

On behalf of all the participants in this Chamber Panel for the Pennsylvania Senate combined Community, Economic & Recreational Development Committee and Labor and Industry Committee we would like to thank both Chairs and the committee members for inviting us to speak about WORK FORCE DEVELOPMENT here in Northeastern PA, which is at the core of the work we do each and everyday.

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My name is Mary Malone and I have had the privilege of serving as the President and CEO of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce for the last eight years, representing over 600 members in a variety of sizes and industries that are the economic engine in my community. It is also particularly fitting that our panel invitation with my esteemed colleagues from the NE Region occurs today because we are 11 days into National Chamber Month. So happy Chamber Month you all! Each of my colleagues will highlight different aspects of Chamber and Economic Development programs in their communities that focus on current and future success of a precious resource regardless of the business... the WORKFORCE

I will speak to 3 challenges that we all face in our work to grow and support the workforce, regardless of the community in Northeastern PA. *Transportation*- The rapid growth of companies developing businesses in the northeast corridor has much to do with our fantastic location and quick access to multi transportation modes interstate or rail to their customers. Yet affordable or mass transportation of the workforce to get to these growing businesses parks is still a headache and challenge. There have been local initiatives, and some state task forces through Penn DOT but possibly a inter committee task force and public and private push that includes these 2 committee might assist the continued struggle *Child Care* is another important issue to the success of today's workforce. A new challenge we are seeing, post pandemic, is many providers went out of business during the heat of the pandemic and building back, as the accelerated growth of jobs has not kept pace. Another complication is the formula used to determine childcare support on both state and federal levels has not kept pace with increase salary demand in a tight workforce market. Therefore, individuals literally cannot afford to work, because they no longer qualify for childcare support. The final aspect is a good stock of *affordable housing*. The housing stock in NEPA is aging, and not kept pace with growth and recent increase in market prices. A coordinate effort.

Finally, I am wearing double hat today as not only the Chamber President but the Vice Chair of the Luzerne Schuylkill Workforce Investment Board. The Chamber and Economic Development folks work together with both employers and employees in our region to combat these challenge through various programs. All three of these issues have not only state and cross committee ramifications, but also impact with federal programs. We urge and encourage the search for equitable solutions be a combination of all levels of government and workforce leaders. We stand ready to assist in any way we can to find innovation solutions for our communities, and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

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My name is Lindsay Griffin-Boylan, and I am the President and CEO of the Greater Wyoming Valley Chamber. Our Chamber was established in 1884 and our mission is to accelerate the economic engine of the region by fostering innovation, connecting our resources, and elevating and advocating for our community. Our evolution as a Chamber over the past decade has had us moving from a traditional Chamber model to becoming a more innovative organization, focused on developing solutions to improve processes and opportunities for businesses, individuals, and communities. This model and way in which we both operate and fulfill the needs in the community was drastically accelerated due to the pandemic. Northeastern Pennsylvania has shared the drastic challenges and critical issues that have been brought forth from COVID-19. As we have moved into an economic recovery phase, we have seen our area show significant improvement as job seekers return to work, pay scales increase, and a surge of new companies and industry establish in NEPA. With this has brought forth the critical need for regional efforts and partnerships between all workforce development and economic development entities to ensure the needs of the industry are fulfilled and growth continues. Chambers of Commerce have seen what is nationally called a “Chamber Boom” since the onset of the pandemic, which correlates to the public's need to connect with a reliable source within their community for trusted information. Everyone sitting at this table has been a collective part of that. Our regional efforts, while established prior to the pandemic, have been strengthened and prioritized by each of us, as we understand that regionalization will be the only way to best serve our communities and residents. Everyone featured here today has been at the helm of solving our community’s most pressing needs, including our local economic development partners and legislators that continue to convene solutions to these needs. Today, I would like to highlight three efforts coordinated by our Chamber of Commerce, which include many of our Chamber partners, our local CareerLink in partnership with the WIB, and our state and federal government entities. Chambers of Commerce have a unique position in their communities, as we are connected and knowledgeable about the many resources and programs available to assist our residents and businesses. This puts us in the perfect position to bring these resources together and make them accessible and easy to navigate so they are better utilized and more impactful. Our goal is to never reinvent the wheel as we have many great partners who are providing these resources, but instead to connect them through pilot programs and new initiatives to create that impact by tapping into our combined outreach, networks, and visibility. The first example of this was the NEPA Works Project, which was a grant funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission that we received in 2019, prior to the pandemic. This 12-month pilot program was launched by Wilkes-Barre

