#### IN THE SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF MONTANA Case No. DA 23-0575

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RIKKI HELD, et al., Plaintiffs and Appellees

v.

STATE OF MONTANA, et al., Defendant and Appellants

## BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTS AND DOCTORS IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFFS-APPELLEES SEEKING AFFIRMANCE

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## STATEMENT OF INTEREST OF AMICI CURIAE $^1$

Amici curiae comprise a group of both Montana-based and nationally recognized experts in medicine, population health, and related fields who bring a broad spectrum of scientific insight into the public health benefits of climate solutions and the corollary health dangers of inaction. Their overarching assessment is that the District Court's findings are entirely in line with what has been documented in the scientific literature.

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Amicus Caren Solomon is Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School and a physician at Brigham and Women's Hospital. She is a Deputy Editor of the NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE, where she oversees articles related to fossil-fuel pollution, climate change, and health.

Amicus Allison Young is a practicing pediatrician in Missoula, Montana at the Western Montana Clinic. She serves on the Executive Board for the Montana Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics ("AAP") and is the chair of the Montana AAP's Climate Committee.

In total, 113 public health experts and doctors and 17 accredited organizations join this brief. All signatories are listed in Appendix A.

Amici curiae affirm that the medical literature on public health strongly supports the District Court's factual findings that climate change is creating serious respiratory, extreme heat, and mental health harms which are being realized by Appellees today. The harm is acute and immediate. Further, the District Court's findings represent just a fraction of the public health risks that Appellees face—the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

Even before crossing a perilous, 2°C threshold, physicians and health experts like *amici curiae* are already seeing pediatric respiratory health harms correlated with fossil-fuel use and resulting climate change.<sup>4</sup> Children exposed to high levels of air pollution suffer higher rates of oxidative stress, inflammation, and endothelial dysfunction.<sup>5</sup> The cellular damage caused by air pollution contributes to diseases like asthma and cancer.<sup>6</sup> These same pollutants have also been tied to harms occurring *in utero*, potentially leading to adverse birth outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

The peer-reviewed, scientific conclusions are echoed in the District Court's findings below. Specifically, the court found that Appellees with pre-existing respiratory

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Jill A. Poole, MD, et al., *Impact of Weather and Climate Change with Indoor and Outdoor Air Quality in Asthma: A Work Group Report of the AAAAI Environmental Exposure and Respiratory Health Committee*, 143 J. Allergy & Clinical Immunology 1702 (2019), https://www.jacionline.org/action/showPdf?pii=S0091-6749%2819%2930281-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Caroline J. Smith, *Pediatric Thermoregula*,

conditions such as asthma are especially vulnerable to climate change impacts—and that these harms have been corroborated by national medical literature.<sup>8</sup> Several Appellees have pre-existing respiratory conditions and are experiencing the effects of this increased vulnerability firsthand. *See* Doc. 405, at Findings of Fact ¶¶ 128, 206a

*Amici curiae*, including organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics, public health experts, and practicing physicians, can attest to the severity of harms associated with climate-driven allergens. Allergies are unequivocally exacerbated by greenhouse gas pollutants and are the sixth-leading cause of chronic illness in the United States, costing more than \$18 billion annually. At least one Appellee, OLIVIA VESOVICH, suffers from allergies that have grown progressively worse, causing her eyes to swell shut and leading to eye pain that has lasted weeks at a time. *See* Findings at ¶ 201b.

Even more significant—especially in fire-prone states like Montana—is the intense harm associated with exposure to wildfire smoke. A thorough review of the evidence led the District Court to find that Appellee BADGE BUSSE

particulate matter ("PM<sub>2.5</sub>

youth and young adults like Appellees, worsening air quality is unquestionably detrimental. A study conducted on the West Coast demonstrated a 25% higher rate of asthma-related hospitalizations in five- to nineteen-year-olds when exposed to wildfire smoke, and a 56% higher rate persisting after the fires were extinguished.<sup>20</sup> More data collected during the 2011 Pains Bay wildfire in eastern North Carolina retells the same story: elevated levels of air pollution were associated with higher rates of emergency room visits for respiratory diseases in children under age eighteen.<sup>21</sup>

Simply put, the District Court correctly found that extended allergy seasons, wildfire smoke, and other climate-driven factors have coalesced to cause severe, respiratory harm to Appellees.

#### **II.** Extreme Heat Impacts.

Extreme heat has negatively impacted Appellees' ability to live their lives normally.

As the District Court found, Appellee RIKKI HELD has experienced climate-change

<sup>20</sup> R.J. Delfino, *The Relationship of Respiratory and Cardiovascular Hospital Admissions to the Southern California Wildfires of 2003*, 66 OCCUPATIONAL ENV'T MED. 189, 192 (2009).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Melissa A. Tinling, Repeating Cardiopulmonary Health Effects in Rural North Carolina Population During a Second Large Peat Wildfire, 15 Env't Health 12 (2016).

related harms to herself and her family ranch, including problems related to severe flooding, wildfires, and drought. *See* Findings at ¶ 195a. The evidence presented confirmed that RIKKI HELD was needed to work on her family's ranch regardless of temperature and air quality—at great personal risk. *Id.* ¶ 195g. Similarly, the

Given these documented harms, it is no surprise that Appellees have had to forego athletic training because of extreme heat-related weather. *See id.* ¶¶ 123, 131, 198f,

These harms should not be discounted, as some evidence suggests that "heatwaves

#### III. Mental Health Harms.

The District Court understood that climate change and extreme weather can cause severe and wide-ranging mental health harms, including increased levels of harmful stress,<sup>34</sup> spikes in psychiatric emergency room visits for depression and suicidal thoughts and behavior,<sup>35</sup> and diminished academic performance, with the potential for lifelong impairments.<sup>36</sup>

These harms affect some of the most elemental aspects of a child's upbringing.

