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**Testimony of Gina Severcool Suydam**  
**President and CEO of Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce**  
**before the Senate Committees on Community, Economic, & Recreational Development and**  
**Labor & Industry**  
**Joint Public Hearing on the Workforce Development in Northeastern Pennsylvania**  
**Tuesday, October 11, 2022 - 1:30 p.m**

Good afternoon, Senator Yudichak, Senator Bartolotta, Senator Cappelletti, Senator Tartaglione and members of the Committees on Community, Economic, and Recreational Development and Labor and Industry. It is an honor to be here today with my Chamber colleagues to present on innovative workforce programs happening across northeast PA.

I am Gina Suydam, President and CEO, of the Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce. My testimony will focus on the creative manufacturing and natural gas workforce programs the chamber is engaged in across our region

Over the last two decades, Wyoming and Susquehanna Counties have struggled to offer diverse employment opportunities for students graduating high school. High school graduates were presented with a choice: go to college or go to work. Those who went on to college seeking a four-year degree typically found jobs elsewhere and did not return. Others entered the workforce, taking up jobs in quarrying, forestry, or agriculture. While these are good jobs and provide much needed services, they are sensitive to economic cycles and often the weather, making them difficult choices for family sustaining employment. For the longest

time, the only local manufacturing opportunity that kept young folks in the region and provided a family sustaining wage was Proctor and Gamble Mehoopany facility. Over the last decade this changed with the discovery of natural gas in the region. The energy industry and its many supporting contractors and vendors have provided new opportunities.

Today, we are struggling with a completely different situation, the availability of a skilled workforce. The energy industry, P&G, and the tremendous economic opportunities now found in the Wyoming Valley are stressing the available workforce. In fact, both counties now rely on workforce from the Wyoming Valley, Scranton, and even the Southern Tier of New York to meet their needs. While this complete 180 is most certainly welcomed in our region, the Wyoming County Chamber along with our partners, now must focus on creating pathways to help high school students and those currently in-between jobs in order to develop the workforce we need to sustain this new economy. And this is no easy feat with many of today's young professionals deterred by 12-hour swing shifts, working outside or working with their hands.

One of the initiatives spearheaded by the Wyoming County Chamber is exposing students to trade jobs. The Chamber has partnered with Valor Manufacturing Training to build out Trained in the Trades programs for area students. Any student can register for the more than 200 classes offered, classes in soft skills and communication to welding and hydraulics. The Chamber's goal is to introduce students to different aspects of manufacturing and find their interest. These programs are a value-add to their current high school curriculum.

The chamber is also partnering with the Northern Tier Industry & Education Consortium (NTIEC). This organization is a leader in introducing high school students to high priority careers. From healthcare to agriculture, NTIEC is building pathways for junior and senior high school students to find apprenticeships, internships, and, ultimately, jobs in our region. One innovative program worth highlighting today is the Energy & Oilfield Career Summer Experience. This weeklong program for students entering 9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades exposes students to every aspect of the natural gas industry. Students tour active drilling sites with industry professionals and receive hands on experiential learning on real industry equipment. NTIEC tries to track where student participants ultimately end up after graduating high school, there are emerging correlations between this program and enrollment in Lackawanna College School of PNG and the Susquehanna County's CDL program.

CDL trucking remains a high priority occupation for the natural gas industry, P&G and many businesses in the Wyoming Valley region. The natural gas industry, faced with continued disruptions to its development, invested close to \$1 million at the Susquehanna County Career and Technical Center to develop a CDL program for students and adult learners. The school offers both A and B licenses and is now an approved PennDOT testing center. The program has graduated over 100 students in less than 18 months and the next three cohorts are full. The most creative part about this school is the access for 18-year-old high school students to receive a CDL license before they graduate. The industry is currently funding the program so there are no out-of-pocket expenses for high school students. Traditional adult learners have a

cost associated with the program, but with federal, state and private donations most program participants receive financial support. The chamber regularly works with this school to promote the program. During our annual leadership program, we visit the CDL program simulator to help folks understand the school and career, ultimately being better ambassadors for the program. One mother, in our Leadership program, after visiting the CDL school enrolled her son, and he completed his CDL the summer after graduation before attending lineman school.

Our region is also blessed with a nationally recognized 2-year collegiate energy program, Lackawanna College's School of Petroleum & Natural Gas. The program started in 2009 has graduated over 330 industry professionals to date. Many of these graduates are now managers and supervisors, often returning to the program to hire interns and new graduates. In 2021 the school expanded into a remodeled 18,000 square foot state-of-the-art facility in Tunkhannock. This strategic move refocuses the school in between the Marcellus Shale producing counties of Susquehanna, Wyoming, and Bradford Counties and the high school workforce from Wyoming, Susquehanna, Lackawanna, and Luzerne counties. The school of Petroleum and Natural Gas offers degrees in Petroleum & Natural Gas Business Administration and Petroleum & Natural Gas Technology, as well as certificate programs in Petroleum & Natural Gas Compressor / Engine Mechanic. Graduates are in high demand from the program, often receiving numerous job opportunities across the Appalachian basin. Beyond its tremendous impacts to date, the school of Petroleum & Natural Gas continues to innovate when it comes to attracting new applicants. The school now partners with five regional high schools to offer dual enrollment

opportunities to junior and senior students. Through this program students can begin acquiring the energy industry knowledge they need while completing high school. This accelerates their learning opportunities placing them into an internship and ultimately a family sustaining job in less time than a traditional associates degree. This exciting new program has grown exponentially this year with 70 new students enrolled and the largest segment coming from the Wyoming Valley, specifically Wilkes-Barre CTC.

Northeast PA should recognize and celebrate the out of the box workforce and education programs currently available in the energy, manufacturing, trades, and trucking industries. We should continue to support and grow these opportunities to create family sustaining household incomes and prosperous communities for future generations.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committees today and discuss educational and workforce development challenges and opportunities with my regional Chamber colleagues. I look forward to any questions you may have.