News
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A man holds a sign reading "Climate SOS" during a demonstration.

A man holds a sign during a demonstration marking the start of Climate Week in New York City, Sept. 17, 2023. Catholic and other faith-based organizations have submitted nearly 10,000 comments opposing the Trump administration's attempt to revoke the EPA's 2009 "endangerment finding.(OSV News/Reuters/Eduardo Munoz)



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Catholic and other faith-based organizations submitted nearly 10,000 comments opposing the Trump administration's attempt to revoke the bedrock environmental policy underpinning federal regulations on polluting emissions that drive climate change and harm human health.

The comments come in response to efforts by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to repeal its 2009 "endangerment finding," in which the agency determined through scientific review that heat-trapping greenhouse gas emissions — released primarily from burning coal, oil and gas — pose a danger to public health and

welfare.

The endangerment finding is seen as the legal linchpin in the federal government's ability to regulate emissions, from sources like vehicles and power plants, that are driving climate change. EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin has challenged the finding and called its attempted reversal part of the largest deregulatory push in U.S. history.

In all, nine faith organizations collected more than 9,400 comments as of Sept. 19 in support of retaining the endangerment finding. Staff members delivered the boxes of comments Sept. 17 to EPA headquarters in Washington, D.C. Catholics accounted for roughly 4,400 of those comments, with a quarter submitted by women religious.

EPA issued the endangerment finding after the U.S. Supreme Court in the 2007 landmark case, Massachusetts v. EPA, ruled that greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide and methane, are considered air pollutants under the Clean Air Act.

The EPA's determination that greenhouse gases endanger public health was seen as a major development in how the U.S. — the largest cumulative source of emissions and world leader in oil and gas use and production — could address climate change at the federal level.

A public health and moral crisis

On Aug. 1, the EPA under President Donald Trump began the process of repealing the endangerment finding. As part of its proposed rule, it also sought to roll back pollution standards on cars and trucks.

Read this next: Faith groups blast 'evil' EPA rollback plans, 'climate change religion' comment

Any new proposed rule or regulatory revision requires a public commenting period as part of the process. Public comments on the endangerment finding closed Sept. 22.

The nearly 10,000 comments were collected by the Catholic Climate Covenant, Laudato Si' Movement, Franciscan Action Network, Ignatian Solidarity Network, the Sisters of Mercy, Maryknoll, the sister-founded Catholic social justice lobby NETWORK, Jewish climate group Dayenu and the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. The comments included nearly 4,400 from Black church leaders,

who also issued a joint statement opposing the EPA action.

At a virtual public hearing Aug. 22, Archbishop Thomas Zinkula of Dubuque, Iowa, said the proposed rollback of the endangerment finding jeopardizes the moral responsibility humans hold to protect life, care for creation and defend the most vulnerable.

"Strong [pollution] standards save lives," the Iowa archbishop said. "They prevent billions of tons of climate pollution, reduce smog and soot, and mean fewer cases of asthma and premature death. Families save thousands of dollars on fuel and healthcare costs. These protections are good for people and good for God's creation."

In its own 15-page comment, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urged EPA to abandon its plans to revoke the endangerment finding, which it said would "rewind any progress the nation has made in combating the dangerous effects of climate change." The letter, written by the conference's legal counsel, including general counsel William Quinn, said EPA was attempting to manipulate the Clean Air Act and ignoring scientific evidence on the impacts of climate change on the health of people and the planet.

"Our concerns with the Reconsideration are founded on the Catholic Church's commitment to environmental justice and care for creation, as it is an integral component of Catholic faith," the bishops' letter said.

"Repealing the [Endangerment] Finding is like tossing out the Ten Commandments," Rabbi Jennie Rosenn, Dayenu founder and CEO, said in a statement. "[Zeldin] is not only denying something that's fundamentally true about the world, but he is eliminating what enables our government to live and act in alignment with our core values."

> 'Strong [pollution] standards save lives.'
> —Archbishop Thomas Zinkula
>
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In their statement, the Black church leaders called climate change and emissions pollution "one of the greatest public health and moral crises facing not just our

communities but our country."

“The cost of this decision by the EPA will be paid for in human lives — and Black bodies will bear the brunt of the burden," they said, citing data showing Black Americans are more likely to live near highly polluted areas, such as highways and industrial facilities.

Evidence beyond scientific dispute

The endangerment finding has long been a target of conservative lawmakers and fossil fuel companies. It underpins many of the other limits on emissions and pollution the Trump administration has sought to eliminate.

Zeldin has questioned climate change and the reliability of EPA's 2009 scientific review that led to the endangerment finding, and has suggested new evidence casts doubt on its conclusions.

People stand with banners in front of EPA building.

Representatives of Catholic and other faith organizations delivered boxes of public comments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Sept. 17 in Washington, D.C. The groups collected nearly 10,000 comments from people of faith opposing the Trump administration's plans to reverse EPA's 2009 "endangerment finding." (FranciscanAction Network/Robert Christian)

In response, the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, which provides independent analysis to the government and policymakers, commissioned a new review of science and evidence around climate change. The 137-page report issued Sept. 17 concluded EPA's 2009 finding was accurate and has been reinforced since.

"The evidence for current and future harm to human health and welfare created by human-caused GHGs is beyond scientific dispute," the nation's leading scientific bodies wrote in the report.

"The United States faces a future in which climate-induced harm continues to worsen and today's extremes become tomorrow's norms," they said.

The past 10 years have been the hottest on record. Extreme weather events levied nearly $183 billion in damage in 2024 alone, while heat-related deaths in the U.S. have doubled since 1999.

In comments, many Catholics emphasized the ways human health — especially among already vulnerable populations like children, low-income families and the elderly — is put at risk through impacts of climate change, such as intensifying extreme heat and storms and increasing exposure to pollutants from wildfires and industrial plants burning fossil fuels.

"Rescinding the Endangerment Finding would erode life-saving public health protections and set the stage for irreversible harm to God's creation," said Franciscan Br. Jacek Orzechowski, associate director of the Laudato Si' Center for Integral Ecology at Siena University in New York.

EPA logo

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is trying to repeal its 2009 "endangerment finding," the legal linchpin in the federal government's ability to regulate emissions, from sources like vehicles and power plants, that are driving climate change. (OSV News/Reuters/Ting Shen)

"All people living in the US are harmed by pollution in our air and water. You may think that repealing the Endangerment Finding will better our economy or our society. But it will not. … My Catholic faith compels me to urge you to leave the Endangerment Finding in place," wrote Patricia Sills-Trausch, a staff member at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona.

"Do the right thing, Mr. Zeldin. Protect the air we all breathe. Think about your daughters, and your daughters' children, and your daughters' children's children," wrote Lindsay Nugent, a parishioner at St. Francis Xavier Church in Missoula, Montana.

A current and ongoing threat

During one of three public hearings in August, Dan Misleh, executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, called the endangerment finding a moral issue for the Catholic community and the basis of air quality regulations protecting human health and the planet.

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"The dumping of excess carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into our atmosphere is, despite some who would deny it, a current and ongoing threat to our way of life and will subject future generations to untold suffering," he said in his Aug. 21 testimony.

In April, Misleh witnessed firsthand how emissions from petrochemical facilities harm local communities during a Catholic health conference in southern Louisiana's "Cancer Alley," which has seen inflated rates of cancer and birth complications.

"It's clear that if states and the federal government don't regulate these industries properly, particularly for health impacts, they will just continue to operate in business as usual, and which means that they'll continue to pollute the neighboring communities," Misleh said in an interview.

"For the U.S. to pull back on that core [endangerment] finding basically allows polluters to just run wild," he said.

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