

TESTIMONY ON PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE BILL 782

Presented to the House Local Government Committee

By The County of Northampton Executive Lamont G. McClure

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Good afternoon, and welcome to the Lehigh Valley. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. I am Lamont McClure, the Northampton County Executive.

We are proud that the Lehigh Valley is one of the fastest-growing regions in Pennsylvania. Our population rose to more than 694,800 people in 2022 as nearby metropolitan areas lost population.

This growth is good news. But because of the growth we continue to see, we need a strategy to balance future development carefully. A strategy that includes supporting our businesses, supporting our workers, protecting our environment, and our quality of life.

The best place to start is by addressing warehouse development. The current growing number of new warehouses is ill-sited, ill-conceived and has a harmful impact on the environment, our transportation system, and our economy, especially in the agricultural sector.

For these reasons, I am pleased that House Bill 782 has been introduced. Joining together to fight back for our communities has been long overdue.

I support House Bill 782 and agree that warehouse proliferation has scarred our landscape, our region's natural features, and the increased truck traffic significantly decreases everyone's quality of life. To this very day, when Northampton County residents reach out to me, their most frequent complaint is the ongoing warehouse development. Taxpayers, your constituents, do not want any more warehouses.

As you know, the County of Northampton does not have power over zoning or planning decisions. That authority rests with the County's 38 municipalities. While many local governments have adopted comprehensive plans along with zoning and land development regulations, they are confronted with new and exponential challenges from the rapid rise in growth.

It is my hope that the House Local Government Committee advances House Bill 782 to begin to hold developers accountable. Local governments need technical resources and guidance to assist in developing land use plans, zoning, and project review procedures based on sound planning, information, and practice.

A [report released by American Rivers](#), a national non-profit, recently named the Lehigh River as the seventh most endangered river in the United States. The report states that poorly planned

development led us here, and this is the result of our region's massive development of warehouses. Pollution, water runoff, destruction of natural habitats and farmland, poor air quality - which has been linked to an explosion of cases of childhood asthma - and increased truck traffic all contribute to the decline in quality of life. This is the result of years of poor planning. Following the report of the Lehigh River, it is reckless to sit back and wait to see it happen to the Delaware River.

As County Executive, I want to do everything I can to empower local governments with tools that give them the ability to control warehouse proliferation, further deterioration of our infrastructure, and everything that comes with it.

Recently, Northampton County and Lehigh County have teamed up with Lehigh University and iSpring for the new Lehigh Valley Breathes project. The project aims to obtain and communicate localized information about particulate air pollution in the Lehigh Valley and will help determine how air pollutant concentrations from warehouses and truck traffic contribute to our poor air quality. The primary purpose is to provide policymakers and citizens with the necessary information to help improve the air we breathe.

Other than preserving and protecting our open space - and I am proud to report that by the end of my second term, I will have committed \$25 million in County dollars alone to the preservation of farmland, open space, and environmentally sensitive land - the best way to fight the nonstop warehouse proliferation is to give our local municipalities the tools needed so they may assess a detailed analysis of the impacts of development.

Pennsylvania may be a right-to-develop state, but holding onto our quality of life requires proper planning. As we move forward, we need to bring order to the chaos and encourage the manufacturing industry to provide skilled jobs and fair wages. As elected officials, we must remind ourselves that smart development would mean making sure there is enough affordable housing for those people who work in warehouses and distribution centers.

Development and progress are necessary and should not be feared. However, we must strive to make sure that any development is site-appropriate and that the infrastructure of roads and bridges is adequate to handle the truck traffic, just as the sewers and water pipes can accommodate the employees.

Amending the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code will give our local municipalities the tools they need to keep warehouses in appropriate areas. I ask that you bring House Bill 782 for a full committee vote as soon as possible.

The great people of the Lehigh Valley deserve a government that cares about and protects their quality of life and makes sure future generations enjoy the same or better quality of life than we have now.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.