Powered, a project of the Texas Public Policy Foundation to raise America's energy IQ. We support this bill because cities' misguided climate action plans will place a financial strain on Texans and drive business out of the state while providing no tangible environmental benefits.

SB 1261 addresses the growing number of municipalities—including Austin, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio—that are proposing ordinances to restrict or penalize activities that produce greenhouse gas emissions. In the absence of greater federal and state actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, cities have banded together to take action themselves, forming groups like the [Climate Mayors](#) and setting goals in line with the Paris Agreement to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

Historically, states have had a primary role in either setting their own air emissions standards or implementing federal Clean Air Act emissions regulations. Texas actually had its own air emissions standards prior to the passage of the federal Clean Air Act. Although this model of cooperative federalism is not perfect, it is the most effective model in existence today. The U.S. has [reduced emissions](#) of harmful pollutants by 77% since 1970, and on the whole, states have proven to be the most effective environmental regulators.

Having cities take on the role of emissions regulators—especially for greenhouse gas emissions, which touch every aspect of human activity—will lead to poor policies and vast unintended consequences. The natural gas bans being addressed by HB 17 are just the beginning of a long line of damaging policies that will flow from these climate action plans. Additional zoning and energy efficiency regulations, restrictions on vehicles, renewable energy procurement requirements, and so on, will raise costs for residents to live, work, and move within these cities. Most of these costs will be hidden and therefore difficult to predict and discern. One in three American households [struggle to pay their energy bills](#), and these small and hidden costs will add up to severe effects on those who can least afford them.

These municipal actions will impact energy affordability and reliability across the state. Our energy systems are interconnected, so when cities take actions to cut out reliable electricity generation or natural gas infrastructure, customers in nearby areas must pay more to maintain their infrastructure. For example, CPS Energy in San Antonio is under intense pressure from city politicians and environmental groups to retire its Spruce coal plant decades in advance of its planned date. These retirements place hidden reliability costs both on CPS customers and on the entire Texas grid. The premature retirement of nearly 8 GW of coal and gas generation over the past 5 years was a significant contributor to the shortage that we experienced last month.

No actions from U.S. cities will measurably impact the global climate. Climate models show that eliminating all U.S. fossil fuel consumption by 2030 would alter global temperatures by [less than two tenths of a degree](#). No city's actions—indeed, even if every U.S. city's actions were combined—will make a significant difference when the vast majority of future greenhouse gas emissions will come from the developing world. Instead of pursuing futile attempts to make insignificant emissions reductions, cities should invest in growing the wealth of their citizens, making energy more, not less, affordable, and investing in adaptation measures to deal with whatever the future climate will bring.

While we will not be able to measure the true environmental impact of municipal ordinances to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we do know that these measures will increase energy costs, worsen poverty, and restrict consumer choices. This is true not just for the cities implementing these plans, but for the whole state, which is why the state needs to take action on this issue. We commend Chairman Birdwell and Chairman Landgraf for carrying this bill and hope the committee will consider it thoughtfully. ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Brent Bennett, PhD, is the policy director for Life:Powered, an initiative of the Texas Public Policy Foundation that reframes the national discussion on energy and the environment. As part of the Life:Powered team, Bennett regularly speaks with policymakers, energy experts, and industry associations across the country. He is responsible for fact-checking the team's work and spearheading many of the team's policy and regulatory initiatives. He has written extensively on how America has improved its environment while growing its energy use and on the physical limitations of renewable energy and energy storage.

Prior to joining the Foundation, Bennett worked for a startup company selling carbon nanotubes to battery manufacturers, and he continues to provide technology consulting to energy storage companies. His early years were spent in the oil country of Midland, Texas—the heart of the oil patch—where he has been a student of energy his entire life.

Bennett has an MSE and PhD in materials science and engineering from the University of Texas at Austin and a BS in physics from the University of Tulsa. His graduate research focused on advanced chemistries for utility-scale energy storage systems.

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