

Written Testimony – Senate Majority Policy Committee
Jen Marsh, Bedford County Development Association (BCDA)
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Chairman, Senator and members of the Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I want to be very clear: workforce housing is now the most significant unmet constraint on economic growth in Bedford County and in many rural communities across Pennsylvania. This is not a future concern - it is happening right now.

Employers across manufacturing, healthcare, biotech, logistics, construction, and hospitality consistently tell us they cannot recruit and retain workers because those workers cannot find suitable housing. Candidates decline job offers. New hires leave within months. Mid-career professionals are unable to relocate their families because there are no modern, move-in-ready housing options available. Employers are not asking for tax incentives or subsidies. They are asking for housing so their workforce can live near their jobs.

We have had extensive conversations with regional and statewide housing developers, and their message is equally direct: they want to build in Bedford County, and the demand exists, but the projects do not move forward because of infrastructure costs. For an 18-acre parcel identified for workforce housing, the estimated cost to install water, sewer, and road infrastructure is approximately \$2.6 million. In rural communities, infrastructure costs exceed land value and rival vertical construction costs. The numbers simply do not work.

Importantly, this is not a zoning or permitting issue. Our municipalities are strong partners. They understand the value workforce housing brings to community vitality and economic sustainability. The barrier is infrastructure.

When we develop business parks, we invest in infrastructure first. We create pad-ready sites, reduce developer risk, and allow businesses to focus on operations instead of site preparation. Workforce housing should be approached with the same strategy. If the Commonwealth invests in sites for jobs, it must also invest in sites for people.

Economic development organizations are stepping into housing because it is now directly limiting economic competitiveness. When housing lags, employers delay expansion, recruitment pipelines shrink, young professionals leave, and years of public investment in workforce training and business park development lose value. Site readiness without housing readiness creates an incomplete growth strategy.

The data supports what we are hearing. Multiple housing studies show Bedford County alone has a 717-unit housing deficit to meet current workforce demand. That figure reflects existing jobs - not future growth. As new business park development moves forward, that gap will widen without intervention.

Current funding programs do not align with this reality. Workforce and market-rate housing receive limited support. Rural communities don't fit neatly into existing housing programs. We're not building large urban high-rises, and we're not solely focused on income-restricted housing. We need workforce housing tools that reflect rural realities.

Infrastructure funding tied directly to workforce housing outcomes is the missing link. Infrastructure programs such as PENNVEST support upgrades to existing systems but do not fund the new infrastructure required to open land for housing development.

Without action, employers will look elsewhere, young professionals will continue to leave, and rural communities will struggle to remain economically viable. Housing is not simply a quality-of-life issue, it is foundational economic infrastructure.

If we are serious about strengthening rural Pennsylvania's economy, we must align our policies with today's realities. That means creating tools that allow communities to prepare housing sites the same way we prepare business parks -through strategic infrastructure investment. The cost of inaction will not show up in headlines tomorrow, but it will show up in stalled growth, lost talent, and missed opportunity. I urge this Committee to take bold, targeted action that enables rural communities to compete, grow, and sustain their workforce for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this critical issue.