



Dear Memphis City Council,

We are writing today to encourage this council to support Councilman Edmund Ford, Sr. and Councilman Dr. Jeff Warren's Resolution Opposing the Byhalia Connection Pipeline. We believe that this council's vote to oppose the Pipeline is pivotal to the health and well being of this community, our country and our climate.

We believe you all have the power to uphold the values of justice deeply rooted in our democratic system and in the hopes of the people of Memphis. As co-leaders of the National Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival, we seek to continue the work of Dr. Martin L. King, Jr. and the millions who fought for the poor, the disenfranchised, and the marginalized. We seek an end to the interlocking injustices of systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation, militarism, and the false moral narrative of religious nationalism. This upcoming Tuesday, we believe that collectively this body can decide to disrupt these systems that have plagued our communities, our cities, and our nation for too long.

This proposed crude oil pipeline funded by the fossil fuel corporations Valero Energy Corporation and Plains All American is burdening the people of this city and Mississippi for the profit motives of corporations. It is past time to put people over corporate gains and to hear the cries of the people in our cities. In Memphis, it seems the cry is clear: "No Oil in Our Soil."

This crude oil pipeline is a textbook case of environmental racism, injustice, and environmental degradation. In targeting the Southwest Memphis neighborhood, and the greater Memphis area, this project hopes to force low-wealth Black communities to carry this billion-dollar corporation's oil barrels on their backs with no public benefit. In the US, between 1986 and 2013, [there have been nearly 8,000 incidents of pipeline leaks \(around 300 per year\)](#). If this pipeline were to leak it would contaminate the aquifer, which provides drinking water to Memphis and the greater Mississippi DeSoto county, with carcinogenic crude oil. Not only is the Byhalia Connection Pipeline plan proposing the construction of a high-pressure crude oil pipeline above your city's water aquifer, it is along an active earthquake zone, increasing the potential for a spill. In the case of an earthquake, the impacts to the community from this project would be devastating.

We have read your report from Dr. Cosler that "one pound of crude oil can contaminate 25,000,000 gallons of groundwater..." The route of the pipeline cuts through the Davis Wellfield, which is operated by Memphis Light, Gas & Water and is in an area known to be vulnerable to groundwater contamination. The Davis Wellfield provides drinking water for several predominantly Black neighborhoods in southwest Memphis. We urge you to not support this crude oil pipeline company but rather protect the water and the people in Memphis.

Beyond the immediate hazards that the proposed Byhalia crude oil pipeline poses to our drinking water, it also would be another significant driver of fossil fuel consumption, and in turn, climate polluting greenhouse gas emissions. As you know, our society is facing an existential crisis from climate change, and it is imperative that our elected leaders do everything in their power to stop expanding fossil fuel infrastructure and transition to clean, renewable energy. Just in the last few days, [international press have been reporting on the alarming public health impacts of the fossil fuel industry](#), which accounted for *one-in-five* global deaths in 2018. As usual, it is people of color and the poor who are the most burdened by the impacts of the fossil fuel industry.

Last fall, Southwest Memphis community members came together to form MCAP to condemn the pipeline and put pressure on local officials to support their fight to put an end to the proposed pipeline. MCAP has garnered support from landowners, community associations in Westwood, Whitehaven, Boxtown, West Junction and Walker Homes, Protect our Aquifer, Sierra Club - Tennessee Chapter, Sowing Justice, and The Climate Reality Project: Memphis and Mid-South Regional Chapter., and the National Black Environmental Justice Network. In addition to those organizations, they have support from several elected officials including the United States Congressman, Steve Cohen. Like the historic Black community of Union Hill in Virginia [that organized and won against the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline](#), MCAP seems poised to do what it takes to protect your communities in Memphis. We hope that you all, as elected officials, who represent the people will put your citizen's health, safety, and futures first.

Although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers provided its recommendation for the fast-track permit for this crude oil pipeline's permit, they made clear that local government and local utilities will have the final say on protecting the people's water and interests. We hope you will raise your voice to end the injustices that are being perpetrated on the backs of the people of this city. We hope your vote and actions will be to oppose this pipeline as Councilmen Ford, Sr. and Warren are proposing. It is not only the best decision but also the morally just one.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis  
Co-Chair, National Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II,  
Co-Chair, National Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival