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Independent Regulatory  
Review Commission

Hello. My name is Beatrice Zovich and I am a resident of Philadelphia. In order to protect public health, secure his legacy as a climate champion, and meet the goals of his January 2019 executive order, Governor Wolf must finalize a strong rule that cuts methane pollution from existing oil and gas infrastructure in Pennsylvania. If there was ever a time at which the link between the health of people and the environment is clearly defined, it is now, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This respiratory virus shines a bright light on our air quality. Air pollution exacerbates heart and lung ailments, including asthma, emphysema and COPD, and people with these conditions are most at risk for serious complications and adverse outcomes from COVID-19. These include many members of the vulnerable communities with whom I worked previously to provide social services, including those who have experienced homelessness and are living with mental health and substance abuse challenges, in addition to their physical health concerns.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania already has some of the worst air quality in the nation. The American Lung Association's most recent State of the Air report has again issued failing grades to both the Pittsburgh and Philadelphia metro areas for their poor air quality. This is unsurprising given that Pennsylvania is the third-largest greenhouse gas-polluting state and the second largest natural gas-producing state in the country, and it was estimated in a 2018 analysis by the Environmental Defense Fund that Pennsylvania's natural gas operators emit more than 16 times more methane than they report to the state Department of Environmental Protection, or more than 1.1 million tons annually.

Methane is a highly potent greenhouse gas -- more than 80 times more potent than carbon in the first 20 years after it is released into the atmosphere -- and is responsible for 25% of the man-made global warming we are experiencing today. Some of the many effects of rising temperatures are the increasingly strange weather and more severe storms and floods we have been seeing recently that cause property damage, agricultural losses, injury, and death and that will only get worse unless we act quickly.

Common-sense standards that cut harmful air and methane pollution and climate action in general are supported by a majority of Pennsylvanians. The Wolf administration should continue its work to advance draft rules to cut methane and air pollution from oil and gas infrastructure at a time when protecting public health and safeguarding our climate is more important than ever. We cannot afford to neglect the looming climate crisis and its impacts on public health and the environment. This is also especially critical at this juncture in US history because data shows that environmental injustices tend to affect Black and Brown communities more adversely than White communities.

In addition to methane, oil and gas operations release other air pollutants, such as volatile organic compounds, which contribute to ground-level ozone that can worsen respiratory diseases, and increase the risk of heart disease and heart attacks. Oil and gas operations also release toxics into our air, such as benzene, which can contribute to heart, liver, kidney and central nervous system damage, as well as blood disorders and even cancer.

**Policy asks:** It is essential that the DEP finalize a strong existing source methane rule that is cost-effective, protects the health of Pennsylvanians, and safeguards our climate. Specifically the agency should:

- Reduce or close the loophole in the draft rule for low-producing wells that are responsible for more than half of the methane pollution from oil and gas sources in Pennsylvania.
- Eliminate the provision that allows operators to reduce the frequency of inspections just because previous inspections did not reveal significant leaks. Both the latest research and experience of other states demonstrate that a large, uncontrolled leak can happen at any time and can only be detected with frequent, regular inspections.

Cutting methane emissions is the quickest, most cost-effective way we can reduce emissions now and is a critical down payment on our climate and our future.

In the face of federal rollbacks by the Trump administration, Gov. Wolf taking action to adopt the strongest possible methane rule in Pennsylvania is more important than ever. Given the large amount of natural and greenhouse gas it produces, Pennsylvania has a responsibility to step up and be a national leader in reducing harmful methane and air pollution from existing oil and gas infrastructure. Please take this opportunity to take a step in the right direction for a healthier populace and planet, especially at this time when the future seems very bleak. Thank you for your time and consideration.