

Testimony of Robert Durkin, President/CEO Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce

PA Senate Majority Policy Committee

Public Hearing on Data Centers

Valley View High School, Archbald PA

August 11, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Argall, Senator Brown, and members of the Senate Republican Policy Committee.

My name is Bob Durkin, President and CEO of the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce.

The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce, with nearly 1,400 members is the largest and longest standing business association in northeastern Pennsylvania.

Further, the Chamber is the parent company to the Scranton Lackawanna Industrial Building Company (SLIBCO), a Pennsylvania Certified Economic Development Organization (CEDO), which is responsible for the development of 15 business and industrial parks throughout Lackawanna County.

I thank the Committee for providing us with a chance to comment on the issue of Data Center development in northeastern Pennsylvania and across the Commonwealth.

As my colleagues in the development and utilities realms are well represented here today and will have provided detailed information on many of the important facts surrounding this subject, artificial intelligence, and the complex interconnectedness of this issue with the energy sector, I will keep my comments within the context of the Community perspective.

I would like to begin my remarks by invoking a bit of history.

The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce as currently constituted was largely born in 1945 out of a community-wide response to economic crisis.

At the close of World War II, with declining coal and rail industries and the impending closure of industrial plants temporarily converted to the war effort, the community leaders from all over Lackawanna County – businesspeople, elected officials, clergy and others recognized the urgent need to rebuild the regional economy. With that, they came together

and created and funded *The Scranton Plan*, a blueprint for promoting economic development, encouraging private investment, and upskilling the regional workforce. These leaders from across Lackawanna County - from Scranton to Carbondale; the Abington's to North Pocono; down valley and the mid valley shared a vision, developed a plan, and took action to attract and grow new industries emerging at that time in the national economy. Industries that would produce quality, family sustaining jobs for the citizens of our region.

Since that time, *The Scranton Plan*, driven by the Chamber, SLIBCO, and emergent affiliates – and with the leadership of elected leaders at all levels of government, education, labor, and the community at large, literally transformed the landscape and economy of Lackawanna County.

With strategic land development and targeted business attraction, the region welcomed global companies, nurtured legacy businesses, and helped seed new enterprises. This more diversified economy embraced new industries—from advanced manufacturing to finance, healthcare, logistics, technology and more. These in turn supported the entrepreneurial small businesses dotting the streets and by-ways of every city, borough, and township of our Valley.

Through each generation leaders scanned the economic landscape, looking for the next opportunities to advance business development and job creation in its time and place. Each phase capturing the economic zeitgeist of its time. The names of some of these businesses read like an historic economic timeline of the Lackawanna Valley: From Chrysler (General Dynamics), Daystrom (Lockheed Martin), and McGregor Iron; to Kane is Able, NatWest (Bank of America), and Gertrude Hawk; and Barry Callebaut, Chewy and Amazon.

The 15 SLIBCO parks also reflect the business opportunities of their times including Keystone and Stauffer Industrial Parks with the focus on manufacturing and logistics; Montage Mountain developments including Glenmaura Corporate Center and the W.W. Scranton Office Park with the a mix of finance, healthcare and back office operations; Scott Technology Park housing research and development and advanced manufacturing; Mt. Pleasant Corporate Center, with multiple healthcare facilities; the Valley View Business Park and Jessup Small Business Center, with a diverse mix of Lackawanna County's largest private sector employers, and budding individual entrepreneurs. These parks collectively have generated billions of dollars in private investment and created more than 50,000 jobs. All of these parks and individual businesses came about because leaders saw the opportunities and seized upon them.

In their times almost all of these successes faced some level of scrutiny. Further each had something else in common, they were developed with input from the leaders and citizens of the host municipalities - the common thread being that when the questions were effectively answered, the projects moved forward.

The Mission of the Chamber and our affiliates today reflects the same sentiments that lit a fire under our forebears who authored and implemented the original *Scranton Plan* some eight decades ago: To Attract, Sustain, and Grow business, To Attract, Sustain and Grow Jobs throughout northeastern Pennsylvania

Which brings us to a nexus in that economic timeline. With the ubiquitous presence of “smart” technologies in virtually every aspect of our daily lives, and recent historical advances in that technology, we need to recognize that A.I. and data centers are a part of our present, yet alone our future.

The Chamber and its affiliates market industrial and commercial properties across Lackawanna County – those owned by SLIBCO and private developers. Recent updates of our strategic plans target specific sectors, which also align with those put forth by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) – including Energy and Technology. Sectors that define data centers. These segments have been selected because they complement many of the strengths of Lackawanna County and northeastern PA; offer the greatest opportunities for quality job creation; and invite potentially historic levels of private investment in our communities.

Development of data centers needs to come with enhanced partnerships with our education sectors, including our public and private secondary schools, Career Technology Center, and higher education institutions. Fortunately, the Chamber, through an emerging new version of *The Scranton Plan* dubbed, Scranton Plan 3.0, is poised to facilitate just such partnerships.

The Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce and our affiliates encourage the General Assembly to embrace this moment in time. To see it as a defining opportunity for regional and state-wide revitalization and economic leadership.

Just as past generations stepped forward with vision and collaboration to build new industries and chart a prosperous course for our communities, we must do the same today. The growth of data centers and advanced technology infrastructure offers Pennsylvania the chance to shape a resilient economy and connect more citizens to high-quality jobs. The decisions we make now will determine our ability to lead in the next era of innovation, for the betterment of all citizens of the Commonwealth.