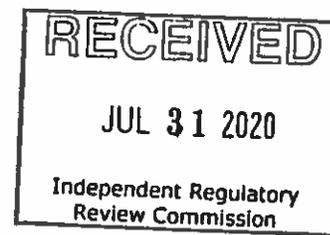


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Testimony for Control of VOC Emissions from Oil and Natural Gas Sources:

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to speak to you on an issue that is important to me personally and I hope to you as well. I am the Rev. Dr. Phil Covert, a retired United Methodist pastor living in York.

I am speaking on behalf of 3 of my 9 grandchildren who live, work and attend school in York County. Each one of these children were born with either autism, ADHD, asthma, or severe allergies. My oldest granddaughter struggles with asthma, chronic fatigue syndrome, and migraine headaches. Our oldest grandson is autistic. My other grandson has ADHD and allergies. I am also speaking on behalf of over 311,000 children who attend schools within ½ mile of oil and gas facilities and are, therefore, exposed to methane and other toxins.

More than 1.5 million Pennsylvanians live in this danger zone. Pollution from natural gas extraction and production raises the risk of numerous health issues among Pennsylvania's children, pregnant women, and other susceptible populations. I know this is true because, as I have said, I have seen it in my grandchildren and in the children in the churches that I served in York county.

According to medical research, the life and wellbeing of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable residents, who live close to natural gas development are being threatened:

- 25% increase in low birth weight infants and significant reductions in infant health, which influences lifelong health concerns,
- Increased brain, spine, or spinal cord birth defects,
- Increased congenital heart defects,
- Up to 25% increase in children's asthma,
- Up to 86 times greater exposure to known cancer-causing chemicals such as benzene and toluene, a colorless liquid hydrocarbon present in coal tar and petroleum, for those living approximately 1 mile or less from unconventional drilling sites
- Increased anxiety and depression in pregnant women.

Pennsylvania's gas operators emit 1 million tons of methane every year— more than 16 times than reported to the Department of Environmental Protection. With these methane emissions come other air pollutants, like volatile organic compounds.

These emissions result in serious health threats to our children, both born and unborn, to senior citizens, the underprivileged and people of color who live in highly susceptible polluted areas.

*He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8 (NIV)*

Regardless of your faith stance, I believe we all have a moral responsibility to care for the most vulnerable and to act as good stewards of God's creation. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is failing to do both as we have some of the worst air quality in the nation, and it is only getting worse. One of the major sources for fouling our air is pollution from the natural gas industry.

Our climate is changing. Our winters are warmer. Our summers are hotter. Temperatures in Pennsylvania increased 1.8 degrees in the last century and will warm another 5.4 degrees by 2050. Increased temperatures raise smog levels and is at least partially responsible for the Lyme Disease epidemic in our state. Leaking methane is making climate change worse. 86 times more powerful at trapping heat than carbon dioxide, methane fuels climate change, placing more burdens on our children and other vulnerable peoples. As these health issues increase there will be a greater financial burden on health care system.

As a pro-life Christian who believes in the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, I am appalled at the health threats imposed by the gas drilling industry on our children, both born and unborn. These toxins clearly highlight that harming creation also threatens human life. For me, creation care is a matter of life, human life.

Caring for the least of these requires action. Therefore, I am urging the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to finalize a strong bill, titled Control of VOC Emissions from Oil and Natural Gas Sources, that defends the health of our children and those most at risk, while reducing perhaps Pennsylvania's most damage-inducing greenhouse gas.

Thank you for doing the right thing, the human thing, caring for all life – yours, mine, our children and grandchildren.

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