



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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**League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Comment to the
Citizens Advisory Council of the
Department of Environmental Protection
October 21, 2014**

Good day. I am Bonita Hoke, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania for whom I am speaking. The League is appreciative of the opportunity for public comment and is delighted that on-going consideration is being given to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the advisory committees of the Department of Environmental Protection.

Today we come to you saddened by the recently reported bad choices made by officials of this Department. We trust that you, as members of the advisory council, are examining ways to rebuild the image of this agency and promote public trust. At the same time we applaud the actions of David Hess and perhaps others in this room who actively opposed HB 1565.¹ Such legislation, once enacted, will degrade our most pristine streams, threaten our source water, and cost taxpayers who will pay the price to insure properties, to pay for anticipated flood damage and upgrade filtration systems of rural water suppliers. Mr. Hess understands that an ounce of prevention through riparian buffers is worth a pound of cure in terms of mitigation and restoration. Perhaps it is time to re-examine the worth of the streamside planting promoted by the DCNR's TreeVitalize program.² Why would corporations partner with the Commonwealth and citizen volunteers to plant trees along the banks of our waterways today to have them cut down tomorrow?

Further, it is disheartening to note that while Pennsylvania appears to be reducing regulation to promote development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency is requiring states to examine climate risks in disaster planning to reduce physical and economic impacts.³ To be eligible for future disaster relief funds, Pennsylvania will need to conduct a formal analysis of all risks their communities face from human-caused and natural hazards, as well as potential policies and projects to deal with these risks. We trust you will consider DEP's role - as well as the influence you can bear on our legislators - to reduce rather than expand future risks.

A review of the EPA evaluation of Pennsylvania's progress on reaching its commitments to the Chesapeake Bay TMDL Commitments indicates that we have fallen short in numerous areas. The League supports measures to reduce pollution in order to protect surface water, ground water and

¹<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?sYear=2013&sInd=0&body=H&type=B&bn=1565>

² See <http://www.treevitalize.net/RiparianBuffer.aspx>

³ <http://insideclimatenews.org/news/20141001/fema-will-require-states-examine-climate-risks-disaster-planning>

drinking water.⁴ We therefore believe it is important to meet not only the prescribed milestones but expand efforts to disclose other pollutants flowing into the Bay. Given the increase in natural gas operations and commercial agricultural feeding operations that impact our waters, additional testing and regulation of these contaminants is essential to safeguarding not only sensitive environments but also public health and welfare.⁵ Should the DEP play a more active, non-partisan advisory role in legislative affairs that “water down” our protections, hamper monitoring, and reduce oversight? Given your expertise and experience, should your mission move up the hill to the halls and offices of our capitol?

As the natural gas industry expands, it is not unpredicted that the number of incidents would also grow. Given the data involving oil and gas violations, the League is pleased that today we will be hearing more about related standards and guidelines for addressing these issues. As in the past, we strongly advocate for increased staffing of this agency to identify, track and resolve these matters. Most importantly, penalties must be enacted that actually deter violators. Resolution through compliance is inadequate and time-consuming. The failure to act quickly to halt violations jeopardizes Pennsylvanians.⁶

Based on recent legislative action, the on-going threats to public health and welfare, and the responsibilities of this Department, the League would like to leave you with two questions.

- What role should the DEP play in providing non-partisan advisory information in legislative matters that do not “water down” our protections, hamper monitoring, and reduce oversight?
- In what ways may your expertise and experience move your vital mission up the hill to the halls and offices of our capitol?

We again thank you for this opportunity to provide input and your prompt consideration.

⁴ See <http://www.lwv.org/content/public-policy-positions>

⁵ For a recent analysis of wastewater related to natural gas extractions, see <http://insideclimatenews.org/author/zahra-hirji>

⁶ An example is <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/washington/2014/08/06/Pa-finds-tainted-water-soil-at-three-Washington-County-shale-sites/stories/201408050198>