



**Public Input of Virginia E. Palacios
Executive Director of Commission Shift
Railroad Commission of Texas Open Meeting
November 19, 2024**

Good morning, I want to sincerely thank you for the opportunity to give Public Input today. The willingness of state agencies to hear from the public is an important part of public governance that is aligned with principles of democracy -something we are all thinking about on the heels of the General Election. Congratulations, Chairman Craddick, on your reelection.

Thanksgiving is next week, so it's a good time to reflect on what we're grateful for. I'm thankful that the commission made steps toward providing language interpretation during Public Input and making your rulemakings and other documents more accessible in Spanish. I'm thankful that the commission requested a peer-review of the Class II injection program with the Groundwater Protection Council. And I'm thankful that the commission asked the legislature for additional funds for well plugging and an underground injection well investigation team. These are tangible steps toward keeping our state safe.

Today I want to ask you to take some tangible steps toward taking more feedback from the public. In an electoral structure where the regulated industry provides the vast majority of campaign funding, the public will always be left to wonder whether their voice matters at the commission. That is why maintaining a Public Input component in the public meetings is so important. To go a step further, the commission should consider developing a process for ensuring it responds to complaints that are raised during Public Input.

Too often, it seems that state and federal agencies consider public input only as a required exercise, but not one that provides meaningful value. I want to urge you to consider public input as a resource that can aid in investigations and make all of our lives better. Several of the impacted Texans we

have met over the years are elderly folks who are experts in their fields. They hold a wealth of historical knowledge and technical expertise that we can all benefit from learning. And they're at a point in their lives where they're having health problems that make it difficult to travel long distances.

I'm asking that you consider allowing virtual Public Input at your Open Meetings, to allow for the collection of knowledge and expertise from the far reaches of the state, and to reduce barriers to access for the public. Demonstrating a fair democratic process extends beyond elections. I understand the risk you take is exposing yourself to more frustrated constituents every month, but that's trivial compared to the benefit of learning more from the public. Sharing information in a transparent public meeting allows real-world problems to be solved more efficiently and with help from more people. I hope you will seriously consider my proposal. Thank you again for listening.