

March 3, 2025

Dear legislators,

I am a resident of Sheraden, an environmental justice area in the city of Pittsburgh. Historically low income and working class people, like me, must live and work in areas where we are exposed to greater environmental pollution while more affluent citizens enjoy green spaces, cleaner air and water, and more attractive neighborhoods. This exposes us to hazards and results in greater instances of preventable health conditions.

The Dept. of Environmental Protection is meant to protect all people from the rampant pollution caused by industrial actors. However, these businesses do not take into account the negative impacts that those who live nearby will experience. We are not able to grow food in contaminated soils, we are not able to enjoy outdoor recreational activities when the air quality makes us unable to breathe without foul smells from toxic chemicals in the air, our roads and vehicles are damaged by industrial trucks, our water is subject to contamination and sewage and utility costs are out of control.

Often, the economic benefits these polluters enjoy are not a benefit to the communities who are impacted by the environmental pollution. Energy generated is sold to areas far away. Pipelines carry resources from our neighborhood to coastal areas to be sold around the world. Foreign companies own and operate steel mills. All while the people living near facilities and working for the companies making profit are left to shoulder the burden. Shouldn't we at least be charged less for our own electric, gas, and water utilities when we live where the resources are collected and processed?

We need HB109 to empower the Dept. of Environmental Protection to address these impacts in meaningful ways. We deserve to be informed about what industrial pollutants we will be exposed to when for profit companies want to operate in our neighborhoods. The DEP needs to be able to do its job, in response to public input and hold the permittees responsible for limiting the impact before they poison our communities and not be intimidated and influenced by companies who put profit over people. Prevention is cheaper than remediation and is easier to build into the permit process than to punitively try to force polluters to clean up their mess.

Crystal Witt