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State of Washington Citizens Committee On Pipeline Safety

PO Box 47250 Olympia, WA 98504-7250 • www.wutc.wa.gov/pipeline/ccops

Mary E. Peters
U.S. Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

April 23, 2008

RE: Comments on PHMSA's Draft Proposed Criteria for Community Technical Assistance Grants

Dear Secretary Peters:

The Washington State Citizens Committee on Pipeline Safety has reviewed PHMSA's recently "Proposed Criteria for Award of Pipeline Safety Information Grants to Communities" presented to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy and Air Quality on March 12, 2008. The Citizens Committee is quite concerned that PHMSA's draft requirements are too restrictive, and seriously fail to meet Congress's intent incorporated into the Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002, and again reinforced in the PIPES Act of 2006, on this very important matter. We believe that Congress meant these technical assistance grants to communities to be a way to broaden the public's understanding of information that will permit more informed discussions and decisions related to pipelines and pipeline safety. PHMSA's proposed criteria requiring a pipeline company cosponsor, a risk assessment, and that grants only be awarded in High Consequence Areas are overly restrictive, and undermine the broader intent of these grants. Priority should be given to a major refocus in development of the proposed guidelines by PHMSA to quickly and prudently complete this requirement.

Technical Assistance Grants for pipeline safety information should be available to those potentially affected parties who demonstrate a need to understand technical aspects of pipelines and pipeline safety. Issuance of such grants should follow general guidelines similar to that permitted in EPA Technical Assistance Grants (TAG), which provides money to community groups so that they can pay for technical advisors and assistance for EPA proposed cleanup proposals and decisions at Superfund sites.

The Citizens Committee believes strongly that these technical assistance grants to communities can go a long way to provide needed independent information that ultimately will lead to greater understanding and trust in this nation's pipeline system. We also understand that to date PHMSA has not been appropriated the funding from Congress to move this initiative forward, but we believe by PHMSA clearly developing a competitive process that meets the intent of Congress that funding will be easier to obtain. For those reasons our Committee voted unanimously to ask that PHMSA quickly rework their proposed granting criteria to comply with the wishes of Congress so this important initiative can move forward.

We ask that PHMSA keep us informed on their progress with the development of these grant criteria and guidelines. If we can be of any assistance in this effort please let us know, and we stand ready to assist however we can to ensure that Congress follows through with the appropriation of funding to allow PHMSA to implement this important grant program.

Sincerely,



Carl Weimer, Chairman

Cc: Carl Johnson, Administrator, PHMSA
Stacey Gerard, Assistant Administrator & Chief Safety Officer, PHMSA
Jeffrey Wiese, Associate Administrator for Pipeline Safety, PHMSA
Washington State Congressional Delegation