

To: Virginia Air Pollution Control Board

December 8, 2018

An Open Letter Regarding the Threat of Environmental Racism
and the Proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline

There is an undeniable pattern of dangerous, polluting industrial facilities being sited in poor communities of color across our nation. “Environmental racism” is a phrase used to describe this systematic positioning.

Right now, a consortium of companies led by Dominion Energy – the largest corporate donor in state political campaigns – is attempting to place the only Virginia compressor station for its unneeded, natural gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline in the low-income, mostly African-American community of Union Hill, in Buckingham County. Many area residents trace their ancestry to the people enslaved on or near the plantation land sold for this site.

Recently, Governor Ralph Northam’s administration announced that it had dismissed two members of the State Air Pollution Control Board, which is made up of independent citizen experts responsible for evaluating the proposed air pollution permit for this huge facility. This happened six days after a November board meeting where detailed evidence of this site’s environmental injustice had been presented. The two people dismissed had stated during the meeting that environmental justice and climate change impacts must be considered in board permit decisions. In addition, Dominion submitted new proposed permit changes during the meeting, including an offer of \$5.1 million to a Dominion-controlled “Union Hill community revitalization plan.” The proposed changes to the permit came 50 days after the public comment period on the permit application closed. The board voted to delay its decision on the permit until December 10.

The governor has been justly criticized for interfering with this permit decision. Not only did he announce the dismissal of the two board members, he further interfered with the board’s independence by signaling that he did not expect the new members to vote at the December meeting. It is unethical to interfere in the citizen board’s decision-making process.

Citizen boards perform an extremely important function in our democracy, providing an additional check on the regulatory process. They serve as an essential last line of defense in ensuring that the public interest is prioritized over private corporate interests.

Therefore, we strongly urge the Air Pollution Control Board to allow the public an opportunity during the December 10 meeting—prior to any vote—to respond to any new information that has been submitted after the close of the public comment period. This includes information expected to be presented by the Department of Environmental Quality about the demographics of Union Hill that would underrepresent the community’s African-American majority. Additionally, because the facts in the record show that the proposed compressor station would have a disproportionate adverse impact on Union Hill, we ask that the board deny the permit.

On August 16, the Governor's own Advisory Council on Environmental Justice called for a moratorium on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline until completion of serious investigations of credible environmental justice issues. Governor Northam, Attorney General Mark Herring, Secretary of Natural Resources Matt Strickler and Department of Environmental Quality Director David Paylor must honor the environmental justice matters in this air permit decision. It must be addressed now.

The legacy of placing toxic facilities in places where they disproportionately affect poor communities of color is unjust and unacceptable and needs acute examination. It is not right to look the other way while this continues.

Respectfully,

Pastor Paul Wilson, Union Hill Union Grove Baptist Church
Chad Oba, President, Friends of Buckingham, Impacted Landowner
Rev. Lakshmi Fjord, Ph.D. Anthropologist, Union Hill history and demography, Friends of Buckingham, Yogaville

CC:

Governor Ralph Northam
Attorney General Mark Herring
Secretary of Natural Resources Matt Strickler
Department of Environmental Quality Director David Paylor

In Solidarity:

Karenna Gore – Director of Center for Earth Ethics

Tim Guinee – Actor, Chair of Climate Reality Hudson Valley Chapter

Norman Lear – Chairman of Act III

Lyn Lear – Producer, Activist

Marie Gillespie - Impacted resident of Union Hill, Buckingham, Va

Don Cheadle - Oscar-nominated actor, Producer, Director, Writer

Ella Rose - Impacted resident of Union Hill, Buckingham, Va

Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr. - President of Hip Hop Caucus

Del. Mark Keam - Virginia House of Delegates of the 35th District

Del. Sam Rasoul - Virginia House of Delegates of the 11th District

Ken Berlin - President and CEO of Climate Reality Project

Irene Ellis Leech - Impacted landowner of Buckingham, Va

Debbie Levin - President and CEO of Environmental Media Association

William F. Limpert – Impacted landowner of Bath County, Va, Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance, Highlanders for Responsible Development, Sierra Club

Lynn S. Limpert - Impacted landowner of Bath County, Va, Citizen concerned about Climate Change, Environmental Justice, and Private Property Issues, Member of The Sierra Club

Ed Begley Jr. - Emmy-nominated actor, Activist

Rev. Dr. Gerald L. Durley - Board Chair of Interfaith Power and Light

Paul Gallay – President of Riverkeeper

Tom Cormons - Executive Director of Appalachian Voices

Mustafa Santiago Ali - Environmental justice advocate

Edward Zwick - Oscar-winning producer, Director, Writer

Jamie Sarai Margolin - Executive Director of Zero Hour

Ruby and John Laury - Impacted landowners in Union Hill, Va, Union Grove Baptist Church, Friends of Buckingham, Concern for the New Generation

