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House of Representatives State of Tennessee

MEDIA STATEMENT

RE: Petition to Reclassify Memphis Ozone Pollution Levels

MEMPHIS, TN — June 5, 2025 — Today's petition by the Southern Environmental Law Center to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is a necessary and overdue call for accountability. It's time we face the hard truth: the Memphis metro area is failing to meet national air quality standards for ozone—better known as smog—and it's putting our families at risk.

This petition is not a first step—it's a last resort. **I urge the EPA to approve this petition swiftly, and I call on our local leaders to step up and put people's health above polluters' profits.** We cannot wait any longer. Redesignating the Memphis metro area as in nonattainment for smog would finally force our regulators to do their jobs: tighten industrial permits, reduce harmful emissions, and protect our health.

Smog isn't just a South Memphis problem. It's a Shelby County and Memphis Metro problem. Air monitors across the metro area, including in Memphis and Shelby, DeSoto and Crittenden counties, document dangerous levels of pollution that threaten our children, seniors, outdoor workers, and anyone with breathing issues. **Four out of five local monitors have recorded smog levels that exceed the federal safety standard. The fifth isn't far behind.**

The American Lung Association recently gave Shelby County an "F" for ozone pollution. We also have the highest rate of emergency room visits and hospitalizations for children with asthma in Tennessee. This isn't coincidence. It's cause and effect. **Polluters like xAI and TVA are contributing to the smog problem.** And yet, local health officials have failed to act. Not only did they miss the EPA's deadline to submit a pollution reduction plan, they have turned their backs on families struggling to breathe.

Breathing clean air is not a luxury. It's a basic human right and we are fighting for our lives.

In Love and Service,

Justin J. Pearson, Tennessee State Representative