



MEMORANDUM OF SUPPORT
A.5424A (Sweeney), S.4236A (Avella)

An ACT suspending the issuance of permits for the drilling of wells for natural gas extraction in certain areas; and providing for the repeal of such provision upon expiration thereof.

Summary of Legislation

This bill would suspend the issuance of drilling permits for natural gas extraction in low permeability natural gas pools such as the Marcellus and Utica shale formations until May 15, 2015, and require a State University of New York school of public health to conduct a comprehensive health impact assessment (HIA) of the potential public health impacts of high volume horizontal hydraulic fracturing (HVHF), to be completed by April 15, 2015. The New York State Assembly passed its version of this bill, A.5424A, on March 6, 2013 with a vote of 95-40.

Statement in Support

HVHF poses major public health risks that are still being evaluated. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has asked the Department of Health to review the treatment of health impacts in its Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement. While this is a step in the right direction, it will not provide for the comprehensive evaluation of public health risks that is necessary for the State to make an informed decision on whether to permit HVHF within its borders. This bill would ensure this evaluation takes place by allotting time for the completion of a comprehensive HIA that would examine the potential public health impacts of HVHF in New York.

The facts regarding HVHF's environmental impacts are clear. HVHF causes emissions of a number of harmful pollutants into the air we breathe, including volatile organic compounds (VOCs), methane, and hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, a known carcinogen. VOCs emitted into the air contain a number of chemicals that can be harmful to human health and cause the formation of ground-level ozone. HVHF also carries the risk of ground and drinking water contamination from poor well construction, spills, and improper disposal of fracking wastewater, among other causes. We also know that in states that have pushed ahead with HVHF, residents living near shale gas operations have reported health issues ranging from dizziness, sinus disorders, bronchitis and other respiratory symptoms to nausea, fatigue, headaches, difficulty concentrating, and cancer. In a study conducted by the Colorado School of Public Health, researchers found that residents living less than half a mile from oil and gas wells face cancer risks that are 66 percent higher than those living farther away.

The New York legislature has the unique opportunity to postpone HVHF in the State until potential public health impacts are evaluated and fully understood. This bill would provide the State with time necessary to ensure that the health of New Yorkers is put first. We commend the Assembly for passing this bill and urge the Senate to quickly follow suit.

Riverkeeper strongly supports this legislation.