



**Minority Leader
C. Allison Russo**

September 11, 2023

The Honorable Mary Mertz
Director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources
2045 Morse Road
Building G
Columbus, Ohio 43229

RE: Alleged fraudulent use of people's identity in the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission (OGLMC) public comment process

Dear Director Mertz:

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources has unfortunately become the center of controversy concerning a recent investigation by the [Cleveland Plain Dealer](#) that suggests misconduct infiltrating the leasing nomination process for the Oil and Gas Land Management Commission (OGLMC). As you know, the investigation found that dozens of Ohioans had their names used without their permission on fake letters sent to the OGLMC urging oil and gas exploration in Ohio's state parks. Equally disturbing is information that OGLMC has known about the potential misuse of individuals' names for weeks, yet they failed to notify the public of potential fraud, and allowed these fake comments to remain in the public record.

I have sent an urgent request to Attorney General Dave Yost to investigate this matter and any potential criminal of identity theft victimizing Ohioans. Without a doubt, any process allowing or denying drilling and fracking in our pristine state parks is controversial, but these recent allegations suggest the process has been overrun by scammers and out-of-state groups trying to rig OGLMC's approval process.

While the Attorney General's office establishes and conducts its investigation, I politely request you and OGLMC Commission Clerk Nathan Moffitt deny any pending leasing

nominations the commission is currently considering in regards to oil and gas exploration in our state parks until the investigation is complete. At the same time, I believe it would be prudent for ODNR to individually verify the letters submitted during this eligibility window, and if they cannot be verified, then the submissions should be deleted from the public record and immediately reported to the Attorney General.

Allowing the OGLMC approval process to be overrun by potential fraud is unacceptable, and the Attorney General's Office, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), and the commission should not passively stand by and await individuals to discover their names and other personal information were used to author fake public comments.

I appreciate your urgency on this matter as we all seek to improve public confidence in our state agencies and ensure criminal activity does not permeate our state approval processes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Allison Russo". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

C. Allison Russo
Minority Leader
Ohio House District 7