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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2108**

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September 17, 2018

The Honorable Steve Russell  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security  
Committee on Oversight & Government Reform  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Russell:

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on National Security, I respectfully request that we hold a bipartisan oversight hearing to examine the state of U.S. pipeline safety and security. As evidenced by the series of hazardous natural gas explosions that occurred in Northeastern Massachusetts and Western Pennsylvania last week, the siting and operation of volatile natural gas infrastructure in proximity to residential communities poses a grave public safety threat that demands robust congressional oversight.

On September 10<sup>th</sup>, residents of Center Township, Pennsylvania were forced to evacuate their homes following a natural gas pipeline explosion that shot flames 150 feet in the air, destroyed at least one house and collapsed several high-voltage power lines and electrical towers. Many evacuees required medical assistance. Only three days later, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, thousands of residents in the City of Lawrence, the Town of Andover, the Town of North Andover, and surrounding communities in the Merrimack Valley Region were forced to evacuate their homes amid fires, explosions, and gas odors reportedly related to an over-pressurized natural gas line. This devastating incident affected an estimated 8,600 homes and businesses in the area, destroyed as many as 80 buildings, and has resulted in at least one fatality. It has also caused fire-related, traumatic blast, and other injuries to over 25 residents. On September 14<sup>th</sup>, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency and investigative personnel from the National Transportation Safety Board and the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration arrived on scene. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, a new and unrelated gas leak was detected and reported in Lawrence.

These are not isolated incidents. According to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration ("PHMSA"), last year witnessed an estimated 650 reported pipeline incidents resulting in 20 fatalities and injuries to 35 individuals. In 2018, PHMSA reports that pipeline incidents have already led to at least three fatalities and injuries to 33 individuals. According to the agency, these incidents can



involve the release of highly-volatile liquids, the release of liquids that cause unintentional fires or explosions, and other hazardous events.

The vulnerability of residents and communities living in proximity to pipeline infrastructure is even more concerning considering the aging state of U.S. pipeline systems and their increased susceptibility to leaks, spills, and explosions. According to former National Transportation Safety Board chairman and current president of the National Safety Council, Deborah Hersman, approximately one-half of our 2.4 million miles of pipelines nationwide were installed prior to 1970. A 2014 pipeline safety study by *USA Today* reported that the largest percentage of pipeline systems still operating with deteriorating cast-iron mains “is concentrated in heavily populated areas with a higher risk of catastrophic consequences.”

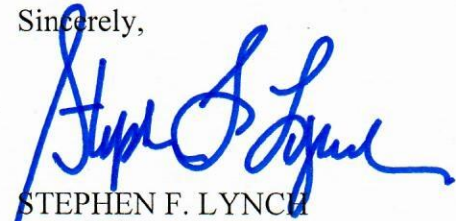
Moreover, our pipeline systems have increasingly become the target of cyber and terrorist attacks. As reported by *Energy* and *Environment News* in its 2017 series on “Pipelines in Peril,” advanced cyber threats targeting U.S. pipelines have exponentially increased following a pipeline hacking spree undertaken by cyberspies linked to the Chinese military from 2011 to 2012. The theft of sensitive data from at least 23 separate U.S. pipelines constituted the sort of cyber breach that, according to the nonpartisan *Congressional Research Service*, “could allow successful ‘hackers’ to disrupt pipeline service and cause spills, explosions, or fires – all from remote locations.” In a 2012 domestic terrorism case, an Oklahoma man was sentenced in federal court for attempting to destroy a natural gas pipeline near the City of Okemah using a homemade improvised explosive device. Three years later, a Texas man received a maximum 20-year sentence after pleading guilty to federal charges stemming from his use of a highly volatile explosive device to damage an above-ground natural gas pipeline located in a residential neighborhood in the City of Plano.

Clearly, the safety of the American public demands meaningful congressional oversight of the myriad safety and national security issues pertaining to the operation of natural gas pipelines, particularly where pipeline infrastructure is situated in or near residential neighborhoods. To this end, I have repeatedly called for the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC”) to review and suspend its certification of natural gas projects located perilously close to residential communities in my own congressional district, including a pipeline segment operating in Boston’s West Roxbury neighborhood directly across from an active quarry blast zone and a planned 7,700 horsepower natural gas compressor station in the Town of Weymouth that would be situated within a half mile of 1,000 households. I have also introduced legislation designed to address outstanding pipeline safety and security issues, including H.R. 4381, the *Natural Gas Pipeline Public Health Protection Act*, which would suspend the construction and expansion of natural gas facilities in communities with pre-existing unsafe air pollutant levels. Moreover, I recently offered an amendment to H.R. 2910, the *Promoting Interagency Coordination for Review of Natural Gas Pipelines Act*, that was adopted by voice vote on a bipartisan basis. This amendment would require FERC to consult with the Transportation Security Administration (“TSA”), the lead federal agency on pipeline infrastructure and cyber security, in determining whether pipeline developers are compliant with existing TSA guidelines and best practice recommendations governing facility security, cybersecurity, and other pipeline security measures.

A bipartisan oversight hearing to examine the state of U.S. pipeline safety and security would greatly supplement these and other efforts undertaken by Members on both sides of the aisle to safeguard the American public against the devastating impact of a pipeline-related public emergency or attack.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request and please do not hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions regarding this letter.

Sincerely,



STEPHEN F. LYNCH  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security  
(MA-08)