

**Clean Water Action * Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania *
Delaware Riverkeeper Network * Earthworks *
PennEnvironment * Sierra Club, PA Chapter**

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**PENNSYLVANIA SENATE AND HOUSE VOTE FOR PREEMPTION OF MUNICIPAL
ZONING TO FAVOR GAS DRILLING AND OPERATIONS;
INDUSTRY INTERESTS DOMINATE THE PUBLIC INTEREST**

Organizations decry lack of concern for communities, health, and property

Yesterday in the Senate and today in the House, the Pennsylvania legislature voted in favor of HB1950, a compromise gas development bill that was hammered out behind closed doors under the heavy hand of Governor Tom Corbett. Under the guise of providing “impact fees” to municipalities where gas operations occur, the legislature effectively supported a takeover of municipalities by the State and the gas industry by gutting established and effective local planning and zoning rights.

Through provisions contained in the bill, municipalities will no longer be able to play a central, critical role in protecting the health, safety, and welfare of residents and determining which uses of land are most beneficial.

The bill requires that all types of oil and gas operations (except for natural gas processing plants)—unlike any other commercial or industrial business—be allowed in all zoning districts, even in residential neighborhoods and near schools, parks, hospitals, and sensitive natural and cultural resource protection areas. As a result, people could be forced to live only 300 feet away from a gas well, open frack waste pit, or pipeline, despite growing evidence that such development causes pollution, damages health, and lowers property values.

The bill also mandates a one-size-fits-all ordinance that supersedes all existing ordinances and prevents municipalities from adopting any zoning provisions that are stricter than the weak, mandated standards.

“The PA Legislature has let the gas industry take over, despite the terrible consequences that drilling is having in communities across the Commonwealth. This so-called impact fee bill

brings no net fiscal gain to Pennsylvania residents; it robs us of the ability to protect what is most locally valuable—our health, safety, and resources—and gives gas operators the right to run all over our communities. This is unjust and exposes the true allegiances of the Bill’s supporters—self-interested gas developers and their backers,” said Maya van Rossum, the Delaware Riverkeeper.

“Today, many legislators and Governor Corbett told Pennsylvania residents that protecting their health and rights matters far less to them than the gas industry’s demands,” said Nadia Steinzor, Marcellus Regional Organizer for Earthworks’ Oil and Gas Accountability Project. “They and other supporters of this bill turned a blind eye on the widespread damage caused by drilling and a deaf ear to calls from citizens for change, while doing the bidding of companies that want to drill anywhere, anytime.”

“If legislators were looking to pass a proposal that will allow more gas drilling near people’s homes, and the parks, playgrounds and schools where our children play and spend their days, then ‘Mission Accomplished,’” said Erika Staaf of PennEnvironment. “Sadly, this is just one more case of powerful interests dominating the political process, and the lack of leadership on both sides of the aisle to do anything about it.”

“A poorly-regulated gas industry will be able to drill in residential neighborhoods, bringing thousands of gallons of toxic chemicals, thousands of tractor trailers, round the clock noisy, polluting drilling, all as little as a football field away from homes, day care centers, and playgrounds,” said Jeff Schmidt, Director of Sierra Club’s Pennsylvania Chapter. “The legislators who voted in favor of HB 1950 have abandoned any pretense that they are acting in the public interest. We will make sure the public knows who sided with the drillers and who sided with citizens when they go to the polls for this year’s elections.”

“This bill represents a huge step backwards in protection for Pennsylvania towns and the environment,” said Myron Arnowitt, PA State Director for Clean Water Action. “The state override of local zoning ordinances will greatly increase the threats to communities from all aspects of gas extraction. Never before has one industry been given full rights to do as they please, without recognizing the needs of other businesses, residents, and our environment. 2012 is an election year, and we will be devoting our energy to ensuring that the voters of Pennsylvania are aware of which legislators voted to give away our control over an industry that has contaminated our air, land, and water.”

“The legislators who voted for HB 1950 made a short-sighted decision that puts the health and safety of Pennsylvania’s communities at risk,” said Josh McNeil, Executive Director of Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania. “They voted against the interests of their constituents and should expect those constituents to return the favor in the November election.”

To see the votes that were cast:

[Click here for PA House Roll Call Votes](#)

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