



REVITALIZATION COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission Hosts Public Hearing on Local Capacity Issues

ALTOONA, BLAIR COUNTY — The Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission and other state and local stakeholders recently hosted a public hearing on February 28 at the Railroaders Memorial Museum in Altoona, Blair County, to address local capacity issues. This event marked the Commission's inaugural hearing, highlighting how limitations in local capacity can hinder the ability of rural communities to address challenges and implement solutions effectively.

Established by [Act 21 of 2024](#), the purpose of the Commission is to create "reviews and recommendations aimed at attracting and retaining residents in rural Pennsylvania while addressing challenges facing rural communities due to population shifts and changing demographics." This includes recommending legislation and regulatory change.

"This hearing marks a historic step for rural Pennsylvania as state officials, local officials, and private sector representatives come together to cooperatively confront the challenges facing our communities," said Dr. Kyle C. Kopko, Chairman of the Commission. "All members of the Commission are committed to identifying and implementing meaningful solutions—through legislation, regulatory reform, and community best practices—to secure a vibrant and sustainable future for our rural communities. This hearing, and much of the Commission's early work, will focus on strengthening local capacity. We must ensure that municipal governments, county governments, nonprofits, and community groups have the resources and expertise needed to plan for, and adapt to, changes in our population."

"I was thrilled to host the Commission in Altoona, Blair County, for the most recent hearing and meeting and give members the chance to see my district firsthand," said Senator Judy Ward, member of the Commission. "The testimony we received was thought-provoking and will be incredibly useful as we think about how to reverse rural Pennsylvania's population decline. I look forward to future hearings with the Commission and am eager to see how we can continue to work together to help these communities grow and thrive."

"The Commission is working diligently to determine the causes of population shifts in rural Pennsylvania and to develop policy recommendations to help reverse the trend," said Senator

Judy Schwank, member of the Commission. "There are so many terrific rural communities, like Altoona, that add character and value to the Commonwealth. In our first hearing, we had an informative dialogue with local leaders about the challenges they face in their communities."

"The goal of this Commission is to better understand the complex challenges facing rural Pennsylvania and to make recommendations that will enhance quality of life, support economic prosperity, and improve access to essential services," said Representative Paul Takac, member of the Commission. "Unfortunately, one of the most common roadblocks we face is limited local capacity. This hearing highlighted some of those specific challenges, as well as some practical ways we can better support local officials and ensure that our efforts and investments are getting to where they are most needed and can do the most good."

"I'm happy to be part of this crucial discussion," said Representative Michael Stender, member of the Commission. "It's vital that we retain residents in rural Pennsylvania while creating a welcoming environment and addressing the unique challenges these communities face."

Testifiers included:

- Sherene Hess, Indiana County Commissioner, President, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP)
- Frank Mazza, Director of Government Relations, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP)
- Holly Fishel, Policy and Research Director, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS)
- Tami Halstead, Newport Borough Councilwoman, and 2nd Vice President of the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs (PSAB)
- Sarah Teater, Director of Capacity Building, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)
- Shate'ja Curry, Community Development Fellowship Program Manager, Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM)
- Charlotte Davis, Executive Director, Rural Maryland Council
- John Papalia, Senior Vice President, Warren County Chamber of Business and Industry
- Brandy Schimp, Mayor of Kane Borough
- Ryanne Jennings, President/CEO of Wayne County Community Foundation, Wayne Tomorrow!

Access the written testimony and video recording of the public hearing on the Commission's webpage at <https://www.rural.pa.gov/commission/public-hearing/growing-local-capacity-in-rural-pennsylvania>.

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