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Governor Wolf called upon to finalize methane controls and oppose budget that sacrifices clean air, clean water and public health

Pittsburgh, PA – Pennsylvania residents, health professionals, and environmental organizations gathered today outside Governor Tom Wolf's southwestern Pennsylvania office in Downtown Pittsburgh to remind him of the promise he made to control methane emissions from new oil and gas operations and to criticize a state budget revenue deal that includes a provision which could prevent that promise from becoming a reality.

The group presented to the Governor's office over 800 letters from Pittsburgh area residents supporting the swift adoption of the GP5 and GP5A permits which are designed to curtail methane pollution from new oil and gas operations. These letters are in addition to the over 11,000 comments submitted during the comment period for rule which ended in June as well as the over 1700 emails sent to the legislature and governor opposing provisions in the state budget that would sacrifice health, clean air and clean water.

"I wish I were here today celebrating how great the new controls on climate-warming methane and toxic volatile organic compounds are and how Governor Wolf followed through on one of the major environmental initiative he campaigned on and promised to implement years ago," said Jamin Bogi, Policy and Outreach Coordinator with the Group Against Smog and Pollution. "Instead we're discussing the exact opposite--giving control of oil and gas rules to a legislature that is very friendly to that industry by slipping a rider into the Tax Code Bill at the last minute."

The Tax Code Bill (HB 542) which passed the Pennsylvania Senate and is supported by the governor, includes a provision that would create a new special Air Quality Permit Advisory Committee to approve any air quality permits meant to regulate emissions from oil and gas operations. The 7-member committee includes 6 members appointed by the state senate and state house and one member by the governor. This is the first time in history a legislatively-dominant body would have veto authority over any environmental regulation or permit. The group stated that they believed the clear intent of this policy was to create a new hurdle for approving the proposed updates to the methane rules.

"As a former grade school teacher, I have dedicated 33 years of my life to educating and protecting children. I am retired now but continue to fight for children's protections from harmful pollution spewed by the natural gas industry," stated Ron Slabe an Upper Burrell Township resident who has a proposed natural gas well site 1,600 ft from his

home. "Neither I nor the families living near this proposed natural gas well site intended to be living next to these industrial operations, my community and others like mine need Governor Wolf to protect clean air and water safeguards."

"As a nurse, I recognize how pollution greatly impacts peoples health," stated Laura Dagley, BSN, who is a Medical Advocacy Coordinator for Physicians for Social Responsibility. "Oil and gas operations can create health and safety risks from pollutants such as methane, benzene, and ozone smog that can cause respiratory diseases, cancer, asthma attacks, adverse birth outcomes, and increased hospitalizations. Clean air and water are a vital part of keeping families safe and preventing illness but unfortunately, the Governor and the Senate have traded important public health protections for a bad budget deal."

The group also demonstrated strong ire for other anti-environmental provisions that were included as part of the revenue package deal. These provisions included allowing wastewater treatment facilities to continue accepting and discharge conventional oil and gas drilling wastewater under long expired permits and allowing industry to pick their own third-parties to review and approve their permits if DEP doesn't do so within a set timeframe. They also pointed out how use of revenue related bills to pass industry friendly policies that could never stand on their own merit is becoming an annual budget tradition in Harrisburg.

"Every year over 100 million gallons of conventional gas wastewater, which contains heavy metals such as arsenic, a variety of hazardous chemicals, radionuclides, and high levels of salts, is still discharged to rivers and streams, especially impacting the Allegheny River," said Myron Arnowitz, with Clean Water Action. "It's disgraceful to allow these facilities to continue to pollute our waterways by letting them operate under weaker standards in violation of an EPA order and the Clean Water Act."

"The third party review provisions of the budget bill are essentially an attempt to privatize the DEP," said Rachel Martin Golman, Sierra Club Sr. Organizing Manager. "By allowing polluters to cherry-pick third party contractors that may lack expertise on the permit and/or who may have even helped prepare the application, the PA Senate is seeking to dismantle the process that is at the core of protecting Pennsylvanians' air, water, and health. Governor Wolf needs to halt this in its tracks."

The event was sponsored by Clean Water Action, Clean Air Council, Earthworks, Group Against Smog and Pollution, Moms Clean Air Force, Sierra Club,

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