

Testimony for the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee  
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Towanda, PA 18848

Presented By:  
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Good Morning my name is Bill Farley and I am the Executive Director for the Area Agency on Aging for the counties of Bradford, Sullivan, Susquehanna and Tioga. I also serve as the Chairman of the Bradford County Housing Authority. When you look at Bradford County as in any of the Northern Tier Counties, our demographic and housing facts include the following:

- a. We have a large population of senior citizens – 22% of the total population.
- b. The 85 plus age group is the fastest growing segment of the population.
- c. About one third of our senior population live in homes that were built before 1950 and these individuals are facing safety and accessibility issues as they age in place.
- d. We have one of the highest usage rates in the Commonwealth of manufactured homes as single family residents.

Adding to the significance of the size of our older population is the current movement in Pennsylvania to rebalance Long Term Living expenditures and provide more opportunity for consumers to receive services in their own homes and communities. When you look at the makeup of rental options available through Bradford County's Public Housing Authority we see a mixture of family, elderly and disabled, and rental assistance options for income eligible individuals, but also a demand in excess of the available units.

Currently the Authority has twenty (20) family units with a waiting list of 41 families. It also has seven (7) buildings serving elderly and disabled individuals with a capacity of 450 tenants. These units have an occupancy rate of 99% and 234 applicants with an anticipated waiting period of 3-12 months.

Our housing authority also operates the Section 8 Rental Assistance program with a current usage of 256 Households and a waiting list of 490 individuals. Their waiting period for this program is about 23 months.

The majority of the individuals waiting for public housing or a Rental Assistance vacancy have an extremely low income - \$11,300 for an individual - \$16,150 for a family of four (4) or less.

So, current housing needs of our elderly and low income population, show that the demand exceeds the availability of units and that consumers will wait a significant period of time before obtaining a public housing or rental assistance unit.

As the natural gas industry becomes more of a reality throughout Bradford County and the Northern Tier the demand for rental units is escalating and driving the cost of monthly rental prices in the private sector in excess of the financial capabilities of our low income population. This demand is reducing the number of private rental options available for traditional needs, and causing an even greater waiting list of consumers in need of public housing options. The potential exists that more of our frail and low income population will join the ranks of the homeless in rural Pennsylvania.

The increased demand for housing is a reality and a logical step should be for regional planners and housing developers to meet with executives of the natural gas industry. They can identify the number of additional housing units needed for the industry, and develop appropriate housing plans and strategies.

Since the natural gas industry is going to impact the housing availability for the low income, perhaps a special housing trust fund can be established, using natural gas revenues, that could be dedicated to affordable housing activities.

Eligible uses could include grants and low interest loans for the full range of costs associated with affordable housing, including non-profit organizational and operations costs, funds for development capital, building operating and rental assistance (the availability of long term rental assistance, both tenant based and project based, is especially important). These funds can enable low income households to compete for existing housing as well as for developers to make new housing affordable.

Additional low income tax credit opportunities, such as those utilized for the Oak Ridge and Wilbur projects in Bradford County could be included in the strategies for additional housing options too.

And, updating the Commonwealth's Domiciliary Care program and implementing Shared Housing and Master Lease programs, can help solve some of the housing concerns for our special needs population, using our existing housing stock.

In closing, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and to express my hope that the solutions identified for Bradford County's housing needs can be replicated in other parts of the Commonwealth as the Natural Gas Industry expands.