



Upstream Pgh
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On behalf of UpstreamPgh, I am writing to express our strong support for House Bill 109, a critical piece of legislation that will help protect Environmental Justice (EJ) communities from the cumulative impacts of pollution.

As an organization focused on restoring and protecting the Nine Mile Run watershed, we work directly with communities in Wilksburg, Homewood, and East Hills—areas that have long faced the disproportionate burden of environmental degradation, flooding, and air pollution. These neighborhoods, like many other Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities in Allegheny County, have historically been subjected to industrial pollution, poor air quality, and inadequate stormwater infrastructure, contributing to higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, and other public health disparities. In fact, Black residents in Allegheny County are more than twice as likely to visit the emergency room for asthma-related issues compared to white residents, and studies have linked long-term exposure to air pollution in our region to increased rates of cancer and respiratory illnesses. Indigenous communities, who have deep historical ties to this region, continue to experience the generational impacts of environmental degradation, loss of land, and lack of clean water access, further exacerbating health disparities.

House Bill 109 is an essential step toward addressing these inequities by requiring select polluting facilities seeking permits to build or expand in EJ communities to conduct a cumulative environmental assessment. This assessment will evaluate potential negative impacts on the broader community and empower the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to deny permits or impose necessary conditions if the findings indicate further harm to public health and the environment.

This bill is a crucial complement to DEP's 2023 updates to its EJ Public Participation Policy, taking key concepts further by codifying them into law. Many communities, including those we serve at UpstreamPgh, have long advocated for stronger protections, and HB 109 ensures that policy changes translate into real, enforceable safeguards for public health.

We urge legislators to consider the lived experiences of those who reside and work in EJ communities like ours. The communities of Wilkinsburg, Homewood, and East Hills continue to feel the effects of decades of environmental harm, and without stronger protections, these burdens will persist. HB 109 provides a necessary mechanism to ensure that impacted communities are not only heard but meaningfully protected from further environmental injustices.

The bill is currently before the House Environmental and Natural Resources Protection Committee and is slated for a hearing in early March. While testifiers for the hearing are limited and by invitation only, we believe it is vital for decision-makers to hear from organizations like UpstreamPgh and the communities we serve. We encourage members of the committee and the full House to support HB 109 and take a meaningful step toward ensuring environmental justice for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Chavaysha Chaney
Water Equity Director
UpstreamPgh