

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Elizabeth Jones](#)
Subject: FW: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Private/Before Publication)
Date: Monday, June 27, 2022 3:59:54 PM

From: Texas Sunset Advisory Commission <sunset@sunset.texas.gov>
Sent: Monday, June 27, 2022 3:26 PM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission <Sunset.AdvisoryCommission@sunset.texas.gov>
Subject: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Private/Before Publication)

Submitted on Mon, 06/27/2022 - 14:25

Submitted by: Visitor

Submitted values are:

Choose the agency that you would like to provide input about

[Texas Commission on Environmental Quality](#)

Public Comments

1

First Name

Linda

Last Name

Phan

Email

City

Pasadena

State

Texas

Your Comments or Concerns

To whom it may concern,

I am Linda Phan, a Pasadena, TX 18-year-old resident (77505).

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is an agency in charge of regulating “emissions and discharges of specific pollutant by industrial facilities,” “the amount of pollution that

poses an unacceptable risk to human health through prolonged exposure,” and “permits for oil and gas operations related to air emissions and water discharges,” according to the Sunset Staff Report on the TCEQ released on May 2022. TCEQ has the State Implementation Program (SIP) in order to ensure that the atmosphere meets the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). These standards include certain levels of carbon monoxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter (PM), and lead, and more. Despite having this program and other initiatives in place, it goes without saying that there is more left to be desired for the health of Houston-Metro residents.

Houston is one of the largest petrochemical complexes in the world and probably the biggest in the United States. That, however, does not mean that its residents have to constantly be placed at a lower priority than oil and gas companies. As a government agency, TCEQ is supposed to serve residents of this state — people who live here — instead of pleasing the vested economic interests of entities with headquarters and other branch locations outside of the state and are simply using Texas to expand their company and corporation.

It's not right that plants and refineries are being built so close to residential areas and educational institutions. Even if they were built farther away, their emissions are still going to impact the region. Those emissions need to remain in check. Standards are made because they need to be kept, and the TCEQ is not being stringent enough. The agency hands out permits and licenses, but it needs to be more careful of which entities it approves. TCEQ needs to look at the entity's history and see if it has historically been compliant. If after approval, and these entities violate what is set in place, harsher fines need to be implemented. The agency also needs to look at the location of the establishment of which the request is being made for. According to the Environmental Defense Fund, there is a much higher prevalence of respiratory illnesses in regions such as the Fifth Ward versus River Oaks. Communities of color are heavily impacted by the choices made by the TCEQ. Perhaps, land is cheaper in those neighborhoods, but that does not mean TCEQ should allow for entities to make their establishments there.

After watching the public hearing of the Sunset Review from home, it becomes clear that many people in the Houston area have been affected and are enraged by the little opportunity they have to share their feelings. Sometimes, TCEQ approves something, and everything happens in such a fast whirlwind that residents of the neighborhood never get to properly protest and make their case. Our voices have been silenced for so long. 2-3 minutes is not enough to show you the entirety of our strife.

There were children at the hearing. The last time the hearing occurred, some of these children weren't even alive. They are being raised in an environment in which they have to constantly fear for their lives, and that is incredibly messed up when you think about how a childhood is supposed to be filled with great memories of playing outside on playgrounds and participating in outdoor activities. They fear the idea of getting cancer and developing respiratory illnesses, and that's not normal for a child.

I have asthma that was incredibly severe when I was a child. It was not helpful living near oil

refineries and plants, and after many hospitalizations, the doctors recommended that I move to Galveston, where the salt and atmosphere may sooth my airways. However, picking up and moving is not the type of thing a family can do without other considerations. My family members have work here, and where's the money to buy a house in Galveston. So we stayed where we were, and I just had to battle the asthma attacks as they come and go. There are many people like me. People with respiratory illnesses that worsen because of their living conditions but have no ability to alter their circumstances. And in the end, why should we move? This is our home, and we deserve the right to live here healthily and happily. Not everyone can avoid their problems by having a getaway to Cancún.

You may think, 'oh, what's a little smoke going to do?' but in reality it is choking us in our sleep and irritating our lungs beyond possible imagination. Sometimes, we can't even see the pollutants. They are so small that they can just slip into the most important organs needed for human survival and shut them down. You may live in a house surrounded by a white picket fence, but we live in houses surrounded with barbed wire enclosing factories and refineries that are slowly handing out our death sentences. If you can't handle the smoke that your bbq pit gives off, then what makes you think we can handle large building-sized furnaces in our backyards? These furnaces aren't grilling meat but things that are inedible and sinister to our health.

We have only 2-3 minutes to talk about this at the hearing. The story I mentioned earlier was an oversimplification of the obstacles my family had to overcome. This is ignoring our stories of shelter-in-place, foul-smelling odors leaking into our home, and other instances to keep what's core. For the speakers who needed an interpreter, their time was significantly cut shorter. By not accommodating these language differences, the Sunset Review has prevented people from fully sharing their stories and perspectives. The Sunset Review has not been welcoming of the diversity that exists in Texas.

Additionally, this hearing happened in the middle of the week and at a time in which many people are still at work. Therefore, many people were prevented from coming to Austin. I, myself, could not come to Austin because of the date and time it was taking place. Organizations in Houston had to make up plans to make the trip possible for residents. People woke up at 4:00 am to catch buses. Despite the challenges in traveling, so many people still went because they were desperate. Desperate that the living conditions will continue to worsen. Desperate because this was their only chance for the next 12 years. This happens once every 12 years and at a very unsuitable time for people to attend. Something is telling me that choices were made to intentionally keep people away.

The Sunset Review needs to happen more often, be more inclusive, and allow for more accommodations. Despite all of the challenges that were present, people still came. This is a testament of how dire the situation has become and the importance of making changes. Transparency is needed with how TCEQ arrives at its decisions of regulating licenses and permits. Perhaps, that is already happening but if people don't know much about it, it probably means that it is not as accessible to the public as it could be. These reports need to be in multiple languages and be located in easy-to-access links. Transparency is also needed with how early on residents of the area are involved and informed about the request for a permit or license. Too often, residents become aware of the situation too late, and everything is basically set in stone. For more information on how to remedy this public health crisis, I think it is also important to conduct some

public health research to fully understand the consequences of what has been happening. With more scientific numbers on the health and wellbeing of our residents, we can mitigate the harm that has been caused in addition to preventing future harm from happening with the more stringent regulation of permits and licenses.

The lives of Texas residents are of the utmost importance. To my dear government officials, if you don't care about us and our wellbeing, then you aren't truly representing us. If that's the case, it's time to look for a career change.

Your Proposed Solution

The Sunset Review needs to happen more often, be more inclusive, and allow for more accommodations. Despite all of the challenges that were present, people still came. This is a testament of how dire the situation has become and the importance of making changes. Transparency is needed with how TCEQ arrives at its decisions of regulating licenses and permits. Perhaps, that is already happening but if people don't know much about it, it probably means that it is not as accessible to the public as it could be. These reports need to be in multiple languages and be located in easy-to-access links. Transparency is also needed with how early on residents of the area are involved and informed about the request for a permit or license. Too often, residents become aware of the situation too late, and everything is basically set in stone. For more information on how to remedy this public health crisis, I think it is also important to conduct some public health research to fully understand the consequences of what has been happening. With more scientific numbers on the health and wellbeing of our residents, we can mitigate the harm that has been caused in addition to preventing future harm from happening with the more stringent regulation of permits and licenses.

My Comments Will Be Made Public

Yes