Connect, the economic development entity of our organization. This program aimed to enhance the quality of workforce in Northeastern PA by addressing specific skills gaps, in an effort to increase opportunities for employees to find gainful employment and provide businesses with the opportunity to expand because of the additional qualified workers. NEPA Works consisted of two components: "Reimagining our Workforce" and "Coding the Coal Region." This pilot program created a new solution and approach to solving workforce issues, alongside of academia and industry, at a faster and more impactful pace. NEPA Works attacked the workforce problem from two angles: (1) By improving the job placement process in Northeast PA; and (2) By developing a model approach to solve skills gaps by industry. The overall goal of the project was to not only enhance the quality of workforce in NEPA, but to help develop the future workforce for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. To improve the job placement process, we worked directly with PA CareerLink® (Luzerne County) to integrate new technology to improve the user interface of their current system, aiming to increase traffic, user activity (for both job seekers and providers), and job placement rates, in a pilot program referred to as Reimagining our Workforce. This program was proven to be effective in bridging the communication gap we see in the public workforce system. After a year of activity, the CareerLink team saw PO BOX 759 • W I L K E S - B A R R E , PA 18703 (570) 823-2101 • HTTP ://WWW.W Y O M I N G V A L L E Y C H A M B E R . O R G tremendous success in growing their texting campaigns and better connecting and engaging with their job seekers. By conclusion of the pilot period, there had been 685 subscribers that opted into the messaging platform. By that time, the CareerLink team had sent more than 55,000 messages to their subscribers through the platform. Each of those 55,000 touchpoints reinforces the engagement that PA CareerLink® had been seeing from local job seekers and speaks to this program's ability to bridge the communication gap we see in workforce placement. Through NEPA Works, we also developed a pilot program to address computer programming skills in Northeast PA – in coordination with Codelicious, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and the Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development. This pilot program, referred to as Coding the Coal Region, involved the launch of a virtual after-school computer programming "club" wherein students could take coding courses and build a foundational skillset, boosting their interest in computer sciencerelated fields. With our partners, we planned to demonstrate to our Luzerne County school districts the importance of introducing computer programming curriculum at the middle school and high school level, with a long-term goal of integrating computer programming curriculum at each high school in Luzerne County, and subsequently, establishing a talent pipeline of computer programmers in Northeast PA – as at the time, we had over 300 jobs available locally in this industry with projections set to double in the next few years. Together, these components allowed us the opportunity to build a replicable model to improve our workforce strategies in Northeast PA. Over 180 students participated free of cost and, at the conclusion of the program, and we were successful in establishing a sustainable framework for this program and securing a collaborative partnership for a continuing program to be launched long-term. As we remain involved in an advisory and supporting capacity, local higher education institution, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, and Junior Achievement of NEPA will not only improve and expand this program, but also use their advanced skillsets, world-class instruction, and broad community relations to take the program to new heights in Keystone Coding and Careers – introducing STEAM curriculum, entrepreneurial development, and career exploration at the K-12 level and making them more accessible to NEPA students than ever before. The third program that was born from the success of the prior two discussed is Project PIVOT, a grant funded program through the EDA and in partnership with all of our local economic and workforce development partners including the WIB, CareerLink and national partner LinkedIn Learning. Project PIVOT, which is still ongoing, aims to provide accelerated workforce training and upskilling opportunities for workers aligning with the historic and

