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COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
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COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3806

July 23, 2020

The Honorable Howard Elliott
Administrator
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Dear Administrator Elliott,

While there has been progress in making natural gas pipelines safer and more reliable, incidents continue to occur far too frequently. On August 1, 2019, a pipeline in Lincoln County, Kentucky exploded, killing one, injuring several others, and causing significant property damage. The year before, on September 13, 2018, a pipeline in Massachusetts exploded in several locations, resulting in another fatality and multiple fires. In fact, incidents involving gas transmission pipelines have killed at least one person during each of the last five years. This is to say nothing of the far more numerous non-fatal incidents that are associated with pipelines, such as a series of sinkholes which have formed along the path of a recently bored pipeline route in West Whiteland Township, Pennsylvania.

With this in mind, I am troubled that the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration's (PHMSA) Pipeline Safety Program has issued a Notice of Enforcement Discretion to gas transmission pipeline operators, delaying the start of enforcement of the *Safety of Gas Transmission Pipelines: MAOP Reconfirmation, Expansion of Assessment Requirements, and other Related Amendments* Final Rule by six months from July 1, 2020 to January 1, 2021. This rule, which includes important provisions, such as the assessment of pipelines in "moderate consequence areas" or MCAs, is vital to ensuring the safety of workers and the communities which host these pipelines. I am therefore writing to ask that you rescind the Notice of Enforcement Discretion and begin enforcement of the rule as originally planned.

I recognize that responding to the COVID-19 pandemic has caused challenges for many Federal entities, as well as the industries they regulate, including the natural gas transmission sector. However, with appropriate precautions, I am confident that longstanding pipeline safety issues can be addressed without compromising the health of industry workers. I respectfully request an explanation for the delay of enforcement for portions of the *Safety of Gas Transmission Pipelines*

Final Rule and what conditions PHMSA believes need to be met before enforcement can begin. I also request a description of how PHMSA intends to determine if noncompliance with relevant sections of the Final Rule is related to the COVID-19 pandemic response, as well as the reasons that this information was not included in the Notice of Enforcement Discretion.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I appreciate your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chrissy Houlahan", written in a cursive style.

Chrissy Houlahan
Member of Congress