

**Press Release**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Community Meeting Draws Residents, Experts Together to Discuss Childhood Cancers in Southwestern Pennsylvania**

CANONSBURG, PA, June 18, 2019 – More than 200 people attended the “Community Meeting on Childhood Cancers in SWPA” tonight, which brought together concerned residents of the area with experts in public health. The evening began with a panel discussion centered on rare forms of cancer in the Canon-McMillan School District and elsewhere in the region, how being exposed to environmental pollution may play a part in public health, and what actions might be taken going forward. The floor was then opened for questions from the audience.

Sponsored by the Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (EHP), the event was held at Bella Sera, a meeting space outside Canonsburg, PA. Also in attendance were staff members from U.S. Rep. Conor Lamb, Pa. Sen. Camera Bartolotta, and Pa. Rep. Bud Cook.

Prior to the meeting, EHP Director Raina Rippel said, “We are hosting this community meeting because we know that parents and kids are worried about the heightened threat of cancer in our region. We want to bring those concerns to light, instead of hiding them in private meetings and incomplete studies.”

The meeting comes on the heels of a Post-Gazette series of articles documenting up to 67 cases of childhood and young adult cancers in Washington, Greene, Fayette, and Westmoreland counties. A total of 27 cases of Ewing sarcoma, a rare bone cancer that affects mostly children and teens, have been diagnosed in these counties in the past ten years. An average of only 250 cases are diagnosed each year nationwide.

“Definitively linking incidences of cancer to environmental causes has always been difficult,” said Sarah Rankin, Public Health Nurse for EHP. “There are many interacting factors influencing causation including things like genetics, lifestyle factors, and environmental exposures. But, one thing we know for sure: exposure to certain toxic chemicals can and does cause rates of cancer to increase, as well as a number of other health issues. We need Governor Wolf and the state to fully investigate these unusual rates of childhood cancers.”

After the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) failed to determine whether a cancer cluster was present in the Canon-McMillan School District, EHP wrote to the DOH outlining its concerns with the study. EHP invited the DOH to attend this community meeting, but the DOH declined. Pa. Rep. Tim O’Neal and his staff were also invited to attend but declined.

## **Panelists/Speakers Available for Interviews:**

### **Bernard Goldstein, MD** (Moderator)

*Professor Emeritus and former Dean, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health*  
Available briefly after the event and anytime on 6/19 by phone (412-417-9611) or email (bdgold@pitt.edu)

### **Janice Blanock**

*Cecil resident, mother of the late Luke Blanock*  
Available 6/19 by phone (412-576-4359) or email (jblanock@yahoo.com)

### **Ned Ketyer, MD, FAAP**

*Pediatrician, Pediatric Alliance*  
*Physicians for Social Responsibility (Board)*  
*Medical Consultant, SWPA Environmental Health Project*  
Available briefly after the event and 6/19 by phone between 2-5 p.m. (724-255-7440) and email (ecketyer@gmail.com)

### **Sarah Rankin, MPH, RN, OCN**

*Public Health Nurse, Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project*  
*Oncology Certified Nurse*  
Available after the event and 6/19 by phone (724-260-5504) and email (srankin@environmentalhealthproject.org)

### **Shaina Stacy, PhD, MPH, CPH**

*Postdoctoral Scholar, University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health*  
*Environmental Health Researcher*  
Available after the event and 6/19 in the a.m. by phone (724-777-7757) and email (sls157@pitt.edu)

### **Raina Rippel**

*Director, Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project*  
Available after the event and 6/20 by phone (724-260-5504) and email (rippel@environmentalhealthproject.org)

## **About Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project**

*The Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (EHP) is a nonprofit public health organization that defends public health in the face of oil and gas development. We provide frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation and guidance. We engage diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others. We do so because knowledge protects health.*