

To: Members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives
From: Matthew Stepp, PennFuture
Re: Support for State Well Water Standards (House Bill 48, P.N. 0042)

Dear Representative:

On behalf of PennFuture, I am writing to convey our strong support for HB 48, an important effort by Rep. Robert Godshall (R-Montgomery) to implement statewide well water construction and decommissioning standards. The bill is currently under second consideration in the House of Representatives and deserves a full vote.

The water crisis in Flint, Michigan shines a much-needed spotlight on public drinking water quality. While well water standards are a separate issue, the critical need for safe drinking water has become more apparent of late. These standards are of utmost importance in Pennsylvania to advance human health and safety, as over 3 million residents rely on private wells for drinking water and over 20,000 new wells are drilled each year. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth is only one of two states failing to implement uniform standards, putting our water resources at risk of contamination.

According to a recent study by the General Assembly's *Center for Rural Pennsylvania*, approximately 40% of surveyed wells had at least one water quality problem due to poor construction, including high levels of arsenic, lead, radon, *E. coli*, and other bacteria. The bill's chief sponsor was personally sickened by contaminated well water. And contamination isn't limited to just those that drink water from the well; rather faulty wells or improperly cased abandoned wells can leak impurities into the surrounding surface water impacting surrounding neighbors and towns.

HB 48 addresses these significant issues by ordering the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) to promulgate rules identical or similar to those recommended by the National Ground Water Association. In particular, HB 48 advances a number of key policies and addresses concerns voiced by public interests, including:

- **Advancing new well construction standards.** These standards will be developed in an open transparent way, with public comments and debate so that the unique needs of Pennsylvanians are considered.
- **Advancing abandoned well decommissioning standards.** The state contains an unknown number of abandoned wells that spread contamination and cause potential issues when drilling new wells. HB 48 will lead to new standards for decommissioning old wells so they're properly marked and capped.
- **General Assembly oversight.** The EQB consists of 4 members of the legislature, 5 public citizens, and key experts from core state agencies.
- **Not authorizing private well water fees.** Rather, HB 48 authorizes DEP to penalize those that fail to construct or decommission water wells to the new standards. This ensures that the standards are broadly adopted.

- **Not regulating oil and gas well pads.** Regulations for oil and gas drilling are promulgated under different legislation and not impacted by HB 48.

A number of amendments have been offered for consideration, but it's critical that the core characteristics outlined above are not removed from the bill. In particular, PennFuture does not support an amendment (A04413) removing language for setting well decommissioning standards, as these wells are prevalent source of drinking water contamination. PennFuture also doesn't support the amendment (A03225) exempting private wells from any new standards based on the size of the town. As many faulty or improperly constructed wells are located in rural regions of the Commonwealth, it wouldn't be prudent to exempt wells that need maintenance the most.

While PennFuture supports first and foremost passing a clean version of HB 48, it does support Rep. Godshall's amendment (A03201) for creating a small Well Decommissioning grant program to help well owners defray some of the cost of properly capping old wells using revenue generated through the Safe Drinking Water Fund. This would help accelerate capping old wells and reducing drinking water contamination.

HB 48 is a critical piece of bipartisan legislation that will dramatically increase the health and safety of Pennsylvania's drinking water. We call on the General Assembly to consider HB 48 and bring it for a full vote in the House of Representatives.

Sincerely,
Matthew Stepp

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

Director of Policy
PennFuture