Pipeline Safety TRUST

Credible.
Independent.
In the public interest.

March 3, 2026

Bob Latta, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 205515

Kathy Castor, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 205515

Re: Pipeline Safety Trust Letter of Opposition for Subcommittee on Energy Bill, *Pipeline Safety Reauthorization Act of 2026*

Chairman Latta and Ranking Member Castor:

Pipeline Safety Trust respectfully opposes the subcommittee's bill, the Pipeline Safety Reauthorization Act of 2026. Pipeline Safety Trust is a nonprofit watchdog of the pipeline industry and its regulators. We achieve our mission through education and advocacy, increasing access to information, and building partnerships with residents, safety advocates, government and industry to promote safe communities and a healthy environment. As part of this work, PST has been involved in reauthorization of the federal pipeline regulator, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) and its predecessor, for over 20 years. It is Pipeline Safety Trust's position that this bill, which serves as the main opportunity for congress to protect the public from the dangers of these pipelines, fails to do so.

It has been five years since Congress enacted the PIPES Act of 2020, and that period has produced major incidents and clear evidence of unresolved gaps in federal pipeline safety oversight. Rather than using this reauthorization to address those lessons and strengthen protections for communities, the Committee has put forth a draft that will do little if anything to meaningfully improve pipeline safety.

Not only does the bill advance no policies that learn from the incidents over the past five years, it further hamstrings PHMSA from achieving its mission of protecting people and the environment.

Most critically, several provisions in this bill are weaker than, or directly contradict, what both the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate Commerce Committee already approved with bipartisan support. We highlight four of the most significant concerns below.

Section 4: Formal Hearing Right

Both bipartisan bills drew a careful line around when operators may demand a formal ALJ hearing: Senate Commerce limited that right to penalties over $1 million; T&I set the threshold at $125,000. The E&C bill sets no threshold at all, giving every operator a procedural weapon to delay routine enforcement actions regardless of size, which goes well beyond due process and into enforcement obstruction.

Section 5: Special Permit Conditions

This provision would prohibit PHMSA from imposing waiver conditions unless they relate directly to the specific standard being waived, ignoring the reality that pipeline safety threats interact and compound. PST opposed this same language in the T&I bill for that reason, and the Senate

Commerce bill wisely excluded it. Stripping PHMSA's flexibility to address related risks does not streamline the process, it creates gaps in the safety net the waiver program is supposed to maintain.

Section 6: "Strengthening Penalties"

Despite its title, this section increases no civil administrative penalties, the caps that drive day-to-day deterrence, and instead expands a criminal sabotage provision. Both bipartisan committees recognized that current penalty caps are inadequate and acted accordingly. Senate Commerce doubled them, T&I increased the aggregate cap to $3.4 million. This bill makes no effort to change either.

Section 8: Voluntary Information-Sharing System

PST worked with both the T&I and Senate Commerce committees to ensure the VIS would have dedicated funding, because drawing from PHMSA's existing appropriations would simply defund other safety functions to pay for this one. The Senate Commerce bill authorizes an additional $5 million per year for that purpose. The E&C bill creates the VIS structure but provides no funding mechanism.

Beyond what the bill gets wrong, equally concerning is what is left out. Provisions that would improve pipeline safety and passed with bipartisan support in the Senate Commerce and/or T&I bills are simply absent here, leaving known safety gaps unaddressed. These include: assessments of high-risk Aldyl-A plastic pipe, strengthened whistleblower protections, a mandated final rule on CO_2 pipeline safety standards, geological hazard mitigation requirements, a hydrogen blending safety study, and a review of PHMSA's potential impact radius methodology.

Rather than moving forward with this bill, the Committee should take its role in pipeline safety seriously and develop comprehensive legislation that moves the needle. 52 people have died and 158 people have been injured from pipeline incidents since the last reauthorization. Don’t let that be in vain.

Sincerely,

Bill Caram
Executive Director

cc: Brett Guthrie, Chair, Committee on Energy & Commerce
Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, Committee on Energy & Commerce