February 14, 2022

The Honorable Governor Gretchen Whitmer
The Honorable Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist II
All Michigan Elected Legislators

Dear Governor Whitmer, Lt. Governor Gilchrist and all Michigan Legislators,

We write you as a coalition of environmentalists, climate activists, scientific organizations, energy workers, entrepreneurs, and concerned citizens that cares deeply about mitigating climate change while ensuring human prosperity. We seek your assistance in preventing the permanent and premature closure of the Palisades nuclear plant in May 2022, nine years before its operating license expires in 2031. This single plant produces as much greenhouse gas free energy in a year as does all the wind and solar capacity in Michigan, 6.3 terawatt-hours. However, losing Palisades is worse than demolishing all renewable energy sources in Michigan: Palisades provides ⅕ of Michigan’s firm reliable carbon-free electricity.

The closure of Palisades will directly undermine the MI Healthy Climate Plan’s laudable goal for economy-wide carbon neutrality and may increase electricity cost to consumers. It will needlessly eliminate over 600 well-paying jobs, devastate the communities that host this plant, and diminish the state’s economic vitality. We urge you to do whatever is needed to keep Palisades operational.

In recent years, wholesale electricity prices have declined significantly due to the shale boom. Gas sets the electricity price in deregulated markets, many of which do not sufficiently compensate the climate, reliability, and resiliency qualities of generation assets. These market failures are threatening the economic viability of nuclear, our largest source of carbon-free energy.

The federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal of 2021 provisioned $6 billion in the Civilian Nuclear Credit program to prevent premature retirement of existing zero-carbon nuclear plants. We ask that you encourage and assist Entergy or any other plant owner, and Consumers Energy, the electric utility, in accessing this financial assistance to prevent plant closure, and to explore all other possibilities. The 2017 business decision to close Palisades was apparently based on losses from short-term market conditions noted above. Since then, our climate priorities have become more urgent, and economic conditions have changed. We request that you provide administrative, regulatory, and financial support as needed to preserve this invaluable asset for Michigan and our nation.

Palisades prevents at least 4.7 million tonnes CO₂e emissions annually. To ensure economy-wide decarbonization in a timely fashion, we cannot afford to lose any carbon-free energy. Some of the world’s leading scientists, entrepreneurs and academics on climate science, marine biology, air pollution, energy, planetary science, and land conservation recently made a similar plea to preserve California’s Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

The characteristics of nuclear power – like availability on demand, low land footprint, and the ability to locate plants anywhere – make it the logical partner for the ever-increasing use of solar and wind energy. As we electrify transportation, heavy industry, and heating, the reliability of the electric system becomes ever more paramount. The Environmental Defense Fund, Princeton, Stanford, and Clean Air Task Force showed that a carbon-free grid that includes firm energy sources like nuclear can cut ratepayer costs in half.

Protect Nuclear NOW is a coalition campaign that seeks to prevent the premature closure of our largest source of carbon-free energy – America’s nuclear power plants.
As already seen in California and Germany, renewables-only decarbonization approaches, coupled with shutting down nuclear power, result in exorbitant electric rates, grid instability, little reduction in fossil combustion, and even increased fossil-fuel dependence. All four of IPCC illustrative pathways consistent with a 1.5 °C planet require 2050 nuclear generation to be 2x to 6x the 2010 level.

America’s nuclear plants are among the best in the world. There is no technical reason that they cannot operate for decades more with good maintenance and replacement of reactor system components. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, responsible for the safe operation of U.S. nuclear generation, has permitted plants like Palisades to operate for 80 years, and is already considering life extensions out to 100 years. The institutional knowledge of workers and engineers who operate the existing fleet of reactors must be sustained.

Saving our existing nuclear plants is the simplest, cheapest, and most immediate action we can take to protect the global climate and Michigan communities harmed by air pollution. Preserving Palisades will reduce Michigan’s herculean burden to build redundant generation, extra transmission lines, and energy storage infrastructure that would span millions of acres and cost billions of dollars.

