

September 26, 2024

Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham  
490 Old Santa Fe Trail, Room 400  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Governor Lujan Grisham,

We write to ask you to exercise your leadership and protect the health of the tens of thousands of New Mexican children who go to school near oil and gas production sites. The science is clear – pollution from oil and gas production is harmful to human health and is particularly harmful to children. With the explosion of oil and gas production during your administration, air quality in the two corners of our beautiful state where there is significant oil and gas production has worsened. Keeping oil and gas production away from where people live, work, play and go to school is a scientifically proven method of protecting human health from the harms of oil and gas production and pollution. Yet, in New Mexico, we have no statewide health buffer zones, and more than 34,500 children go to school within a mile of oil and gas production sites.

In the last year, more wells have been drilled closer to more students. There are now 28,000 children attending school within half a mile of an oil and gas well, up from 24,000 last year, and new wells have been drilled as close as 370 feet to schools. We ask that you secure a one-mile children's health buffer zone around schools and ensure extra pollution controls on the 850 plus wells that are already within a mile of schools.

Science demonstrates that proximity to oil and gas development causes adverse health outcomes, including perinatal and respiratory problems as well as childhood cancers. <https://www.conservation.ca.gov/publichealth>. Oil and gas production emits toxic air contaminants, hazardous air pollutants and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that are harmful to human health. Added to these emissions are those of diesel engines used to power on-site equipment and trucks at oil and gas sites, which also emit hazardous air pollutants, fine particulate matter, nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and VOCs. NO<sub>x</sub> and VOCs are precursors to ground-level ozone, which is another health-harming pollutant. San Juan and Eddy Counties received an "F" grade from the American Lung Association for ground-level ozone pollution; Lea and Sandoval Counties received a "D" grade. And despite the adoption of Ozone Precursor and Methane rules, air quality in these regions has

gotten even worse in the last few years. (See [NMED Ozone Levels](#) through 6/30/24). While the only way to eliminate the harmful effects of oil and gas pollution is to phase out oil and gas production completely, in the meantime, the harms to children can be mitigated by keeping a distance between children and oil and gas facilities.

We have previously brought to you and your administration the science that supports the need for a one-mile health buffer zone around schools. In the Spring and Summer of 2023, we wrote to the Secretaries of Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources, the Environment Department, and the State Land Commissioner, seeking a one-mile health buffer zone around schools (See Letters dated [3/29/23](#), [4/17/23](#) and [6/15/23](#)). State Land Commissioner Stephanie Garcia Richard responded by immediately passing [an executive order](#) to cease new leasing of state land within a mile of schools and to require extra protections for the existing wells. However, the Secretaries of EMNRD and NMED ignored our requests. We then sent you [a letter](#) with wide community support in August of 2023, but we did not receive any response. During the 2024 legislative session, we were disappointed that your administration supported oil and gas reforms that did not include health buffer zones, and you did not give a message to Representative Debbie Sariñana's [House Bill 32](#) that would have established a one-mile health buffer zone around schools.

We hope that as you near the end of your second term, with your leadership, the executive branch will step forward to protect New Mexico's children from the harms of oil and gas pollution while they are at school. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Gail Evans, Colin Cox and Jozee Zuniga  
**Center for Biological Diversity**

Daniel Tso  
**Diné Frontline Community Member**

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**Diné Community Member**

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**New Energy Economy**

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**New Mexico No False Solutions Coalition**

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cc:

Stephanie Garcia Richard  
New Mexico Commissioner of Public Lands

Secretary Designate Melanie Kenderdine  
Energy Minerals Natural Resources Department

Secretary James Kenney  
New Mexico Environment Department

Secretary Patrick Allen  
New Mexico Department of Health

Speaker Javier Martinez  
New Mexico House of Representatives

President Pro Tempore Mimi Stewart  
New Mexico Senate

Daniel Schlegal  
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