

Testimony regarding SCI Waymart given by Debbie Gillette, Executive Director

The Chamber of the Northern Poconos represents more than 600 member businesses in Wayne and Pike Counties and the Pocono Lake Region. Our mission includes supporting our membership by serving as the center of commerce for the Northern Pocono Mountain Region, while informing consumers and advocating for responsible economic growth, industry, local business, and tourism, thus enhancing the region's quality of life.

The Chamber understands that Governor Wolf, and Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel, are considering closing a number of corrections facilities including SCI Waymart. Please be advised, this Chamber strongly opposes such action as we strongly believe that closing SCI Waymart will be extremely detrimental to Canaan Township, Waymart Borough, Wayne County, and a host of surrounding communities. The Chamber fully supports the 706 employees of SCI Waymart, their families, the independent contractors to the facility and the businesses in our region.

SCI Waymart has a 106-year history as being a major employer in Wayne County. The closing of this facility, located in such a rural setting, will have a crippling impact on the local economy.

This closure will literally impact thousands of lives here in this rural part of the Commonwealth. The Chamber urges the Governor and the administration to consider the families that would certainly be impacted by such a closure. The stress, challenge and cost of relocation and/or layoffs will impact thousands of lives and ultimately increase costs for the Commonwealth. For employees, a 65 to 90 mile commute to work takes away time spent with loved ones. This may mean missing sporting events, academic achievement events and family gatherings. Children will remember that Mom or Dad were not able to attend a milestone moment in their life because of their commute to work. The majority of the employees at SCI Waymart have spouses that work in other professions. It is most likely that they will not be able to relocate their jobs, which will be a loss of income to these families if they are forced to move to another region of Pennsylvania.

Additionally, there are many businesses that provide ancillary goods and services that will be affected if SCI Waymart closes. The vast majority of these businesses are small and family-owned. They are the backbone of our membership and our local economy. These hard-working families operate restaurants, service stations, grocery stores, hardware stores, inns and other accommodations. Professionals in the medical community are also affected as the immediate area includes physicians, dentists, independent pharmacies, Wayne Memorial Hospital and other medical services. These local businesses represent thousands more lives that will be negatively impacted by the closing of SCI Waymart.

Economically speaking, local municipalities will lose wage taxes from the employees at this correctional institution. This will, again, have a crippling effect on Wayne County and the region as a whole. The lost revenues from our local businesses, reduced property values and increased

unemployment would cause a rippling effect throughout the region.

The potential of the Commonwealth vacating the iconic facility at SCI Waymart is also a threat in and of itself. Having such a structure abandoned significantly increases the potential for trespassing, property damage, theft, drug use and a host of other crimes in and around the facilities and the 420 acres. This would put further stress on local law enforcement and our judicial system going forward. The abandoned, iconic structure and accompanying real estate would also leave a scar on our otherwise picturesque local landscape in the Pocono Mountains.

There are 127 Mental Health Units across the PA Dept. of Corrections with 82 of those units at SCI Waymart. We understand that the cost associated with managing this classification of inmates is much higher than the other inmate population. These inmates can't be in general population. The correctional officers and staff at SCI Waymart are well trained and prepared to handle these inmates, more so than the other four facilities under consideration.

The Chamber agrees with our Wayne County Commissioners that there is room for growth and expansion at the SCI Waymart facility. The site is served by a new natural gas line, water and sewer infrastructure and is off the Governor Casey Highway (Route 6). USP Canaan, a federal prison, is also adjacent to SCI Waymart.

This property and facility have significant historical significance to our region. In 1907 the Delaware & Hudson Canal Company donated the land to the Commonwealth for the purpose of building a hospital for incarcerated prisoners who displayed extremely violent, bizarre behaviors. These prisoners were a danger to themselves and others. The original transfer of 625 acres occurred for the sum of \$5. The Farview State Hospital designated and built by 1911. This facility was built to give prisoners and patients a reason to live and provided hope for a future. For generations, the administration and employees of SCI Waymart have been supportive of our local communities, schools, businesses and other organizations.

The Chamber of the Northern Poconos respectfully urges Governor Wolf and the Department of Corrections to reconsider closing SCI Waymart and to search for other, less crippling ideas to reduce costs in the Commonwealth. Public safety must be your priority.