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**Environmental and Conservation Groups Slam Pennsylvania's Backroom Fiscal Code as Attempt to Delay Action on Clean Power Plan, Gut Oil & Gas Regulations**

HARRISBURG (January 19, 2016) – A backroom Fiscal Code bill passed by the Pennsylvania General Assembly will gut improved environmental regulations for oil and gas drilling activities, subvert the public input process for clean air standards, and give handouts to the oil and gas industry.

Pennsylvania's environmental and conservation community—including Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), PennFuture, Clean Water Action, Sierra Club PA Chapter, Clean Air Council, PennEnvironment, Conservation Voters of Pennsylvania, BlueGreen Alliance and Mom's Clean Air Force—slammed the General Assembly for approving the non-transparent budget package that is hostile to public health, clean air, and pure water. The groups urge Governor Tom Wolf to veto HB 1327 and the legislature to deliver a clean Fiscal Code bill.

Provisions in the Fiscal Code add unnecessary hurdles to Pennsylvania's process for developing a state plan to implement the Clean Power Plan, the historic federal plan to reduce carbon emissions from power plants. It would also exempt "conventional" oil and gas drilling activities from compliance with updated health and safety regulations, and shift existing funding for renewable energy sources to natural gas development.

As approved by the General Assembly, the Fiscal Code could give the legislature more time to review the Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) state plan under the Clean Power Plan than the DEP would have to write it. The bill seems calculated to create confusion and make it harder the DEP to develop a strong, timely state plan that works for Pennsylvania. In addition, the bill would prohibit the state Environmental Quality Board from adopting much-needed and long overdue modernizations of Pennsylvania's oil and gas drilling regulations, And, to add insult in injury, the bill would divert \$12 million earmarked for clean energy projects under the Alternative Energy Investment Act to into a new "Natural Gas Infrastructure Development Fund" to further subsidize an industry that already benefits from billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies.

Pennsylvania's Fiscal Code must be passed annually to authorize expenditures provided for in the budget bill; the budget package will now go to Governor Tom Wolf for approval.

"The new Fiscal Code bill, House Bill 1327, scuttles the public process and transparency for regulations that defend our kids' health and calls into question the hope for a vibrant clean energy future," said Gretchen Dahlkemper, National Field Manager, Moms Clean Air Force. "Our families deserve better.

Pennsylvania's children deserve the economic opportunities and health benefits associated with a sustainable, renewable energy economy."

This Fiscal Code includes language which circumvents the public input process currently underway. In the case of the Clean Power Plan, the DEP just concluded a public input process consisting of 14 listening sessions around the state and a 60-day written comment period, and will hold an additional comment period in 2016. And there have been multiple opportunities for input into the gas drilling regulations over the last two years. Moreover, the amendments may be unconstitutional, because the Fiscal Code is supposed to implement Pennsylvania's budget, not establish (or in this case, undermine) environmental standards.

"Tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians submitted comments and attended hearings on climate and gas drilling regulations," said Adam Garber, Field Director for PennEnvironment. "The General Assembly has undermined that robust democratic process through secret, back door amendments in the state budget."

PennFuture president and CEO, Larry Schweiger said, "While many of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable populations have suffered the greatest during the budget impasse, those same citizens' constitutional 'right to clean air, pure water,' and an overall healthy environment are threatened with the enacting of this Fiscal Code. This loss for Pennsylvanians is a gain for big oil and gas companies."

"Implementation of the Clean Power Plan is an issue that affects all Pennsylvanians," said Mark Szybist, Senior Program Advocate for NRDC. "It needs to be worked out transparently, as the DEP has been doing – not in backroom deals."

The environmental and conservation groups urge Governor Wolf to veto HB 1327 to ensure a responsible state budget for Pennsylvania's citizens and environment.

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