Given the urgency of the situation, we cannot continue down the politically expedient path of allowing premature nuclear closures before successfully eliminating fossil combustion. Recognizing this, the Illinois legislature recently passed a comprehensive energy bill that preserved the Byron & Dresden nuclear plants. Pennsylvania successfully reversed the previously announced closure of Beaver Valley. Even groups previously skeptical of nuclear energy are calling to preserve built plants that operate safely. Michigan must take the courageous step to protect its existing nuclear assets to help displace all carbon-emitting sources.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Signed,

Dr. Todd Allen  
Fastest Path to Zero  
Chair, Dept of Nuclear Engineering & Radiological Sciences, University of Michigan

Dr. Frederick Buckman  
Adjunct Prof University of Michigan  
Former CEO, Consumers Power  
Former Chief Nuclear Officer, Consumers Power

Dr. James Hansen  
Director  
Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions  
Columbia University Earth Institute

Dr. John C. Lee  
Professor, University of Michigan  
Serving on the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Used Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Issues

Dr. Xiaodong Sun  
Professor, University of Michigan

Dr. William R. Martin  
Prof Emeritus, Dept of Nuclear Engineering & Radiological Sciences, University of Michigan

Dr. James Hansen  
Director  
Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions  
Columbia University Earth Institute

James Duderstadt  
President Emeritus, University of Michigan

Dr. Sara A. Pozzi  
Professor of Nuclear Engineering and Radiological Sciences, University of Michigan

Dr. Jessica Lovering  
Founder, Good Energy Collective  
Fastest Path to Zero, University of Michigan

Dr. Douglas McLain  
National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration  
(retired)

Dr. John C. Lee  
Professor, University of Michigan  
Serving on the National Academy of Sciences Panel on Used Nuclear Fuel and Waste Management Issues

Dr. Xiaodong Sun  
Professor, University of Michigan

Dr. William R. Martin  
Prof Emeritus, Dept of Nuclear Engineering & Radiological Sciences, University of Michigan

Michelle Sonderman  
Undergraduate Program Manager, Nuclear Engineering & Radiological Sciences, Univ of Michigan

Dr. Alec Thomas  
Professor, University of Michigan

Dr. Brendan Kochunas  
Assistant Professor, University of Michigan
Mackenzie Warwick
U.S. Women in Nuclear
University of Michigan Student Chapter

Dr. Victor Petrov
Research Scientist, NERS, U of Michigan

Kevin Krause
Michigan Public Service Commission Staff
(representing self)

River Bennett
Graduate Researcher, NRES, U of Michigan

David Wehe
Professor, University of Michigan

Adam Burak
Assistant Research Scientist
NRES, University of Michigan

Barbara Peitsch, MA/MPP
Sr. Program Manager, Fastest Path to Zero,
NERS, University of Michigan

Marisol Garrouste
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Michigan

Andrew Panter
American Nuclear Society, Univ of Michigan

Michael Schneider
Climate Coalition, Michigan

Meredith Angwin
Author of “Shorting the Grid”

Dr. Joshua Goldstein
American University, Professor Emeritus

Dr. Gene Nelson
Californians for Green Nuclear Power

Michael Pelizzari, Ph.D.
Environmental Progress

Dr. Shanbin Shi
Professor, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Heather Hoff
Mothers for Nuclear

Dr. Minghui Chen
University of New Mexico

Dr. Leonard Rodberg
New York Energy and Climate Advocates

Philip Carlson
U of Wisconsin Radiology, Emeritus Professor

Dr. Imre Pázsit
Adjunct Professor, Nuclear Engineering & Radiological
Sciences, University of Michigan

Dr. Scott Baalrud
Associate Professor, NERS, U of Michigan

Dr. Joseph Lassiter, III
Heinz Professor of Management Practice in
Environmental Mgmt, Harvard Business School (Retired)

Zhong He
Professor, NERS, University of Michigan

Fei Gao
Professor, University of Michigan

Dr. Roger N. Blomquist
Captain, US Navy (retired), former nuclear submariner.
Currently Principal Nuclear Engineer

Dr. Malcolm Cleaveland
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
Professor Emeritus of Geosciences

Oskar Searfus
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Michigan

Flynn Darby
Graduate Student, University of Michigan

Andrea Kooistra
MS, Dietitians, University of Michigan

Kaitlyn Barr
BSE Nuclear Engineering, University of Michigan

Dr. Chris Keefer
Doctors 4 Nuclear Energy

Dr. Jennifer Klay
Professor of Physics, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo

Dr. Eugene G Preston
Transmission and Generation Adequacy Consulting

Peter V. Schwartz
Professor of Physics, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Futurist