seismic industry shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The focus was on the top 10 high priority occupations needed in our area and how to fill these roles quickly and efficiently for job seekers through established pipelines. Participants of this pilot program have free access to 18,000+ online LinkedIn Learning courses as well as all of the CareerLink resources, including SkillUp courses, as a means of developing themselves professionally and upskilling in the careers and fields of their choice. This program is also designed to work directly with businesses in Luzerne County to provide their employees with the skills they need to grow within their companies. In addition to free LinkedIn Learning access for their staff, businesses who participate in the pilot program with their employees have the opportunity to work directly with our team, CareerLink, and the team at LinkedIn Learning to develop a specially-tailored pathway that is specific to their company and employee needs. This will help them to take their current workforce to the next level in their skillset, and address any educational gaps their team may be experiencing. To date, over 9,800 residents of Luzerne County have utilized this system. This program has led to our newest pilot program, which builds off of Project PIVOT and is now partnered additionally with the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18, giving us access and partnership with our K-12 institutions and our future workforce. Partners include the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, CareerLink, and the WIB to establish long-term and sustainable career pathways. This program will provide our local school districts with a process to introduce career exploration that allows students to navigate pathways online through LinkedIn Learning & Skill Up Learning, linking education and industry by providing students with local work-based learning opportunities. Making these experiences a bigger part of career exploration will build a pipeline of talent filtered into local industries, including small businesses struggling to retain their workforce due to the pandemic, as well as our large industry partners moving into NEPA. Long term, students will get early exposure to our community, we retain our talent, and we produce more qualified workers to fill jobs in our most in-demand industries. This program is currently being piloted in the West Side CTC and focuses on eight priority pathways for students that will be graduating at the end of this year and coming out into our workforce. The program currently has a funding request in progress to PO BOX 759 • WILKES-BARRE, PA 18703 (570) 823-2101 • HTTP://WWW.WYOMINGVALLEYCHAMBER.ORG allow this program to be brought into all Luzerne County schools in 2023 and will work in alignment and partnership with the WIB, our industry partners, higher ed's, trade partners, and our local CareerLink to continue to provide our next generation of workforce the best resources and pipelines to successful employment in NEPA. In conclusion, regional workforce development is continuing to evolve and strengthen as all entities and partners continue to collaborate, convene on pressing issues, and work alongside our government officials to solve these issues collectively. On behalf of our organization, we thank you for having us be a part of today and thank everyone here for their partnership and commitment to the betterment of Northeastern PA – we look forward to continuing to work alongside of you.

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Greater Pittston is continuing to experience rapid industrial development including plans for another five-million square feet of industrial space within the next 3-5 years. When industrial development occurs at this speed, it brings with it tremendous job growth and results in a need for workforce development support for employers, both large and small.

Many believe this industrial growth is primarily warehouse space but a quick look at some of the projects bringing jobs into Greater Pittston and it is clear the opposite is true.

- Ball Corporation: Invests \$360 Million to rejuvenate a previously abandoned industrial space; Built a 1,079,000 square foot state of the art manufacturing plant; Created 230 new jobs in manufacturing.
- Home Depot: Three locations in Greater Pittston including a one million square foot facility that processes customer returns, refurbishes equipment, and serves as the repair center for consumers; Created 300 skilled jobs over three locations
- Geisinger Healthplex CenterPoint: Re-imagined 140,000 square feet of abandoned retail space to create a state-of-the-art medical clinic; Bringing 250 healthcare jobs to Greater Pittston 154 of which were new to NEPA

The greatest benefit of the rapid industrial growth Greater Pittston has seen over the last several years can be found in the increase in starting wages. In 2018 it was common to see a starting wage between \$8 - \$10 per hour. Today, wages start between \$16 and \$18 per hour with many industries offering higher wages, full benefits, paid time off, and great working environments.

