

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 08, 2024/ **UPDATED July 16, 2024**

### Media Contacts:

Amanda Gillooly, Group Against Air Pollution and Smog (GASP), [amanda@gasp-pgh.org](mailto:amanda@gasp-pgh.org)

Zachary Barber, PennEnvironment, [zach@pennenvironment.org](mailto:zach@pennenvironment.org), (412) 973-5023

Debra Smit, [dsmit@breatheproject.org](mailto:dsmit@breatheproject.org), (412) 760-7677

### **Environmental Groups Support Plan to Boost Funding for Allegheny County Air Quality Program**

*Groups Support Increased Fees to Polluters; Object to Cuts to Allegheny County Air Inspectors*

**PITTSBURGH** - The Allegheny County Board of Health is expected to vote **TOMORROW, Wednesday, July 17**, on plans to increase funding for the Health Department's Air Program, which faces a budget deficit of nearly \$2 million. The new plan would substantially increase permitting fees charged to polluters, but would eliminate a number of staff positions from the Air Program.

“Allegheny County needs a fully funded Air Program - full stop,” **GASP Executive Director Patrick Campbell** said. “Fully funding the program through polluter fees is vital for our health, and that means raising enough money to avoid cuts to personnel needed for environmental inspections and effective enforcement.”

The Allegheny County Health Department unveiled an initial plan for fee increases at a June 10 Air Pollution Control Advisory Committee meeting. Department officials revealed a \$1.8 million deficit and said the permit fee increases and other measures are necessary to help offset the shortfall.

**Lisa Graves Marcucci**, community organizer for the Environmental Integrity Project and lifelong Mon Valley resident, said: “Residents of Allegheny County rely on the Health Department’s air program to keep us safe from dangerous pollution and hold companies accountable to the law. In order to ensure protections are in place there needs to be Clean Air Act expertise in the department with proper financing to ensure compliance.”

The new proposal would bring in an additional \$1.9 million by increasing fees charged to polluters, and would create a new outreach coordinator position to work with Environmental Justice communities. However, the proposal would also eliminate multiple positions from the air program, including engineers, technicians, inspectors.

While environmental groups like GASP, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center, the Environmental Integrity Project, and Breathe Project are lauding plans to bolster funding for the Air Quality Program, they expressed concern about plans to cut positions and encouraged the county to consider going further to fully-fund the Department.

"You can't put a price on our health, which is why we need to ensure county officials have the money they need to protect residents from toxic industrial air pollution," **Zachary Barber, the clean air advocate with PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center**, said. "Rather than cut staff, Allegheny County should fully fund the Air Quality Program by charging polluters the true cost of protecting our health."

Advocates plan to speak in support of a fully funded Air Quality Program at the next Allegheny County Board of Health meeting July 17.

###