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Testimony for Control of VOC Emissions from Oil and Natural Gas Sources by Rabbi Daniel Swartz, 606 Division Street, Clarks Summit PA 18411, on behalf of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Good evening. I'm Rabbi Daniel Swartz from Clarks Summit. I serve as the spiritual leader of Temple Hessed of Scranton, the oldest Jewish congregation in Lackawanna County, and as the executive director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, which for the past 25 years has worked with all Jewish movements and 18 national Jewish organizations to help bring the teachings of our tradition to bear on important questions of environmental justice.



Thank you for the opportunity to comment on PA DEP's proposed rule on methane and other emissions from natural gas. These virtual hearings come at a time of great change in our state and our planet — and we should pay attention to the signs of these times. It shouldn't take the indirect effects of a pandemic for all people to have clean air to breathe. And it shouldn't take protesters chanting "I can't breathe" for us to realize that breathing is one of the most basic of all human rights. That's why I'm heartened to see DEP's efforts to rein in \ toxic, climate-change fueling emissions from natural gas production that have dirtied the air of the commonwealth today, while at the same time contributing to destructive climate change for generations to come.

You don't need me to list all the harmful effects of such emissions — they have long been clear to anyone who doesn't worship at the golden calf of fossil fuel profits. What I do want to do tonight is try to clarify why such rules are matters of fundamental morality and justice, as well as call for two changes to strengthen these rules.

My tradition is very clear on the underlying purpose of societal institutions. We read in Proverbs 31:8-9 that those with power should, "*Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.*" In other words, in order to build a just society, we need first and foremost to value the lives that other people say don't matter, to amplify the voices that have been drowned out by wealthy and powerful interests. That's why this rule matters — because it would protect the very young and very old, protect vulnerable individuals and communities from carcinogens, from respiratory pollutants that are bad enough in and of themselves but even worse when considered in the light of COVID. And, because methane is such a potent greenhouse gas, reducing methane emissions means that we are also defending the rights of future generations who otherwise will suffer from the heat

waves, droughts, fires, floods, vector-borne diseases and more that will come with climate change.

But such protection will only be truly effective if the current rule is strengthened. Since low-producing wells emit more than half the methane from all oil and gas production in Pennsylvania, it is critical that they are not exempted from this rule. Furthermore, experience teaches us that leaks can happen at any time, in any location, even when previous inspections have shown minimal leakage. So the prudent course is to stick with a protocol of frequent and regular inspections — as Proverbs teaches (22:3), “the prudent see danger and take cover, but the simpleton keeps going and pays the penalty.”

If we just keep going as we have been, if we do not ensure that methane emissions are regulated, that leaks are stopped, and that emissions of volatile organic chemicals are quickly and drastically reduced, we will all pay the penalty. And it will be those with pre-existing respiratory conditions, those unable to afford to move away from gas producers, and the children of our children who will pay the highest price for our inaction.

Our sages taught in the Midrash Ecclesiastes Rabbah, “When the Holy One created the first human beings, God took them around all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said, ‘See my works, how fine and excellent they are, which I have created for you. Think upon this and do not corrupt or destroy my world; for if you corrupt it there is no one to set it right after you.’” Please prevent that corruption and destruction, and set our commonwealth on the right path by finalizing a strong, comprehensive, loophole and leak-free rule.

Thank you for your consideration.