Small business growth links directly to economic and industrial growth. As larger businesses come to town, they create an increased need in many employment sectors. The City of Pittston stores, hair salons, health and wellness facilities, and more. Unfortunately, the greatest benefit to employees of industrial growth, higher wages, becomes one of the biggest challenges for small businesses. Couple this with the cost health insurance and other benefits and small businesses struggle to hire dependable employees. Another challenge that small businesses are facing is the emerging work from home culture. I believe we have underestimated how this new culture will impact the growth and success of our small businesses who rely on the many employees working in our industrial and business parks.

The state's investment in workforce development through apprenticeship is helping organizations develop stronger career pathways for young workers. Apprenticeship benefits employers by helping them upskill employees to create a highly skilled workforce with less turnover, and increased productivity. The Greater Pittston Chamber registered the Innovations in Management Apprenticeship and is in the process of recruiting employers into the program

We also work closely with Pittston, Hazelton, and Wyoming Area School Districts, and the Wilkes Barre Career and Technical Center to help students see the incredible career opportunities available to them right here in NEPA. We do this by hosting career exploration days, job fairs for graduating seniors, career panels and facility tours. Over the past year, we have reached over three thousand students with the goal to expand the dialog with students, and their parents, so they can better understand the many wonderful career choices available and what the path to success can look like.

We could not accomplish our workforce development goals without our strong partnership with PA CareerLink of Luzerne Co and the Luzerne Schuylkill Workforce Development Board. PA CareerLink staff understand how important it is to meet the needs of our employers and are skilled at using the tools available to do so. Programs like On-the-Job training, Rapid Response, Business Education Partnership, State and Local Internship Program, Courses to Careers and so many more, work to support not only our employers but also our job seekers on their mission toward success.

Gina Severcool Suydam
President and CEO
Wyoming County Chamber of Commerce

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 9th – 12th 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.

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Hazleton Works –

In 2020, the Greater Hazleton COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force worked together to secure CARES act dollars to launch several initiatives geared toward the areas workforce and small business/entrepreneurial challenges. From micro grants to small business consulting services – the task force made sure to work with as many of the regions businesses as possible. Through those conversations, it became evident that there was a disconnect between business and industry and our educational providers. As such, the task force used \$10,000 of the funds to conduct a workforce education and training needs assessment – focused solely on Hazleton-based industries. In addition to the notable skills gap identified through that assessment, data backed up the information collected during earlier conversations related to an informational gap regarding career opportunities and career training. Enter Hazleton Works!

Originally launched with \$50,000 of CARES act dollars, Hazleton Works is a community wide marketing initiative to promote career training opportunities, as well as overall career opportunities, within the Greater Hazleton Area. This organic – real life – initiative, follows a three-prong approach – the campaign works to highlight opportunities that exist, where to get training for said career, and completes the cycle by highlighting companies that employ that type of career. Upon completion of the initial 6 month campaign, Hazleton Works was tucked into Partners in Educations new membership structure as a perk for members which allows the campaign a sustainable future.

Lackawanna College – Educational Training

Lackawanna College received a \$377,000 PA Smart grant to develop a 24-week pre-apprenticeship program that will prepare individuals for employment and apprenticeship in construction trades. The program is tailored to meet the needs of Spanish-speaking individuals with limited English proficiency. The program will include an eight-week ESL

class, followed by a 16-week semester of courses in which students will obtain 11 certifications and earn 16.5 college credits. Students who complete the program will be prepared to enter apprenticeship, employment, and/or continue their postsecondary education. Forty individuals will be served.

Keystone Job Corps – Red Rock Job Corps

Keystone Job Corps is located on a 175 acre property in Drums, Pennsylvania. Established in 1967, the campus serves a student body of 400 students and is committed to offering top level training in the nations fastest growing industrial region. Additionally, students are able to earn their High School Diploma or GED equivalent while working toward a trade based certification.

Recently modified through a new ownership contract, Keystone's Director – Kelly King – has been appointed as the Executive Director of not only the Drums facility, but also the Red Rock Job Corps facility located in Sullivan County. Through this direct relationship – Hazleton area employers now have access to a much larger pool of skilled labor opportunities.