



Promoting and Protecting the Health of Delaware County

March 2, 2025

Testimony:

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Director

Delaware County Health Department

“The Issuance of Permits in Environmental Justice Areas/ HB 109”

Tuesday, March 4th, 2025

10:00am – 12:00pm

Lathem Hall, Widener University, Chester PA

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House Environmental & Natural Resource Protection Committee and to express my strong support for Amending Title 27 (Environmental Resources) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to add Chapter 47 (Issuance of Permits in Burdened Communities).

A critical policy tool for addressing long-standing inequitable exposures and health impacts is to consider cumulative impacts in environmental permitting decision-making. Empowering PADEP to consider cumulative impacts – the total harm to human health that occurs from the combination of environmental burden such as pollution and poor environmental conditions, pre-existing health conditions, and social factors such as access to quality healthcare – addresses this gap of only considering each permitting decision in isolation.

I joined the Delaware County Health Department as Deputy Director at the initiation of the department’s operations in April 2022 and was promoted as Director in November 2024. Prior to serving the County, I worked at the federal level as Regional Director for the Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry/Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and with the Preparedness Division of the Federal Emergency Management Agency Region 3 in Philadelphia and in environmental consulting. I have over 30 years of experience directing responses to chemical exposure and environmental public health concerns, evaluating and providing technical assistance to communities and agencies, and building partnerships across Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

There is substantial scientific evidence that environmental stressors, socioeconomic disadvantage, lack of environmental assets, and health vulnerability are clustered and persist in distinct geographic patterns in our country. I observed this over and over again in my work at the federal level, and it is crystal clear that this also occurs here in Delaware County. Residents living in particular communities in Delaware County are disproportionately burdened by multiple environmental hazards in the places where they live and work. This is the result of years and years of continuing the practice of regulating facilities in isolation from each other in concert with local zoning practices that do not consider cumulative health impacts. The effects of environmental burdens on our residents’ health are compounded by pre-existing health

conditions and social inequities. This results in health disparities that can continue over generations.

Addressing cumulative impacts in environmental permitting decisions in overburdened communities is needed across our Commonwealth – in every rural, suburban and urban county. In my federal career, I worked with communities in Northeast Pennsylvania dismayed that PADEP cannot take into account cumulative exposures from existing waste disposal operations into future landfill permitting decisions. I worked with communities in Berks County that couldn't understand why the cumulative impact of biosolids applications on neighboring farms was not something that the state could consider in permitting. I worked with rural mountainous communities where there is only one major road and any increase in coal mining truck volume dramatically compounded the existing air quality problems for homes lining that same road. And I worked with communities in Lehigh County and Allegheny County frustrated that PADEP does not have regulatory tools to address the cumulative impacts from air emissions and quality of life impacts from quarry and concrete crushing operations in close proximity to residents.

Closer to home now, this is absolutely a critical issue here in Delaware County. We are here for this hearing in the City of Chester because I believe this committee recognizes the importance of this community and the longstanding challenges it has faced.

Data from the Pennsylvania Environmental Health Indicators Map developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology demonstrates that the City of Chester has highly elevated risks in key environmental health indicators including:

- Air Toxics Cancer Risk,
- Respiratory Hazard Risk,
- Diesel Particulate Matter (PM)
- Traffic Proximity and Volume
- Wastewater Discharge

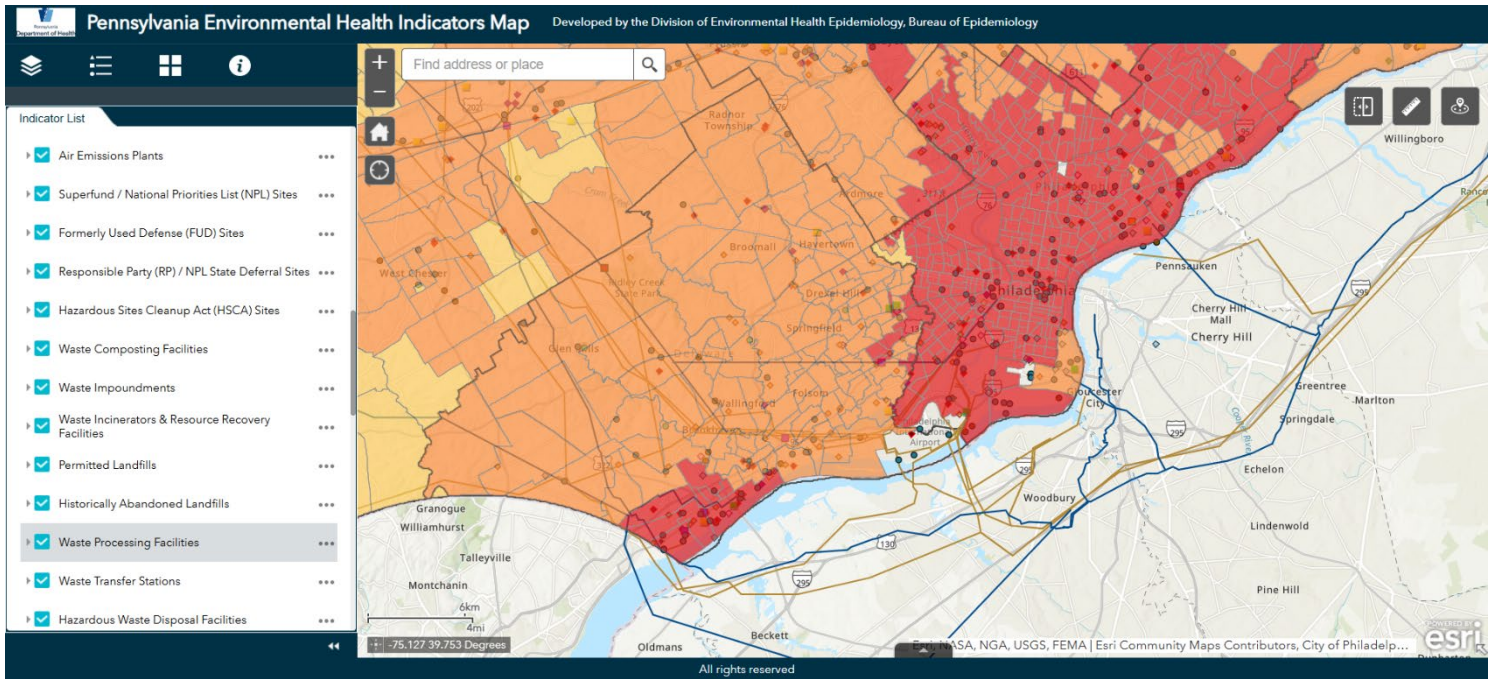
The map below from this program provides a stark visual of the locations of elevated air toxic risks in Delaware County against the clustering of active and former sources of environmental emissions, and how this disproportionately impacts our communities along the I-95 corridor.

The environmental permitting system requirements we have right now in Pennsylvania do not allow the state to take a “bigger picture” look at what our communities are experiencing. We can do better. This proposal is an important step forward that would advance PADEP’s permitting decision-making in a very positive way for all Pennsylvanians.

Best regards,



Lora S Werner, MPH



Source: Pennsylvania Environmental Health Indicators Map,
<https://www.phaim1.health.pa.gov/env-health-map/>