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Democratic Whip



Senate of Pennsylvania

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January 14, 2020

The Honorable Kevin Gross
United States Bankruptcy Court
District of Delaware
824 N. Market Street, 6th Floor
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Judge Gross,

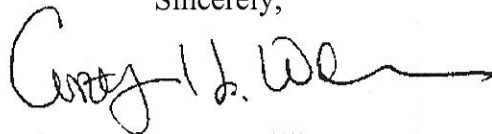
The explosion at the Philadelphia Energy Solutions refinery last summer sent shockwaves through my community. In addition to accelerating the bankruptcy and closure of the plant, constituents in my district and neighboring communities raised concerns about air quality monitoring, emergency plan development and community input on the future of the site. At a hearing of the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee held at my request, experts from Drexel University, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the University of Pennsylvania described the potential hazards from both the explosion and the regular operation of the refinery complex. I share their concerns about the toxic chemicals released during the explosion, as well as the remediation of decades of pollutants spread throughout the site and additional air quality monitoring systems, but I also am concerned that any future use of the 1,400 acre plant include requirements for employment equity for those who have long been excluded from sharing in the economic benefits of the plant.

It's no secret that the refinery, which has been operating at that location in one form or another for 150 years, is the largest single source of toxic air emissions in Philadelphia. A 2017 report produced by the NAACP and Clean Air Task Force cited the PES complex as responsible for 72 percent of such emissions, and provided evidence of a direct link to poor quality-of-life outcomes in low-income families who live in proximity to the site, especially families of color. I've heard from constituents for many years about the poor air quality and attendant respiratory conditions. Residents in my district have long suffered the negative consequences of living near the refinery – increased rates of asthma, allergies, and a whole host of other related health issues, so reducing pollutants and ensuring that the health of neighboring residents is paramount. I wholeheartedly endorse the message sent by others that any future use of this land must be conducted in a more sustainable and health-conscious manner.

Also any future development needs to include employment equity for residents. I would ask that in considering bids for the future use of the refinery property, require bidders to commit to at least 60% of the workforce be comprised of city residents with a special emphasis on surrounding communities of color and historical high unemployment. Residents in the surrounding communities should not be locked out of high-paid employment opportunities.

Achieving the goal of environmental justice requires equity in both the environmental burdens and benefits. It is evident that market forces will drive any prospective development in the near future, and I hope that the global shift toward cleaner sources of fuel will drive a more sustainable business model at this complex. I also hope that whoever wins the bid will make an effort to actually listen to the community and address longstanding environmental and health issues. All of that can be accomplished while providing expanded opportunities for stable, high-paying jobs for residents of the 8th District and the City of Philadelphia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anthony H. Williams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Anthony H. Williams
State Senator – 8th District