Children attending school in areas affected by extreme weather events exhibit diminished performance in reading and numeracy, and adolescents exposed to rising

disorders in youth were 4.48 and 6.32 times higher, respectively, compared to non-drought periods."38

The District Court reviewed evidence—subject to cross examination—which confirmed that Appellees have suffered and are continuing to suffer significant mental health harms such as these. Worry and dread over climate change and greenhouse gas pollution are harming Appellees' mental health. Thus, the court found that Appellees feel "distressed," "anxious," "stressed," "helpless[]," and "depressed" due to climate change. *See*, *e.g.*, Findings at ¶¶ 200f, 202h, 205i. The District Court further found that "[a]s climate disruption transforms communities, some Plaintiffs are experiencing feelings that they are losing a place that is important to them." *Id.* ¶ 115.<sup>39</sup>

Abundant research confirms that climate-driven distress alters how children and young adults like Appellees envision their future.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, mental distress can be so severe that they even question whether they can bring children into an uncertain

<sup>38</sup> Sewell et al., *supra* note 35, at 18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Further examples include: RIKKI HELD, who is worried about the effects of climate change on her family ranch, *id.* ¶ 195n; BADGE BUSSE, who feels a sense of loss after a wildfire destroyed and degraded his namesake, Badger Two-Medicine, *id.* ¶ 196k; and KIAN TANNER and MICA K. who are both distressed by the receding glaciers in Glacier National Park, *id.* ¶¶ 198d, 205h.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Hickman et al., *supra* note 34, at 868.

world. *See, e.g., id.* ¶ 200g ("Even though Grace would like to raise children in Montana, she questions whether she can morally bring children into the world, because of her knowledge and fear of the world that her children would grow up in if climate change is not ameliorated."); id. ¶ 201c ("Olivia would like to have children of her own, but she questions whether this is an option in a world devastated by the effects of climate change.").

Again, the medical literature backs up the District Court's findings. *Amici curiae*'s own professional observations confirm that in the wake of climate-related disasters, children may develop post-traumatic stress, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>41</sup> Research highlights the damaging ways in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Susan Clayton et al., Mental Health and Our Changing Ceberaneginimbre e.48(A IMPACTS, IMPLICATIONS, and Guidance 36 (2017), <a href="https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf">https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2017/03/mental-health-climate.pdf</a>; see also Hoesung L4.04 0TE4 158.64 275.16 Tm0 Tc281Tc0L

which acute harms (

chronic stress for children and adolescents. <sup>43</sup> A recent review of nearly a quarter-century worth of literature on climate change and children's health confirmed an important research consensus: fear of climate change is leading to serious symptoms of anxiety and depression in younger populations. <sup>44</sup> Mental health professionals find that stress over the present and future impacts of climate change can cause changes in "behavior, development, memory, executive function, decision-making, and scholastic achievement." <sup>45</sup> Children and adolescents become more vulnerable to "increased worry" when they "believ[e] that the governmental responses are unsatisfactory." <sup>46</sup> While these mental health harms burden all communities, children living in socially and economically disadvantaged communities are affected first and worst. <sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Tara J. Crandon, *A Social-Ecological Perspective on Climate Anxiety in Children in Adolescents*, 12 NATURE CLIMATE CHANGE 123, 123–24 (2022), <a href="https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01251-y">https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01251-y</a>; Hickman et al., *supra* note 34, at 864. 
<sup>44</sup> Terra Leger-Goodes et al., *Eco-Anxiety in Children: A Scoping Review of the* 

Finally, the District Court's findings underscore a cruel irony: strong attachments to place and community provide many benefits to children like Appellees, such as vector-borne, water-borne, and respiratory viruses linked to climate change.<sup>49</sup>

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**CONCLUSION** 

Amici curiae, Public Health Experts and Doctors, are deeply familiar with the peer-

reviewed medical and scientific literature on climate change and children's health.

The data confirms that the District Court's findings are robustly supported. Based

on both national and Montana-specific expertise in public health and medicine, amici

curiae respectfully ask this Court to AFFIRM the Findings of Fact and Conclusions

of Law of the District Court.

Respectfully submitted March 21, 2024.

/s/Timothy Bechtold Counsel of Record

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#### CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to Montana Rule of Appellate Procedure 11(4)(a), I certify that this brief is double spaced, except for those parts allowed by rule to be single spaced, uses a proportionally spaced Times New Roman 14 point font, and contains 4,837 words, excluding those parts not counted by rule.

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