

CLEAN AIR COUNCIL

October 4, 2021

Testimony of Clean Air Council on the Joint Public Hearing of the Pennsylvania Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee and Community, Economic & Recreational Development Committee

Dear Senators:

Clean Air Council (the “Council”) respectfully submits this written testimony for consideration at the joint public hearing on gas infrastructure convened by the Pennsylvania Senate Environmental Resources & Energy Committee and Community, Economic & Recreational Development Committee on Monday, October 4, 2021.

Your committees have dedicated this hearing to the “Consumer & Economic Impacts of Failing to Invest in PA’s Natural Gas Infrastructure.” This is an absurd premise for a public hearing: There has never been a lack of investment in the gas industry in the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania has treated the gas industry as a golden child, giving it generous heaps of subsidies at the expense of taxpayers and carving out exemption after exemption for the gas industry from the laws and regulations by which other industries must comply. In Fiscal Year 2019 alone, Pennsylvania gave the gas industry \$2 billion in subsidies.¹ Currently, the General Assembly has bills pending that would make it illegal for municipalities to adopt any policies that have “the effect of” restricting the use of gas in buildings (SB 275), roll back environmental protections for the conventional gas industry (HB 1144), and strip the Department of Environmental Protection of its existing authority to take any action whatsoever to control greenhouse gases from the combustion of, in large part, fracked gas. No other industry is so coddled by the state.

Meanwhile, the industry has done little for Pennsylvanians. The big benefit of the fracking boom was supposed to be jobs. But job growth in the most fracked counties in Pennsylvania stalled at just 4.6%, less than the statewide average, at the same time as nationwide jobs grew 9.9%.² The number of jobs in the gas industry in Pennsylvania has never been large. Out of 6.3 million employed Pennsylvanians, less than 24,000 work in the gas industry. Three times as many

¹ “Buried Out of Sight: Uncovering Pennsylvania’s Hidden Fossil Fuel Subsidies.” Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future, Feb. 2021, https://www.pennfuture.org/Files/Admin/PF_FossilFuel_Report_final_2.12.21.pdf, at page 3.

² “Appalachia’s Natural Gas Counties: Contributing more to the U.S. economy and getting less in return.” Ohio River Valley Institute, Feb. 2021, https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Frackalachia-Report-update-2_12_01.pdf.

Pennsylvanians are employed in the energy efficiency industry as in the gas industry.³ That's more than \$80,000 in state subsidies for every job.

What most Pennsylvanians experience from the gas industry is pollution. Illness. Bulldozers barreling through their state forests and backyards. Their land taken without their consent through eminent domain. Their drinking wells polluted. Sudden dangerous sinkholes. The constant worry of a major explosion. Their lives threatened by increasingly disastrous storms and floods driven by climate change, in turn caused by leaking methane, the primary constituent of fracked gas, and carbon dioxide, which results from the burning of gas.

The Council has witnessed this again and again while working on behalf of our members to protect everyone's right to clean air and a healthy environment. Desperate homeowners have called us to ask us what can be done now that their water well has dried up or now that a sinkhole has opened up by their house. What can be done now that a big company with deep pockets has threatened to take them to court? We have heard too many stories of people forced to move due to the heavy industrial pollution from gas operations and infrastructure in close proximity to their homes becoming intolerable. Pennsylvania's 43rd Statewide Investigating Grand Jury conducted a two-year investigation and issued a report in June 2020 that presented clear evidence of the same: The gas industry is poorly regulated and controlled in Pennsylvania, and doing widespread and untallied damage to people's health and wellbeing.

Take the Mariner East 2 natural gas liquids pipeline project, for example. Over nearly five years of construction, the project has racked up at least 126 notices of violation from the Department of Environmental Protection, hundreds of actual violations, tens of millions of dollars in fines for breaking our environmental protection laws—and yet, our state government welcomes and encourages its continued construction. This is typical. A restaurant fails a health inspection and gets shut down, while a pipeline company repeatedly endangers lives and property and the General Assembly calls a hearing bemoaning the purported impacts of *failing* to invest in gas infrastructure? The focus at this hearing is on how the state hasn't heaped enough subsidies on the industry yet? What other industry gets such largesse from the state while at the same time causing it so much harm? Where is the General Assembly when people need protection from the gas industry?

It does not have to be this way. The green economy in Pennsylvania already supplies more jobs than the gas industry does, and it's poised for significant growth and investment in both the near-term and long-term. The climate crisis demands immediate attention and renewable energy will be a fundamental part of the solution. Fortunately, Pennsylvanians recognize this and want change. Overwhelmingly, Pennsylvanians oppose subsidizing the fossil fuel industry, but support public investments and resources dedicated to clean energy expansion.⁴ Pennsylvanians

³ "2020 Pennsylvania Energy Employment Report." Produced for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Energy Programs Office, at <https://files.dep.state.pa.us/Energy/Office%20of%20Energy%20and%20Technology/OETDPortalFiles/2020EnergyReport/2020PAEnergyEmploymentReport.pdf>, at pages 3-7.

⁴ See polling commissioned by Ohio River Valley Institute in Spring 2021, available at <https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/dfp-poll/>.

want their government to better control the gas industry.⁵ Your constituents would be better served by a public hearing on the impacts of failing to invest in solar, wind, and energy efficiency programs. These would be true investments for all our futures. That is also where future jobs will come from.

Pennsylvania's finite reserves of fossil fuels, including fossil gas, are not a solution to the climate crisis. Indeed, continued extraction and burning of gas will produce catastrophic consequences for the health and safety of people statewide. With solar and wind technology now the cheapest way to add electricity in markets around the world, and with significant advancements in battery technology and energy storage, investments in renewable energy are unquestionably the best use of Commonwealth fiscal resources. Pennsylvania should act now to get ahead of the curve on clean energy. Indeed, to avoid falling even further behind.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Sincerely,

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⁵ *Id.*