

May 1, 2019

**An Open Letter to the Pennsylvania Department of Health Bureau of Epidemiology,
Division of Community Epidemiology**

On behalf of the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (EHP), I would like to thank the Pennsylvania Department of Health for performing their due diligence after being called upon by concerned residents of the Canon-McMillan school district to analyze rates of Ewing sarcoma in the area. Following standard CDC protocol, DOH compared rates of Ewing sarcoma and other cancers over three time periods to determine whether it could be proven statistically that there was a higher incidence of cancer in Washington County generally and the Canon-McMillan school district specifically as compared with the rest of the state. The report concluded by saying that incidence rates of Ewing sarcoma were not “consistently and statistically significantly higher than the rest of the state over the time periods reviewed” and therefore could not reach conclusive findings.

As an organization dedicated to providing timely and trusted public health information to our served communities, including the Canon-McMillan area, we have a number of questions that bear asking:

1. How were the three time periods used in your study selected? Your report chose to look at the data over three timeframes – from 1985 to 1994 (9 years), from 1995 to 2004 (9 years), and from 2005 to 2017 (12 years). Why are the time periods not uniform? Wouldn't the reporting of more cases within a shorter time frame increase statistical significance?
2. Why hasn't the standardized incidence ratio pertaining to bone cancer within the Canon-McMillan school district been marked with a double asterisk to indicate statistical significance or been mentioned elsewhere in the report? There were 10 observed cases with 4.45 expected resulting in an SIR of 2.25 and a confidence interval of 1.08 to 4.13. If statistical significance is your test of whether or not further epidemiologic investigation is warranted, we would like to know why this is an exception. Or was this an oversight?
3. Since Kyle Deliere's father has publicly confirmed that his son was in fact a resident of Cecil Township up to and including his time of diagnosis, what is your plan to update the analysis to include him?
4. Being that time is of the essence, is there a reasonable method to estimate the state rate of Ewing sarcoma for 2018 so that you would be able to perform this analysis utilizing the two cases diagnosed in 2018 within the Canon-McMillan school district (Mitch Barton and David Cobb) that have been brought to light? We understand that your data source is the Pennsylvania Cancer Registry, for which there is a two-year lag. However, waiting a year to include local cases that can be verified today seems to place procedure over the need to get the facts on the table.

5. As has been recommended by Representative Tim O'Neal, is there a plan for a public meeting to clarify your message to the concerned community members of the Canon-McMillan area?

If there is no plan to hold a public meeting, please clarify your message to the community through a response to this letter. Your lack of conclusive findings leaves local residents wondering whether they and their children are safe with regards to a potential environmental exposure. The residents of Pennsylvania look to your organization for clear guidance based on a thorough assessment of all pertinent available data.

Thank you for addressing my concerns. I look forward to hearing your answers.

Sincerely,

Sarah Rankin, MPH, BSN, OCN

Public Health Nurse, Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project

cc: Lora Siegmann Werner, MPH, Regional Director, Region 3, Agency for Toxic Substances & Disease Registry/CDC, Gov. Tom Wolf (by fax), Rep. Tim O'Neal