Dear UUPLAN:

Thank you for writing to me about your concerns regarding oil and gas development and public health and safety. This is an issue that my administration takes very seriously.

During my time as governor, we have made real strides to improve Pennsylvania’s regulations on oil and gas development. Despite powerful opposition, we have put in place new protections to more rigorously protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land on which we live. These regulations protect Pennsylvanians from negative environmental and health impacts and are a part of our work to ensure that we’re being responsive to the growing body of scientific research on oil and gas development and public health. Pennsylvania’s natural gas development is providing economic benefits to the commonwealth. However, these benefits should never require a choice between continued growth and public health or safety. It is essential that as we realize economic benefits, we ensure the public is protected—especially our children—and take the necessary steps to aggressively regulate resource development.

While there is significant oil and gas activity in the southwestern counties of our state—as well as a long legacy of development of other natural resources—there is currently no known environmental cause of Ewing’s sarcoma. The Department of Health was initially asked to undertake an analysis of this area as a potential cancer cluster based on radiation concerns. We will continue to monitor and study cancer incidents in this area, especially as more data becomes available.

Further, my administration’s epidemiologists just completed a years-long and exhaustive review of relevant scientific studies regarding the potential health impacts of hydraulic fracturing. After working with epidemiologists in Colorado, their peer-reviewed paper determined that the results were inconclusive, and suggested that further in-depth research is warranted.

In these matters I defer to the expertise of the health professionals who have devoted their careers to ensuring that the public is protected from health risks. We will continue to research and study the evidence from Pennsylvania, and closely monitor the academic literature as it develops elsewhere. This work is incredibly resource-intensive, but it must be done. I have asked my Secretary of Health, Dr. Rachel Levine, to assess the best ways to spur additional academic, science-based study of potential public health impacts from oil and gas development. We will continue to make decisions guided by science, and we encourage the public to provide information to the Department of Health.

I am grateful for your suggestions, and please be assured that I give your views serious consideration. I believe that, together, we can build a brighter future for Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

TOM WOLF
Governor