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United States Senate
**COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION**
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125
WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

December 12, 2025

Keith Coyle
Chief Counsel
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Mr. Coyle:

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) plays a critical role in ensuring the safe movement of hazardous materials through states, cities, and neighborhoods. Pipeline and hazardous materials incidents can have devastating impacts on communities, the environment, and the economy, which is why the agency must remain independent and vigilant. Just last month, a leak in the Olympic Pipeline in Everett, Washington prevented jet fuel from reaching Seattle-Tacoma International Airport—nearly preventing planes from taking off during the Thanksgiving holiday. This incident underscores why I am concerned by recent reporting indicating that companies and industry stakeholders you recently represented at the law firm Babst Calland may be receiving special access at PHMSA while the agency rewrites the nation’s pipeline safety rules to their benefit. Accordingly, I am requesting documents and information regarding the extent to which INGAA may be exercising undue influence over PHMSA.

According to your financial disclosure, as a shareholder of Babst Calland’s Pipeline and HazMat Safety practice, you represented major pipeline industry companies and groups shortly before President Trump appointed you to PHMSA in February 2025, including the Interstate Natural Gas Association of America (INGAA).¹ While you were representing INGAA, the now-Deputy Administrator of PHMSA, Ben Kochman, was employed as INGAA’s Director of Pipeline Safety Policy.² A recent *ProPublica* investigative report found that PHMSA has advanced at least 23 actions since the start of this Administration that propose or implement amendments to safety rules—many of which seek to rollback safety and incident reporting requirements.³ According to the report, PHMSA leadership initiated at least four of these actions in response to requests or specific concerns raised from your former client, INGAA.⁴ As Deputy Administrator, Mr. Kochman signed multiple proposed rulemakings that explicitly cite INGAA’s comments,

¹ Coyle OGE-278e.

² “Deputy Administrator,” *PHMSA*, (accessed Dec. 10, 2025); <https://www.phmsa.dot.gov/about-phmsa/leadership/deputy-administrator>.

³ Coburn, Jesse, “How Trump’s Transportation Department Is Loosening Safety Rules Meant to Protect the Public,” *ProPublica*, (Nov. 20, 2025); <https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-dot-regulation-safety-rollback-sean-duffy>

⁴ *Id.*

including comments Mr. Kochman personally signed for and submitted while employed by INGAA.⁵ This raises serious questions about your former client INGAA's influence over agency decision making—and whether PHMSA is pursuing industry's agenda instead of one that protects the American public. It also raises serious concerns about whether PHMSA leadership is complying with federal recusal obligations.⁶

Additionally, it appears you defended pipeline companies in PHMSA enforcement proceedings while at Babst Calland—the same enforcement process that you are now in charge of overseeing as Chief Counsel. Your office is involved in the approval of final enforcement orders, reviews petitions for reconsideration of enforcement orders, and handles any hearings if pipeline operators dispute the violations identified by pipeline safety inspectors. This gives you significant authority over how violations of pipeline safety laws are adjudicated and settled—decisions over which INGAA and its member companies now appear to wield considerable influence. Under your leadership, proposed enforcement penalties assessed by PHMSA on pipeline companies that violate safety rules declined a staggering 98 percent.⁷

Given these serious questions and concerns, please provide the following documents and information from January 20, 2025, to present:

1. All communications between you and INGAA, the INGAA Foundation, INGAA or INGAA Foundation member companies, or any of your other former clients at Babst Calland regulated by PHMSA. This includes, but is not limited to, all communications regarding or relating to:
 - a. Potential rulemakings;
 - b. PHMSA policies;
 - c. Enforcement cases;
 - d. Your recusal obligations or potential conflicts of interest.
2. A complete list of every meeting or event (virtual or in person) in which you have participated in with INGAA, the INGAA Foundation, INGAA or INGAA Foundation member companies, or any of your former clients at Babst Calland regulated by PHMSA. Please specify the date, location, attendees, and subject matter discussed for each such meeting or event.
3. A complete list of all regulatory actions PHMSA has taken that cite to or rely on any comments, data, or other inputs provided by INGAA or the INGAA Foundation while you represented INGAA.
4. A complete list of all matters from which you have sought to recuse yourself.

⁵ Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Docket No. PHMSA-2025-0019, (May 21, 2025), footnote 13; <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/21/2025-09078/pipeline-safety-repair-criteria-for-hazardous-liquid-and-gas-transmission-pipelines#citation-7-p21717>; *see also* Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Docket No. PHMSA-2025-0135; Amdt. No. 190-22, (July 1, 2025); <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/07/01/2025-12132/pipeline-safety-rationalize-special-permit-conditions>; *see also* INGAA Comments in Response to DOT RFI 5.5.25(16562500.2), (May 5, 2025); <https://www.regulations.gov/comment/DOT-OST-2025-0026-0872>; *see also* Comments on Gas Pipeline Leak Detection and Repair NPRM Docket No. PHMSA-2021-0039, submitted by Ben Kochman for INGAA, (Aug. 16, 2023); <https://www.regulations.gov/comment/PHMSA-2021-0039-26287>.

⁶ *See, e.g.*, 5 C.F.R. § 2635.502.

⁷ *See supra* n. 3.

5. Copies of all waivers or authorizations you have received from PHMSA or DOT authorizing you to work on matters involving INGAA, its member companies, or any of your other former clients.
6. A complete list of every rule, regulations, memo, guidance, or enforcement case settlement that you have signed or recommended for approval to the Office of the Secretary or the PHMSA Administrator, Acting Administrator, or Deputy Administrator.
7. A complete list of enforcement cases, where the penalty was reduced, deferred, or withdrawn, and the legal rationale for each such instance.

Please provide the above requested materials no later than January 5, 2026.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

Cc: Judy Kaleta, Department of Transportation Designated Agency Ethics Official