

Testimony submitted by Cassandra Collinge, Allegheny County Economic Development

Good morning and thank you Senator Argall and Senator Brewster for convening this public hearing about the Future of Pennsylvania's Cities, Large and Small. This is a very important topic, and we thank you for inviting Allegheny County to be part of today's discussion and testimony. My name is Cassandra Collinge and I am the Manager of Housing Development for the Allegheny County Economic Development. As many of you know, much of the work that we do at Allegheny County Economic Development and at the Redevelopment Authority of Allegheny County is towards the end goal of helping our cities and municipalities redevelop, revitalize and thrive. We help redevelop Brownfield's, large and small to get them shovel ready for development. We make loans to businesses large and small so that they can open their doors or expand and in doing so create jobs for our citizens. We offer financing to help create high quality affordable housing. We provide grants for the repair of sewers and sidewalks and for the demolition of unsafe structures. We help recycle and repurpose vacant and abandoned properties to citizens, businesses and organizations that have a viable plan for that property, be it as a side yard or for an urban farm, or for parking or for a public park. In listing off just a few key programs that we offer, I want to be clear that when I use the word "we", I mean we at Allegheny County in partnership with many others, including our cities, our municipalities, our businesses, our citizens and many others. The work of redeveloping cities cannot be done alone, the deals are too complicated, too much is at stake for the future of our communities, and the work can take a long time to see results. For these reasons and more, this work is and must be done in partnership.

We are proud to be partners with our cities and our municipalities to help them with the redevelopment of their land, helping their businesses grow and assist with creating and improving the affordable housing stock that exists. It can take time to get to the right solution for a given situation, and it takes healthy dialogue, but through the partnerships, something is created that is what is best for our communities today and tomorrow. So, to that end Senators, I encourage you to make deep and meaningful partnerships that help to redevelop and revitalize our cities and municipalities part of any new legislative framework aimed at helping to encourage and inspire growth.

As everyone here knows, and has much more firsthand experience, as I am not a native Western Pennsylvania resident, our cities and municipalities, especially those along our rivers, are not what they once were. Their physical structure and legal structure was created at a time of growth and expansion, and while through all the good work that we have accomplished, growth and revitalization is occurring and becoming the trend, in some places it's taken considerable time and effort, and in others, there is room for much more. Where revitalization is occurring, we need to be sure we understand all the mechanics of why it's occurring, and be sure to support those aspects that are allowing the redevelopment to occur, and make sure the obstacles are identified, and are eventually removed. It is my understanding that this is one of the reasons for today's hearing, is to learn about what our cities are dealing with and assist them in revitalizing, which again, we applaud you on taking the initiative and leadership to hear from the panel, including Allegheny County, today.

For those of us who attended the Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group's summit last week, we heard from the Urban Land Institute, and again from the American Planning Association's immediate past president that our population is changing, and as such our cities need to change to meet the needs of today and tomorrow's citizens. We need make sure that ours is an area that people want to live in, and are able to thrive in. As I mentioned earlier, I am not a native to Western PA, I chose Pittsburgh and Allegheny County as the place to call my home and start my family, and there are lots of people out there that once they experience what an amazing place Pittsburgh/Allegheny County and Western

Pennsylvania is, they wouldn't consider living anywhere else...but we need to be sure to have the elements that transplants like myself want, and also have what the multi-generation western Pennsylvanian's want and need as well. The good news, is that the desires of transplants and natives are well aligned, and can be addressed together.

We also need to make sure we're aware of our demographic trends, and plan for the future. This can be very difficult for city and municipal officials to do if they are overburdened with dealing with the day-to-day worries of meeting payroll and making sure there is enough police and fire protection for the area. It's very difficult to balance day-to-day municipal management and to active involvement in a re-visioning/revitalization strategy and its implementation. The elected officials you're going to hear from today have found a way to be part of both worlds, which is extraordinary and a testament to their personal dedication to their communities. That said, we need make sure there is a sustainable and strategic way to make sure both the day-to-day needs are attended to as well as the long-range visioning. So Senators, anything that can be done from a legislative or resource standpoint at the state to assist with allowing our local leaders to be part of the day-to-day and part of the planning and implementation for tomorrow would be greatly appreciated. This could be via legislative reform or through providing additional resources.

As I reflect on some of our more successful programs and projects, another element that comes to mind is cooperation. In addition to partnerships, cooperation is critical to redevelopment. The Land Bank Bill that was passed the end of last year is a very good example of what I think is a very good piece of legislation that encourages and in some cases requires cooperation. Some of the issues that our cities and municipalities face, like vacant and abandoned land, are too big for one city or municipality to address alone. Some issues that are affecting our cities and distressed municipalities are much larger than that particular city or municipality, and as such, cooperation with others that have similar circumstances is key to figuring out a solution that is common to all. Again, addressing vacant and abandoned land is just one issue that affects many areas, there are many others, and we encourage the state to make cooperation between and amongst cities and municipalities as easy and pain-free as possible.

In closing, I would like to say that we at Allegheny County are here to help our cities revitalize, and want to assist them in any way that we can. We want Allegheny County to continue to be a place that people are proud to call home, proud to run businesses in, and we want to continue to help our cities in Allegheny County prosper.