



PennFuture Submitted Testimony Regarding Private Wells

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Testimony of Ollie Cugini, Clean Water Campaign Manager

Good morning, Chairman Miller and Members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. My name is Ollie Cugini, and I am the Clean Water Campaign Manager at PennFuture.

PennFuture is a statewide environmental advocacy nonprofit. We envision a Commonwealth in which all people enjoy a stable climate, clean air, and pure water. What brings me here today is our pursuit of upholding our state's constitution and every Pennsylvanian's right to clean water.

Let's begin by addressing the central question: What happens when a well isn't properly installed? More than three million people in PA rely on private water wells for their drinking water. When a well is improperly sited, cased, or drilled, it creates a direct, vertical conduit from the contaminated surface environment straight down into the shared groundwater aquifer. This is where the environmental breakdown occurs. Without the required cement grout seal around the well casing, a professional standard enforced in almost every other state, surface pollutants like pesticides, road salt, or bacteria from septic systems flow freely and rapidly down the well bore. Even more concerning, this improper casing allows emerging toxins like PFAS "forever chemicals" from the surface industrial runoff to bypass the natural filtration provided by soil and rock, moving rapidly into people's drinking water supplies.

The harm does not stop at one family's well. An unsealed or improperly abandoned well threatens the integrity of neighboring private wells and the entire aquifer allowing pollution to spread through the community.

Yet, we are one of only two states that fails to enforce industry standards on well siting and construction, and one of only three without statewide driller licensing. We are allowing a dangerous, unsealed highway for pollution straight into our groundwater. This regulatory gap is not an abstract policy issue, it places the entire burden of contamination and poor construction on Pennsylvanians homeowners to fix, placing undue economic and environmental burdens on our citizens.



The lack of statewide standards for well construction and driller proficiency directly jeopardizes human health and imposes unexpected financial hardship. The data is clear. We face widespread failure as studies show that a staggering 41% of private wells in Pennsylvania have failed to meet at least one health-based drinking water standard. A separate USGS study found that in the Lower Susquehanna Basin, 70% of private wells were unsafe for drinking without treatment.

This means that without standards to guide where and how wells are built, Pennsylvanians are needlessly exposed to unsafe water contaminated by viruses, bacteria, and toxins. Pennsylvania is currently one of only three states that does not require private water well drillers to demonstrate any level of experience or proficiency. This zero barrier to entry places the entire legal and financial burden of poor construction onto the homeowner.

So, when hiring a driller, property owners have no way to verify if the individual is properly trained. If a well is improperly sited or poorly constructed, property owners have no legal recourse to hold the driller accountable.

Pennsylvania has a moral obligation to protect its citizens from preventable health and financial risks. Instituting and enforcing standards are the mechanisms needed to finally address this silent crisis of environmental and economic injustice.

The proposal before us is a simple, yet critical, measure designed to rectify decades of regulatory neglect. It is not about new, burdensome regulations; it is about establishing professional accountability and ensuring existing industry standards are upheld. The proposal provides consumer protection by establishing a transparent licensing process based on experience, requiring companies to demonstrate bonding and liability coverage, and utilizing the Department of State's existing mechanisms to ensure government efficiency. This initiative is the result of extensive collaboration and enjoys strong, broad consensus, including support from the Pennsylvania Ground Water Association and the Marcellus Shale Coalition. We are not adding complexity; we are simply affirming the right of every Pennsylvanian to safe drinking water.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on such an important issue.