



65 West Main St * Ste 107 * Uniontown, PA 15401 * 724-437-4571

**Pennsylvania State Senate Housing Hearing
Workforce Housing as Economic Infrastructure in Fayette County
Muriel Johnson-Nuttall
Executive Director, Fayette County Chamber of Commerce**

Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, a county-wide business advocacy organization with a partnership of nearly 700 businesses across Fayette County.

I offer these remarks from the perspective of the business community, employers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, healthcare providers, educators, and small businesses who are committed to growing in Fayette County and strengthening Pennsylvania's economy.

From this vantage point, workforce housing is not a secondary issue. It is economic infrastructure. Without adequate, attainable housing, even the strongest workforce and economic development strategies cannot fully succeed.

Businesses require three fundamental conditions to grow: access to a skilled workforce, predictable infrastructure, and communities where employees can live and remain long-term.

When workforce housing is insufficient or misaligned with wages, each of these conditions is compromised.

In Fayette County, employers consistently report difficulty attracting and retaining workers, not because jobs are unavailable, but because housing options do not meet the needs of the workforce those jobs require. This challenge affects early-career professionals, skilled trades, healthcare workers, educators, and young families.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, more than one-third of renters in Fayette County are cost-burdened, spending over 30 percent of their income on housing. Homeowners face parallel pressures from aging housing stock, rising maintenance costs, and limited availability of move-in-ready homes. These realities directly influence labor mobility, job acceptance, and long-term retention.

Housing constraints are increasingly contributing to population loss in Fayette County, particularly among young and early-career workers who want to relocate here but cannot secure attainable housing.



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Communities across Pennsylvania are working intentionally to retain and attract young talent. However, young adults do not simply choose jobs; they choose places where they can build a life. Housing availability, affordability, and quality are central to that decision.

Research from the Center for Rural Pennsylvania identifies out-migration among working-age adults as one of the most significant challenges facing rural counties. Housing supply limitations are increasingly cited as a contributing factor in relocation decisions. If unaddressed, these trends weaken the tax base, limit entrepreneurial growth, and constrain long-term economic resilience.

Fayette County does not function in isolation. Our workforce moves daily across county lines into Westmoreland, Washington, Greene, and Allegheny Counties. When workforce housing options are limited locally, workers are pushed outward, lengthening commute times, increasing transportation costs, and reducing local economic attachment.

Analysis from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia underscores the relationship between housing supply, commuting patterns, and regional labor market efficiency. When workers cannot live near employment centers, business competitiveness declines, and workforce investments yield diminished returns.

Statewide housing assessments conducted by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) and the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED) consistently identify a shortage of units affordable to households earning between 60 and 120 percent of Area Median Income, the income range that defines workforce housing.

In rural and legacy counties like Fayette, the cost of construction, financing constraints, and infrastructure requirements frequently exceed what workforce households can reasonably pay. This creates a feasibility gap. The market does not fail due to a lack of demand; it fails because the financial structure does not support workforce-level pricing without targeted policy tools.

A policy-forward response should include: Alignment of housing policy with workforce and economic development strategies; incentives that close the rural feasibility gap; support for missing-middle housing development; flexible tools responsive to rural market realities; and preservation of local decision-making authority.

Treating workforce housing as core infrastructure, rather than peripheral programming, will strengthen regional competitiveness and employer confidence.



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Fayette County wants to grow. We want to retain our young people and attract new residents. We want employers to invest with confidence and expand with stability. Workforce housing is the place where economic policy, demographic sustainability, and community vitality intersect. Without it, growth stalls. With it, opportunity expands.

By treating workforce housing as essential economic infrastructure, the Commonwealth can empower counties like Fayette to compete, retain talent, and build lasting prosperity.

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

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Muriel Johnson-Nuttall".

Muriel Johnson-Nuttall

Executive Director – 2.18.2025

Reference:

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 5-Year Estimates
Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), Statewide & Regional Housing Needs Assessments
Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED), Housing and Workforce Reports
Center for Rural Pennsylvania, Population Change and Rural Workforce Studies
Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia, Regional Labor Market and Housing Supply Analysis