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February 28, 2025

Dear Pennsylvania Rural Population Revitalization Commission,

Wayne County established the [Wayne Tomorrow! Initiative](#) over 10 years ago in order to bring people, organizations, and businesses together to find some shared goals. This broad, county-sponsored, community-based collaboration focuses on the projects, resources, and infrastructure needed to move Wayne County, its people, its culture and its economy into a vibrant future. Wayne Tomorrow! has been bringing a group together for monthly meetings for over a decade, and what has been most impactful from this initiative has been the trust that has been built among community members across sectors and across the county. This group of people partner on a regular basis, provide letters of support for grant applications, collaborate on community programs and events, and are a network of resources to help solve problems collectively in our community. This ecosystem model now represents the way that Wayne County tries to do business. We focus on the shared goals, we bring multiple partners to the table, we work through differences, and we have collective action.

Wayne Tomorrow! was established by the Wayne County Commissioners and they fund the staff time needed to coordinate this effort through the county budget. The participants in the initiative are otherwise volunteers as part of their organizations represented or their interest

in the projects. The [Wayne County Community Foundation](#) established a fund for Wayne Tomorrow in 2021 to collect philanthropic resources in order to support projects of Wayne Tomorrow!, particularly matching grants needed for funding. The Wayne County Community Foundation is also an active participant in the task forces that Wayne Tomorrow organizes and the Coordinating Committee that helps to set strategy and the agenda for the monthly meetings.

In 2018, the Wayne County Commissioners and the Wayne Economic Development Corporation had [a study completed](#), with funding from the Appalachian Regional Commission, to look at how to strengthen the economic and community development in Wayne County. This study identified multiple action items including improving broadband, creating a network of rural community hubs, and partnering with the Wayne County Community Foundation to help access philanthropic dollars, including legacy giving. One of the identified action items was to establish a giving pledge for community members to be encouraged to leave 5% to community foundations. I serve on the board of the Pennsylvania Community Foundation Association and the Wayne County Community Foundation is a member, and PACFA recently created a [giving pledge website](#) for Community Foundations across the Commonwealth to collectively promote.

Community Foundations are a unique entity and one of the very few, if not only, funding structures that is really a neutral player. Across the Commonwealth, and country, community foundations work to enhance their communities and support the nonprofits that serve them. These organizations are important conveners, grantmakers, and community leaders. Every county should have a “Wayne Tomorrow” Initiative happening that brings

stakeholders across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors together and Pennsylvania can make this happen faster with the following recommendations.

1. Provide funding for each county to complete an economic and community development study

If every county had an economic and community development study done similar to the one Wayne County had done in 2018, this would help identify partnerships and opportunities to help focus their county-specific initiative.

2. Invest in grant writers.

Wayne County has very limited capacity as far as staff who are skilled grant writers. In 2023, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation provided a pilot grant to the Wayne County Community Foundation to hire a full-time community grant writer.

This grant writer, in his first two years of employment has brought in over \$4 million dollars in private and public grants to Wayne County with millions more have been applied for and many partnerships and collaborations created from his meeting with nonprofits, municipalities, and county program staff. I'm certain that Wayne County is not unique in lacking this skillset and capacity in our county, and investing in grant-writers at the County, municipal and/or community foundation level through funding and professional development are actionable steps to help counties across the commonwealth access state, federal, and philanthropic grant dollars. It also encourages more partnerships to make those projects come to fruition.

3. Lower match dollars required for state grants.

The Wayne Tomorrow Fund was initially created because we recognized that larger state and federal grants would require a match, and our community often has to scramble to raise those funds with each application. This could be addressed at a

state level with lowering the percentage of match dollars required, particularly for rural communities. Rural communities, like ours, have great ideas and strong partnerships, but often lack large businesses in our communities that may sponsor projects and our pool of people to raise money from is quite literally smaller. Having a sliding scale or lower amount for match dollars based on population size might help alleviate this issue for small, rural communities.

4. Support Intestate Bill

State Representative [Torren Ecker](#) has recently posted his [co-sponsorship memorandum](#) that seeks to replace the *Commonwealth* with a ***PA Community Foundation Endowed Community Grantmaking Fund*** within the PA Intestate Succession Statute. This legislation would allow Community Foundations to be the recipients of any monies collected through intestate so that we can put them back into our local community.

Respectfully submitted,

Ryanne Jennings

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ryanne Jennings". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

President/CEO
Wayne County Community Foundation.