November 7, 2022

The Honorable Jason Snyder  
Acting Deputy Secretary for Property and Asset Management  
Department of General Services  
515 North Office Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17125

Via email

Dear Acting Deputy Secretary Snyder,

Thank you for your response to our letter concerning the Climate Countdown Clock. We appreciate all the assistance the Department has given us over the course of the exhibit. Lori Sherlock and Walt George have been particularly helpful. For the reasons stated below, we would like you to reconsider your decision.

Your letter states, “With all our exhibits and displays, DGS is given a specific set of guidelines and criteria under the Pennsylvania Code for allowing temporary exhibits to be displayed within the confines of the Main Capitol Building and other state-owned facilities.” Title 4 PA Code, Chapter 86 addresses policies regarding temporary exhibits. According to 4 PA Code § 86.3(8)(v), “Exhibits may be scheduled for display for up to 14 calendar days, subject to availability of time and space.” It would appear after reviewing the Capitol Events calendar that your department has discretion over whether or not to enforce the policy. Several entries list exhibits that have lasted anywhere from three weeks to several months.

However, the Code says nothing about permanent exhibits like the one we are requesting. As it happens, another clock has been on display at the Capitol since February 24, 2016, suggesting that years-long displays with indeterminate end dates are also permitted. Barry Shutt, an Agriculture Department retiree, installed a Pension Debt clock that, according to a Pennlive report from January 2022, “has been a fixture of the East Rotunda for years.” A tag on the clock reads, “Pennsylvania Pension Debt Clock Unveiled February 24, 2016.”

Unlike our Climate Countdown Clock that appears as an entry each day on the calendar from June 13 to November 16, the Pension Debt clock is not listed on the calendar except for this month when it is to be displayed in the Senate fountain area from November 3 to December 2. The unveiling ceremony in 2016 was listed as an hour-long event, as was a resetting of the clock in January of 2017. Between February 24, 2016 and November 3, 2022, the exhibit was never listed as a daily entry.

The Climate Countdown Clock will tick down to zero in less time than the Pension Debt clock has already been on display if the state government takes no action to address the crisis. If our governor and legislature continue on their course of enabling the fossil fuel industry, as they did last week when Governor Wolf signed HB1059 that authorizes $2 billion in taxpayer subsidies to fossil fuel corporations for methane and blue hydrogen (a.k.a. methane) projects, the true time left will be even less.

Your letter states, “When individuals or groups apply for the ability to put exhibits on display, there is a mutual understanding that exhibit agreements are for a specified time-period and are temporary in
nature. We work with applicants to ensure their voices are heard and their causes receive the maximum public exposure. Such was the case with your exhibit, which was prominently displayed for viewing for an extended length of time.”

It was precisely because we respect the mutual understanding of what we understood to be a temporary exhibit that we submitted our letter and petition calling for the display to be made permanent at the end of the agreed upon period. We are curious about the terms of the relationship Mr. Shutt has with the Department, especially since his clock seems to be a de facto permanent exhibit in the East Wing, and would like to understand how DGS differentiates our clock from his.

The actions of every elected and appointed official in Pennsylvania have the potential to directly impact and accelerate the climate crisis. The Climate Clock must stay where it is until fossil fuel extraction, compression, transmission, and all related methane gas infrastructure comes to a halt. On display or not - the climate clock will not stop ticking. The clock's presence in the Capitol is a necessary reminder of that indisputable fact.

Our sense of urgency compels us to ask you to reconsider your position and give our exhibit the same permanence the Pension Debt clock has been and continues to be given.

Respectfully,
Karen Feridun, Co-founder, Better Path Coalition
karen@betterpathcoalition.org
610-678-7726

cc: Acting Secretary Joseph Lee
Governor Tom Wolf
Senator Kim Ward
Senator Jay Costa
Representative Kerry Benninghoff
Representative Joanna McClinton