

September 3, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201
sent via e-mail

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

As you may be aware, the NIOSH Pittsburgh research laboratory (PRL) has experienced a recent reduction in force and its future status is currently unknown. The PRL's mission is to eliminate mining fatalities, injuries, and illness through relevant research and impactful solutions, serving approximately 3,000 miners in the Commonwealth. Given similar charges for ensuring miner's health and safety, the PRL and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Mine Safety (Bureau) have routinely worked collaboratively and cooperatively for many years, to provide training, best practices and tools to aid the mining industry. The Bureau believes the permanent closure of the PRL facility is cause for concern.

The Bureau has recently engaged with scientists and engineers of the PRL in several multi-disciplinary, agency, and stakeholder workgroups focused on improving miners' health and safety. The work produced from the Stone Mine Pillar Taskforce, Coal-Gas Chain Pillar Committee, and ad hoc committee on the usage of methane emission control systems (MECS) on bituminous coal mines has helped keep miners safe by developing: a risk matrix and Technical Guidance Document for the Submittal of Benching Plans in limestone mines; Technical Guidance Document for Chain Pillar Development and Longwall Mining Adjacent to Unconventional Wells; and Specifications for the approval of MECS for Unsealed, Abandoned Workings of Active Mines. Other needed research associated with lithium-ion battery usage in underground mines was being worked on at the time of the reduction in force.

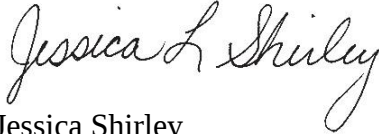
Over the years, the Bureau has benefitted from the usage of the PRL's onsite laboratory and testing equipment. The PRL has hosted the Bureau's staff at its experimental mine for annual self-contained self-rescuer smoke expectation training and hosts an average of five mine rescue training events per year for the Bureau. The PRL has developed a Virtual Reality (VR) mine environment that has been very useful for mine rescue and miner training. In fact, in 2024 the first annual VR mine rescue contest was held at the PRL. PRL researchers in this focal area were working with the Bureau to develop a Bureau VR environment for training of apprentice miners, certified mine official candidates, and mine rescue team members.

The Bureau believes the loss of the PRL facility and its subject matter experts would not be in the best interest of miner's health and safety. Since its inception in 1910 as the Bureau of Mines, the work accomplished by this group has undoubtably saved lives and advanced the industry forward. The research that was and would be conducted by the PRL is needed for the betterment of the mining workforce's health and safety. Pennsylvania has a long legacy of mining –

stretching back hundreds of years – and we owe it to our mine workers, their families, and mining communities to ensure their safety and continue this critical research.

Should you have any additional questions, please contact Richard Wagner, P.E., Director of the Bureau of Mine Safety by e-mail at rwagner@pa.gov or by telephone at 724.404.3154.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica L. Shirley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessica Shirley
Secretary

cc: Dr. John Howard, Director of NIOSH
sent via e-mail