

The Hon. Dave Yost  
Attorney General of Ohio  
30 E. Broad St., 14th Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215

September 11, 2023

Dear Attorney General Yost,

On behalf of Consumer Energy Alliance (CEA), the nation's leading consumer advocate for sensible energy and environmental policies, I am writing to you to offer our organization's cooperation and information regarding an erroneous article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer dated September 10<sup>th</sup> and [linked here](#).

The article falsely and potentially libelously insinuates that CEA intentionally submitted comments to dockets regarding leases at the Ohio Oil and Gas Land Management Commission (OGLMC) without the knowledge of the people named. This is false, and CEA has a digital chain of custody to demonstrate that. The same data with digital chain of custody was provided under an off-the-record agreement with the highest editorial management of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, which inexplicably was not honored by the newspaper.

The comments submitted by CEA were gathered by a digital advocacy contractor hired by CEA and vetted via a digital chain of custody that traces the multiple points where a user must input an email address, telephone number, physical address and affirmatively click on links before a form letter is generated in the name self-input by the user. These digital signers of these letters are then vetted through human review to ensure the identifying data matches location, phone number, IP address or MAC address.

Unfortunately, digital advocacy relies on the honesty of those inputting data and leaves open the opportunity for unscrupulous or fraudulent attempts to subvert the system. In fact, the author of

the Cleveland Plain Dealer story attempted to do just that by entering the misspelled name of a PIXAR character. An activist quoted in the Cleveland Plain Dealer story also attempted to submit a comment opposing CEA's position through the CEA platform. CEA has the digital trails of these attempts, which were thwarted, and are attached.

Understanding this first-stage vulnerability to bad actors, both CEA's contractor and CEA review submissions to find disingenuous and/or fraudulent attempts before the comments are submitted to the docket. CEA believes there is ample evidence likely including records of electronic communications that reflect collusion among members of activist organizations and members of the media to create a false narrative about CEA. This would achieve a goal that two of the activist groups leading the accusations want to achieve and for which the comment system was not designed. This goal is to delay the leasing docket.

These activists, and perhaps certain members of the media, are motivated to besmirch CEA's reputation by, among other means, repeating false allegations from two similar cases where CEA was falsely and maliciously accused by opposing similar activist groups of intentionally submitting false public comments. Indeed, in a third similar situation, CEA was unwittingly victimized by the same organization which submitted millions of false comments into the Federal Communication Commission's Net Neutrality public comment period. In all three situations, CEA was cleared of wrongdoing because, like the current situation with the Cleveland Plain Dealer, CEA did not engage in any wrongdoing.

It is important to understand that comment drives are not like elections and therefore, self-identification is permitted and the standards of identification are lower. Equally, form comments submitted by organizations such as ours are generally reviewed by regulators in the aggregate, with the knowledge that a bigger picture emerges when all stakeholders have made their voices heard.

The public comment system is an important part of our democratic system, and its integrity must be protected for all citizens. CEA desires accuracy and transparency. CEA will remove from the OGLMC dockets the name of any person who feels their name has been improperly used, even if they changed their mind after the fact or in the harsh glare of a media spotlight. Additionally, we stand ready to share our data and technical assistance with your office to understand fully what did happen here.

CEA kindly requests a meeting with your office with me and Midwest Executive Director Chris Ventura, who is based in Columbus, to clear the air on the matter. Chris may be reached at [cventura@consumerenergyalliance.org](mailto:cventura@consumerenergyalliance.org) and I can be reached at [dholt@consumerenergyalliance.org](mailto:dholt@consumerenergyalliance.org).

Sincerely,



David Holt

President, CEA

CC: Ryan Richardson, Chairman, Oil and Gas Land Management Commission, Ohio  
Department of Natural Resources