



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

May 24, 2017

Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott
Director
Department of Health
3 Capitol Hill
Providence RI 02908

Dear Director Alexander-Scott:

We are writing to inquire about the extent of your investigation into the gas rupture on March 29 on Allens Avenue in Providence and to urge you to release to the public any information about its effects on public health.

As you are no doubt aware, the 19 million cubic feet of natural gas that was released is significant in terms of gas leaks, and we are concerned about what the effects could be on our air quality, the health of those living or working nearby and the Narragansett Bay, located just a few blocks from the site of the rupture. Additionally, one media report said two gallons of polychlorinated biphenyls, also known as PCBs, were released. Given the current federal ban on PCBs, and the fact that they are labeled “probable carcinogens” by the Environmental Protection Agency, we believe more public information about this matter is in order. Any other potential contaminants have not been publicly released, so it’s unknown to us whether there could be other health impacts on the residents in the area, but we feel that information should be reported.

We feel there has been little information given to those who live or frequent the area about whether they should be concerned, whether they should be watching out for any particular adverse effects on their health or environment, and whether there is anything they should be doing to protect themselves. Even if you believe the spill did not have a significant adverse effect on public health, we are asking that you communicate your findings publicly very soon. Rhode Islanders need assurance that the effects have been, or are being, investigated and that their state is doing everything possible to protect them, including arming them with any information they need to protect themselves.

In particular, the residents of South Providence and Washington Park deserve to know that the state is taking this matter seriously. Since a great deal of the state’s natural gas infrastructure is located in this neighborhood, the people of South Providence should know whether they are at heightened risk of adverse health effects in the event of such accidents.

Does your department have any input into regulation of utilities with regard to their potential effects on public health? Please know that if this situation has brought to light any failings in state law that weaken your department's ability to hold utilities accountable for addressing and preventing such threats to public health, we would be eager to assist legislatively.

We look forward to hearing from you about this matter, and hope that you will provide this information to the public in short order. It has been a month and a half since this incident, and the public has been left to wonder about the extent to which their health has been affected.

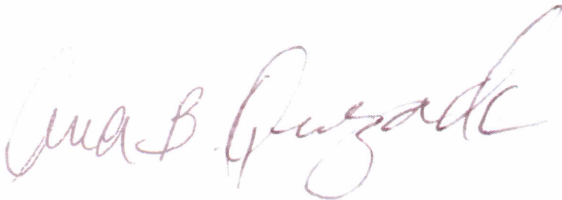
Yours very sincerely,



Jeanine Calkin
Senator – District 30
Warwick



Harold M. Metts
Senator – District 6
Providence



Ana B. Quezada
Senator – District 2
Providence