

Good morning Honorable Members of both the Pennsylvania House and Senate Environmental Committees,

My name is Kim Geyer and I am a Butler County Commissioner. I serve on the County's Conservation District and Farmland Preservation Board. My background is being self-employed working in a construction and development business with my husband over 35 years prior to becoming a county commissioner. I recognize how water and sewer infrastructure are critical to any land development and how growth follow both.

March 1st, I began to hear from various municipalities and sewage enforcement officers throughout Butler County about their awareness in the field that the State DEP restricted the use of alternate technology septic systems. Various parties indicated that the "effective date" of this new regulation had already taken effect as of February 23, 2021. Municipalities such as townships and sewage enforcement officers felt taken off guard for being in the middle of standard testing, subdivision, design, or permitting processes and learning of the regulation's implementation after the fact and with no advanced notice or warning.

Because of Pennsylvania's hilly terrain and steep slopes, these alternate septic systems make up approximately 75% of all new home construction in areas not serviced by public sewers. Alternate systems would only be permissible for a repair but not suitable for new construction. These systems are recognized by regulatory officials and experts in the industry as some of the most reliable wastewater technologies in the marketplace today.

Because the northern tier of Butler County is mostly rural and does not have public sewer or access to public sewer due to feasibility issues, alternate sewer systems are an option for those wishing to develop a parcel of land they either purchased or inherited from the family's farm. Prohibitive use of alternate systems will greatly reduce the number new permitting, construction, and development. This, in turn, can reduce the quality of life for rural townships preventing them from experiencing residential or commercial development and growth. This situation would likely direct more growth to suburban and urban areas accessible to public sewer and will shift populations to more densely populated communities. This could reduce or stagnant rural school district student populations and reduce school funding through a reduction of property taxes and minimal land values in which these property taxes would be based upon. With stagnant growth in rural communities, municipalities will be unlikely to sustain themselves, as rural municipalities are already struggling with there not being enough of a tax base to keep up with yearly increased operating costs associated with municipal functions such as road and bridge maintenance along with snow removal. Most counties are experiencing challenges associated with an aging rural population of residents trying to maintain a needed tax base for operations and maintenance of their communities while experiencing minimal growth. Rural Pennsylvanians do not live in neighborhoods but in households separated miles apart from one and other making water, sewer, and broadband services unfeasible to providers, developers, or property owners.

In Butler County's case, if growth ceases to spread into our northern townships, jobs associated with the planning, engineering, construction, building, and development will be centralized exclusively to southern areas of our county in which public sewer exist. DEP's restriction could very well put Sewage Enforcement Officers out of business on a permanent basis. In 2020, Pennsylvania's Governor deemed construction being unessential. The 2020 construction season was lost due to the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Building and Trades Industry is eager to work and get back to work to make up

for 2020's loss of wages, revenues, and uncompleted projects that came to a screeching halt last March. Now these trades are dealing with triple the increases in the cost of construction materials, and challenged by finding people who want to work and/or have the skill set to do this type of work, and major delays and shortages associated with building materials and supplies. Having the DEP restricting usage of alternate septic systems compounds an already exacerbating job climate given the aforementioned conditions. Skilled labor is experiencing shortages in the trades that help to build, develop, and support families and our local economies. If travel is required because these jobs only exist or are more prevalent in urban or densely populated areas, there will be a rural disadvantage for municipalities. Migration patterns have the potential to influence the tax base and quality of life of each municipality, school district, and town that supports a local economy in Pennsylvania.

In the first four months of 2020, Butler County has over 468 building permits filed to date. Many of these property owners, sellers, and buyers, would be affected. Most are unaware of DEP's restriction until they proceed with the permitting process, only to learn, they cannot do what they may have intended with the land they either purchased or inherited due to no alternative option. People and entities invest in property daily and make plans, have dreams of retirement, selling the farm, building a house, and realizing the American dream which costs much money and sometimes all the money they have.

In the big picture, not many would have ever thought that something such as an alternate sewer system could have so many implications for people's lives, municipalities, school districts, counties, and state government. The impact of DEP's restriction of the use of alternate septic system on our citizens and industry is coming at a time when our Commonwealth should be striving to invest in creating a more stable working environment. We should be providing our municipalities and taxpayers with every tool made available to all other states, in Pennsylvania's toolbox for their usage in lieu of tying their hands via regulations and putting them at a distinct disadvantage. Perhaps PA DEP can reach out to other and surrounding States that allow the use of alternate septic systems that are proven protective of public health and the waters of the state, when they initiate their rule-making process on site suitability criteria.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony on this important issue.

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