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<u>Coalition Urges Vote Against 'Demolish the DEP' PA Budget Bills</u>
Groups to Pennsylvania House: Budget Compromise Violates Constitution

A coalition of groups released a letter today calling on the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to reject budget bills, calling the package of legislation an unconstitutional plan to "decimate" the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's ability to regulate the fossil fuel industry.

The letter, which was signed by over 30 organizations, identifies several major concessions to the drilling industry. Under the guise of balancing the budget with a small tax on drillers, the bills would empower private consultants to conduct environmental permit reviews, and would fast-track the permit approval process at the DEP. The bills also would create an industry-friendly panel to review shale gas air quality permits, taking that responsibility out of the hands of the DEP entirely. The bills also fail to include mechanisms to restrict conflicts of interest, setting the stage for a process where the drilling industry is quite literally policing itself.

Right now, there are major controversies swirling around the Mariner East 2 and the Atlantic Sunrise pipelines, with impacted communities challenging the DEP and the Wolf administration to take a more assertive stance to protect public health and the environment. These bills would make it much more difficult for the public to pressure lawmakers and regulators to stand up to corporate polluters.

The groups are urging lawmakers to oppose House Bills 542, 453, 118, and any proposed legislation that would include similarly dangerous provisions.

"State decision-makers cannot in good conscience sacrifice our core environmental safeguards for the sake of political convenience," said Sam Bernhardt, Senior Pennsylvania Organizer with Food & Water Watch. "Real threats like climate change

and the health impacts of fracking will not fade away just because Harrisburg politicians got themselves off the hot seat with a patchwork budget. State Representatives must oppose these dangerous policies."

"In light of the recent contamination caused by Energy Transfer Partners' blatant disregard to conditional permits issued by the DEP, Chester County residents need more assurance than ever that their rights to clean air, clean water, and community are being protected," said Rebecca Britton, co-founder of Uwchlan Safety Coalition. "We call upon our elected representatives in the House to oppose the newest house bills that seek to eliminate environmental protections. Big oil and their surrogates should not be allowed a free pass by allowing private industry to be in charge of permitting processes. We demand more stringent oversight, not less."

"The state's budget is being hijacked by Legislators who are willing to trade away essential environment protections for approvals to keep the Commonwealth's government in operation. This kind of cynical, special interest manipulation is not only shameful, it is unethical because it violates the Constitutional rights of citizens to clean air and water by undoing basic environmental regulation of those who exploit our natural resources. Our legislators must vote an unequivocal NO on this Budget Bill package to say NO to this injustice," said Tracy Carluccio, Deputy Director, Delaware Riverkeeper Network.

"Outsourcing the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) duties to the gas industry and bypassing the regulatory role of the DEP would allow environmental injustices to deepen and is a misappropriation of taxpayer funds," said Tammy Murphy, of Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania. "This threatens our human health protected by our state Constitution's guaranteed 'right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment'. House Bills 542, 453, 118 are dangerous bills which threaten the health of Pennsylvanians."

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