Dr. Richard A. Steeves
Friends of Fission – Midwest, Climate Coalition

Mikołaj Gumulski
Fridays For Future, Poland

Dr. Dietmar Detering
Climate Coalition, Nuclear New York

Dr. Alan Fellman, CHP
NV5 Training Academy, Senior Health Physicist
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valerie Gardner</td>
<td>Climate Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Schue</td>
<td>New York Energy and Climate Advocates</td>
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<td>John Kutsch</td>
<td>Thorium Energy Alliance</td>
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<td>Paris Ortiz-Wines</td>
<td>Stand Up for Nuclear</td>
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<td>Amanda Poster</td>
<td>U.S. Nuclear Energy Foundation</td>
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<td>Alan Medsker</td>
<td>Campaign GND</td>
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<td>Eric Robinson</td>
<td>Thorium Energy Alliance</td>
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<td>Aaron Belman-Wells</td>
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<td>Mark Miller</td>
<td>Certified Health Physicist (Retired)</td>
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<td>Eugene Wilson,</td>
<td>California Clean Energy Committee</td>
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<td>Brad Volz</td>
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<td>Colin Sweet</td>
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<td>Robert Lance</td>
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<td>Isuru Seneviratne</td>
<td>Climate Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arvid Pasto</td>
<td>Retired from Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Metals and Ceramics Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hubby Kristopher</td>
<td>Monterey Bay for Nuclear Power</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pramilla Malick</td>
<td>Protect Orange County</td>
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<td>Rezwan Razani</td>
<td>Footprint to Wings</td>
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<td>William P. Gloege</td>
<td>Californians for Green Nuclear Power</td>
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<td>Princess Mthombeni</td>
<td>Africa 4 Nuclear</td>
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<td>Dan See</td>
<td>California Polytechnic State University, SLO</td>
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<td>Isaac Reichow</td>
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<td>Dr. Qingqing Liu</td>
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<td>Benjamin Leonardo</td>
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<td>Todd Francisco</td>
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<td>Mukesh Mistry</td>
<td>NPCIL, Electrical Supervisor</td>
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<td>Anne Gent</td>
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<td>Travis Dietz</td>
<td>Radiation Effects Engineer</td>
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<td>Marc Deffrennes</td>
<td>Ecole Centrale, Professor</td>
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<td>Matthias Rey</td>
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<td>Ray Sundby BSEE, MBA</td>
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<td>Eric Meyer</td>
<td>Generation Atomic</td>
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<td>Jim Wimberly</td>
<td>Energy Security Partners, LLC</td>
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<td>Art Hobson</td>
<td>U of Arkansas, Professor Emeritus of Physics</td>
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<td>Herschel Specter</td>
<td>Micro Utilities</td>
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<td>Ray Sundby BSEE, MBA</td>
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<td>Steve Curtis</td>
<td>Texas Recycles Used Nuclear Fuel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Sisco</td>
<td>Citizens’ Climate Lobby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bruno Comby</td>
<td>Environmentalists for Nuclear Energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julianna Schoenwald</td>
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<td>Rachel Pastori</td>
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<td>Robin Mahn</td>
<td>Nuclear Engineer (retired)</td>
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<td>Carolyn McCreary</td>
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<td>David Liljewall</td>
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<td>Stefan Hasenohr</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Brown</td>
<td>Research Scientist, University of Colorado</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Rehm</td>
<td>AIChE Climate Solutions Community</td>
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<td>Martin Kunetka</td>
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<td>Kalin Filipov</td>
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<td>Juraj Klepáč</td>
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</table>

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Peter Shaw
Radiological Chemist

Rainer Klute
Nuklearia

Pawel Krawczyk

Annapoorna Akella

George Berka

Konrad Siemek

Christie Cherrington

Samantha Pious

Meredith Faltin

Virgil Fenn

Diane J. Reed

Fabio Nouchy
Design Engineer

Bill Kish
Stop Cricket Valley

Donald Hebbard

Marty Marinak

Chris Melville

Daniel Perez

Damon White

Brian Wilson

John Harshorn

Thomas Kurhajetz

Jean McCulloch

Stuart Bondurant
I&C Engineer

Janne Hirvonen
Ecomodernists Society

Giovanni Paolo Vinci

Kristyne Marton

Damon White

Mary Baier

Ryan Pickering

Doug Houseman

Kyle Vaughn

Nellie Kooistra
Program Manager, Calvin U

Joel Gingold

Jason Sylvester

Chris Quartly

Johannes Ros

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The list of supporters can be found at: climatecoalition.org/sign-the-letter-to-save-palisades

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i Burning gas emits 758 g/kWh CO₂e life cycle GWP₂₀, at a 2.3% methane leak rate vs. 12 g/kWh from nuclear.

ii Save Clean Energy. Dear Governor Newsom. February 2022. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wpKHJQD91VHD00QPLMFYH9Ft5x0Lm00/view

iii EDF, Stanford University, Princeton University, Clean Air Task Force. California needs clean firm power, and so does the rest of the world. April 2021. https://www.edf.org/cleanfirmpower


vi IPCC. Global Warming of 1.5 °C. October 2018. https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/spm/spm-c/spm3b/