Manna Jo Greene - Environmental Action Director of Hudson River Sloop Clearwater

Ada Washington – Impacted resident of Union Hill, Va

Tom Benevento - Virginia Governor’s Advisory Council on Environmental Justice

Mary Finley-Brook - Virginia Governor's Advisory Council on Environmental Justice

Lisa Lefferts, MSPH – Impacted landowner, Horizons Eco Village

Heidi Dhivya Berthoud, LMT, LYT, RDH – Secretary Friends of Buckingham, Baseline Testing Project Manager; Buckingham: We the People

Warren Leight – Pulitzer Prize finalist, Writer

Ernie Reed – Member of Board of Supervisors, Nelson County, Va

Swami Dayananda - LOTUS Center for All Faiths, Yogaville

Rev. Fletcher Harper - Executive Director of GreenFaith

Rev. Faith Harris – Chair of Virginia Interfaith Power and Light

Richard Walker – Union Hill ancestry, CEO and Founder of Bridging the Gap in Virginia

Beth Roach - Vice Chair of Governor's Advisory Council on Environmental Justice, Mothers Out Front

Montina Cole - GreenFaith Fellow

Joyce Burton - Landowner Liaison with Friends of Nelson

Mark Antoniewicz - Director of Communications with Hip Hop Caucus

Terence Muhammad - N.O.I., Community activist, Hip Hop Caucus

Kenda Hanuman - Buckingham: We the People, Yogaville

Piper Perabo - Actor, Activist

Brian Johns - Executive Director of Virginia Organizing

Gioia Timpanelli – Winner of National Book Award and two Emmy Awards

Richard and Jill Averitt – Impacted landowners in Nelson County, Rockfish Valley Investments, LLC (DBA Spruce Creek Resort and Market), Friends of Nelson

Siva Ernie Moore - Executive Director of Yogaville

Jeeva Abbate - Yogaville Environmental Solutions

Mindy Zlotnick -Yogaville Environmental Solutions, Buckingham: We the People

Eleanor Amidon – Organizer with Pipeline Education Group

Kristin Mink - Environmental activist

Sean Michael Haggerty

Lorne Stockman - Senior Research Analyst with Oil Change International

Kirk Bowers, P.E. - Pipelines Program Coordinator with Sierra Club Virginia Chapter

Lewis Freeman - Executive Director of Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance

William Espinosa - Executive Committee member of Cville 100

Kendyl Crawford – Director of Virginia Interfaith Power & Light

Kay Ferguson - ARTivism Virginia

Barbara Gottlieb – Director of Environment & Health, Physicians for Social Responsibility

Mike Tidwell – Director of Chesapeake Climate Action Network

Barb Adams - RVA Interfaith Climate Justice League

Lee Williams - Divest RVA

Freda Cathcart – Founder of Indivisible Virginia

John Cruickshank – Chair of Piedmont Group of the Sierra Club

Stacy Lovelace - Co-founder of Virginia Pipeline Resisters

Jessica Sims - Co-founder of Virginia Pipeline Resisters

Ruth Turner - Magnolia Productions, Wild Virginia

Thomas Burkett - Virginia River Healers

Maya Stewart-Silver - Friends of Nelson

Freeman Allan – Vets for Peace, Cancel Compressor Coalition, VCSamerica.org

Karen Anderson - Sierra Club, Piedmont Chapter

Jennifer Trippeer - Reclaim Augusta

David Copper - Reclaim Augusta

Emily Little, RN - Volunteer with Generation 180

Elizabeth K Williams, MD - Fellow American Academy of Pediatrics (retired)
Board Member of Wild Virginia

Kimberly Williams - Mothers Out Front Team, Norfolk, Va

David Sligh - Conservation Director with Wild Virginia

Mary Stewart – Landowner in Nelson County, Va, Friends of Nelson, Friends of Buckingham, Friends of Horizons

Pam Gibson - Friends of Augusta, Reclaim Augusta

Billy Davies - Community Outreach Coordinator with Virginia Chapter Sierra Club

Helen Kimble – President of Friends of Nelson

Scott Ziemer - Renewable Energy Chair with Piedmont Group Sierra Club

Craig Stevens - Patriots From The Oil & Gas Shales, Marcellus Patriots For Land Rights

Queen Zakia Shabazz – Coordinator of Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative, United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards

Suzanne Keller - Retired epidemiologist, Virginia Department of Health

Thomas Hadwin – Electric and gas utilities executive (retired)

Laney Sullivan - Lobo Marino

Whitney Whiting - Photographer, Founder of Pipeline Podcast

Michele Mattioli

Andrew Tyler

Rosemary Gould

Lauren Nyland

Alia Stewart-Silver

Hayden Shaw