



The Honorable Greg Vitali
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
30 East Wing
Harrisburg, PA 17120-2166

Letter of Support for House Bill 109 – Strengthening Environmental Justice Protections

Dear Representative Vitali,

On behalf of Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN), I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 109, legislation requiring stricter oversight of industrial permits in environmental justice areas. This bill is a critical step toward safeguarding the health, well-being, and future of communities like Mon Valley, where residents have suffered for decades from unchecked industrial pollution.

VCAN has worked tirelessly to provide direct support and advocacy for communities disproportionately impacted by air pollution. Through our Air Filter Distribution Program, environmental monitoring efforts, and resident-led advocacy initiatives, we have witnessed firsthand the devastating health and economic consequences of weak regulatory enforcement in these areas. The need for more substantial permitting processes and greater accountability from industrial polluters is not just a policy concern—it is a matter of life and death for our residents.

Recent statistics paint a grim picture of pollution and its impact on our communities. A new study has found that fine particulate pollution (PM_{2.5}) in Allegheny County, particularly in the Mon Valley, has contributed to some of the highest mortality rates in the country. Researchers discovered that long-term exposure to these pollutants is directly linked to increased deaths from respiratory diseases, heart conditions, and cancers. The study reported that individuals living in areas with higher concentrations of PM_{2.5} are significantly more likely to suffer from life-threatening illnesses, with mortality rates from air pollution-related diseases exceeding national averages. This is not just data—it is the lived reality for the people in our communities.

Dave and Cindy Meckel have lived in Glassport for over 30 years. Every morning, they wake up to a layer of black soot on their windowsills. Cindy, who suffers from chronic asthma, often struggles to breathe on high-pollution days, forcing her to use her inhaler multiple times. Their home near the U.S. Steel Clairton Coke Works has become a battleground between daily survival and corporate pollution. Despite numerous violations and fines against the facility, enforcement has been inconsistent, and air quality remains dangerously poor. House Bill 109 would help close the regulatory gaps that have allowed industries to continue polluting without meaningful consequences.



Art Thomas is a retired steelworker who has watched his neighborhood slowly deteriorate due to air pollution. Many of his friends and former colleagues have been diagnosed with respiratory illnesses, and several have died from lung cancer. Art himself has been diagnosed with COPD, a condition worsened by exposure to delicate particulate matter and benzene emissions from nearby industrial facilities. He often says, “We gave our lives to these industries, and now they are taking them away.” Stronger oversight of industrial permits, as outlined in House Bill 109, is essential to protecting workers and residents from further harm.

Germaine is a community leader and environmental justice advocate fighting for clean air in the Mon Valley for years. She has seen generations of children in her neighborhood develop asthma at alarming rates, including her granddaughter. Schools in the area frequently receive air quality alerts warning them to keep children indoors, yet industries continue to operate with impunity. The passage of House Bill 109 would ensure that the voices of affected residents are prioritized in permit decisions rather than drowned out by corporate interests.

The air we breathe in the Mon Valley is not just polluted but deadly. The recent findings on PM2.5 mortality rates confirm what we have known for years: that the air pollution in our communities is cutting lives short. Children are developing asthma before they reach school age, seniors are suffering from preventable heart attacks, and pollution-driven diseases are tearing families apart. If we do not act now, more lives will be lost due to regulatory negligence. House Bill 109 is not just a measure to improve environmental policies—it is a lifeline for the thousands of Pennsylvanians who are suffocating under the weight of unchecked industrial emissions.

We urge you and your colleagues to support House Bill 109 and advocate for its swift passage. Pennsylvania has a moral and constitutional obligation to protect its residents from environmental harm. VCAN stands ready to work alongside you to ensure that every Pennsylvanian, regardless of ZIP code, has the right to breathe clean air and live in a healthy environment.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to your support and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Sincerely,
Qiyam Ansari
President
Valley Clean Air Now (VCAN)
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