The Pennsylvania Utility Contractors Association (PUCA) is one of the largest state-wide utility construction associations in the country, serving excavation contractors in a range of underground facility markets. PUCA members provide the manpower and equipment needed to build, repair, and maintain the infrastructure needed for water and wastewater improvements as well as other infrastructure systems including gas distribution, broadband, electric as well as the nation's surface transportation system throughout the State of Pennsylvania.

PUCA supports the Promoting Innovation in Pipeline Efficiency and Safety Act (PIPES Act) of 2025, and we appreciate the committee's efforts to advance it.

The bill includes language would require states to demonstrate that they have adopted or can show progress toward adopting several leading practices in their damage prevention programs as part of the criteria considered when states apply for PHMSA damage prevention grant dollars. These leading practices include examining and limiting exemptions, including municipal exemptions, requiring marking of all lines and laterals, including sewer lines and laterals; and encouraging the use of technologies to locate underground facilities, such as geographic information systems (GIS), which offer the most detailed and prolific pipeline mapping available. We are especially interested in expanding use of GIS mapping.

Importance of GIS
Optimal damage prevention on project efforts begins early in the planning and design stages. Understanding the risk and developing designs that mitigate risk is achieved using industry-driven standards and utility engineering best practices. Providing excavators with well-contrived designs that avoid or mitigate utility conflicts along with standardized digital data on utility infrastructure enables better construction planning and execution by leveraging virtual design and construction technologies that eliminate potential for damages. Moreover, these methods expedite construction, providing tremendous cost savings on projects. A fundamental need is to document utilities properly and in a standardized fashion at the time of installation. GIS mapping offers the best way to meet that need.

At a time when we are in the midst of the largest infrastructure build out in American history, and some $550 billion in new infrastructure investments is coming into a range of subsurface infrastructure markets, damage prevention to underground facilities is more important than ever. Reintroduction and enactment of the PIPES Act would take needed steps to encourage states to employ state-of-the-art technologies, such as GIS mapping along with published standards for documenting utility infrastructure, which will only improve the damage prevention process.

Contractors offer the unique perspective on pipeline safety from the industry responsible for building and repairing the vast majority of distribution and transmission pipeline

infrastructure across the country. GIS can create, manage, visualize, analyze, and map different layers of data by creating maps and scenes related to underground facilities. GIS connects data to a map, integrating location data with a range of limiting information regarding the subsurface facilities in that area, and it allows for layering of data tied to geographic points. Rather than restricting the user to limited features on a static map, GIS mapping allows for viewing customizable combinations of data layers in a single dynamic tool.

PUCA believes ensuring the use of readily available GIS mapping technologies would be the most efficient way to identify and document the exact location of underground pipelines (as well as other subsurface infrastructure). This precise mapping system is increasingly utilized to ensure for the accurate locating and marking of underground facilities.

Increased Penalties for Sabotage on Pipeline Infrastructure
PUCA supports First Amendment rights for peaceful activism, including peaceful protests to existing and pending pipeline construction projects, but we also support legislative language that would hold those who engage in criminal activities during protests more accountable.

Past proposals on this issue would have revised existing criminal penalties for damaging or destroying a pipeline facility by specifying that vandalism, tampering or disrupting the operation of a pipeline facility would be punishable by criminal fines and imprisonment. Importantly, leading proposals included pipeline facilities under construction within their scope. While interfering or tampering with the operation of a pipeline would clearly compromise pipeline safety, vandalism and destruction of nearby equipment used to build a pipeline can be just as dangerous.

For example, setting construction equipment on fire near a natural gas pipeline can be as dangerous as turning a valve. Several states have enacted laws intended to deter pipeline vandalism. Tampering with or vandalizing critical infrastructure or nearby equipment used to build it can create serious safety risks to the public, pipeline employees and even the perpetrators. Additionally, acts of vandalism could result in devastating environmental impacts. Therefore, we encourage the committee to adopt language that would enact criminal penalties for criminal protesting activities, and these penalties would be subject to vandalism and destruction of equipment and materials needed for construction of pipeline infrastructure.

PUCA appreciates your consideration, and we support passage of the Promoting Innovation in Pipeline Efficiency and Safety Act (PIPES Act) of 2025.