



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA

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December 5, 2011

Robert F. Powelson, Chairman
Pennsylvania Public Commissioners
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-3265

**Comment: Order - 2271982 LAW Pipeline Replacement and Performance
Secretarial Letter Ratification Order**

Dear Chairman Powelson:

The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania commends the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission for efforts to improve the safety of natural gas pipelines in our Commonwealth. The fatal February accident in Allentown underscores the need for distribution companies to file pipeline replacement and performance plans. We are encouraged to note that these plans will include timeframes for replacing aging pipelines and standards for damage prevention, corrosion control, and distribution system leaks.

The League, however, is concerned that such plans may be unavailable to the public through an exemption to the Right to Know Law under Act 2006-156, The Public Utility Confidential Security Information Disclosure Protection Act. We are aware that certain data is critical to security. At the same time, other information regarding pipeline safety is essential for providing meaningful public input into decision-making processes. For example, the Pipelines and Informed Planning Alliance, initiated and supported by the Pipeline and Hazardous Safety Materials Administration has recommended practices related to risk informed land use planning and development adjacent to transmission pipelines. Without access to documents related to distribution integrity management plans, informed participation by public stakeholders is severely limited. The League thus urges you to seek clarification and, if necessary, to request amendments to Act 2006-156.

We believe such action is also consistent with our recently adopted statewide position on pipelines. The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania supports:

- siting of natural gas pipelines through coordinated federal, state, regional, and local efforts that are objective and responsive to safety considerations, accurate

environmental assessments, county conservation districts, land use planning agencies, and local communities. The process should include adequate public notice of local stakeholders from the beginning of the process, convenient input venues, timelines reflective of the PA Municipal Planning Code, consistency with existing state and local regulation, and a mediation process to resolve conflict.

- regulation for the safety of natural gas pipelines that encompasses the entire transmission system, including gathering lines, with standard location data, current, comprehensive maps that are publically accessible, on-going inspection, One Call coverage, odorization, emergency/hazard response contingencies, adequately funded maintenance plans, a reserve trust to compensate for unanticipated events, and mandated best practices to promote the integrity of the system.

- standardized and comprehensive inspection of all natural gas pipelines by an adequate number of qualified inspectors who are continually updated in their training and employ best practices including on-site evaluations, objective information to verify self-reporting, accurate data gathered from sophisticated technological devices, and the support of local agencies such as emergency response teams and county conservation districts.

- enforcement of regulations for all natural gas pipelines that demonstrate standardization, best practices, costly penalties that encourage compliance, and fines consistent with the nature of the violation.

- legislation at the State level that would - authorize the PA Public Utility Commission (PUC) to regulate all natural gas pipelines for safety without providing the right of eminent domain for gathering lines, and - promote the development of a regional interstate compact for siting interstate pipelines.

- ordinances/zoning regulations, where and when possible, for natural gas pipelines at the local level sited and designed to protect the public, prevent environmental degradation, and reflect community or county-wide land-use planning.

- measures to insulate regulatory agencies from political influences and other considerations provided by the natural gas companies that they are authorized to regulate. This would prevent the appearance of a conflict of interest and potential ethical concerns.

We appreciate your consideration. It would be most regrettable if average citizens became frustrated seeking information about pipelines in their community or accident-related investigations became hampered by confidentiality issues.

Sincerely,



Olivia Thorne, President
League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania