

Good afternoon, my name is Danielle Powell. I am the Housing Choice Voucher program manager for the Wyoming County Housing Authority. I apologize that our Executive Director, John Jennings, could not join us today. He had a previous engagement with HUD Headquarters in Philadelphia. I have been asked to speak to you to represent this affected area in the Northern tier region. I would like to take this time to thank you for the opportunity to present a status report on the effects of the Marcellus Shale development and our observations on how it has affected your constituents.

It is my intent here today, to not only bring you up to date with our regions experiences, but also to talk about our plans for both the immediate and the long-range future of our communities.

I don't think anybody had the foresight to anticipate what we were about to experience with the influx of so many people all vying for what appeared to be a very small number of available units. During that time, our residents were panicking, fearing eviction, some even receiving evictions. Landlords began asking for higher rents and multi-family units that were listed for sale were suddenly off the market. I know that you have had many hearings and are certainly aware of the effects of the rental market crisis. Our past few years have been challenging with regards to providing safe, affordable housing to many of the residents affected throughout the region. Fortunately, in recent months, we have experienced a stabilization in the number of families being affected by the rental housing crisis. We feel this is directly related to the plunge in Natural Gas prices and the industry workers moving on to more lucrative gas sites. However, we are concerned that as the price of Natural Gas increases in the market place, we will feel an increase in rental shortages once again.

I took it upon myself to contact colleagues in the housing industry in the Northeast shale region, specifically, Tioga-Bradford and Susquehanna Counties in order to give a broader understanding of the impact, not just our views in Wyoming County.

I think one of the best ways to explain the affects on housing would be to give an example of the Wyoming County Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher program and how it was affected over the last 2 years. In 2010, the Wyoming County Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher program was very successful and maintained 100% voucher utilization – meaning our entire allotment of vouchers were under lease for the entire year. Currently, our Housing Authority is at 89% utilization, leaving approximately 40 vouchers unused. This is due to the inability of our clients to find an affordable, qualified unit. As you all know, our program prohibits us from leasing units that do not meet Housing Choice Voucher standards, whether by rental prices or quality. Our waiting list, the time in which an applicant remains on the list prior to leasing up, has grown from an expected 3-6 month wait to a 12-18 month wait. In 2010, our waiting list was approximately 55 households. Currently, our waiting list is comprised of over 200 families.

Tioga-Bradford: Both Tioga & Bradford County are leading the state in the number of well drilling activities. With the influx of gas workers in both counties, the Tioga/Bradford County Housing Authority has felt a great impact. One of the most challenging impacts to the Housing Authority in both counties has been to the Housing Choice Voucher Rental Assistance Program. Over the last two years it has been increasingly more difficult to manage this Rental Assistance Program to its full potential. It's become nearly impossible for families to locate rental properties

that are within the fair market rents allowed by HUD for these Counties. The standard rents in both counties are now double and sometimes triple the historical rents we are used to working with.

The difficulty for low income households in finding rental properties that are within the fair market rents has had a negative effect on our waiting lists in both Counties. Currently the waiting list for this Program in Tioga County is 607 families while in Bradford County it is 936 families. These are the longest waiting lists that either county has ever experienced. Historically both lists never exceeded 150 households.

The average waiting time for families in need of assistance with their rent is now three years or more. In addition, once a family arrives at the top of the waiting list they must find a rental property that meets the fair market rent, which has proven to be nearly impossible. Historically, it took families no more than 60 days to locate a qualified rental property but today it can exceed 120 days and in some cases these families have still not found a unit. Quoted from Kelley Cevette, Executive Director, Tioga-Bradford Counties

*Susquehanna: In 2010, the Susquehanna County Housing Authority reports that it was at 95% voucher utilization. Currently, they are experiencing a lease-up rate of 82%. In an effort to bring their utilization back up, they have requested and been granted an exception Payment Standard, thus raising their rents to 125% of the Fair Market Rent for their area. - Quoted from Kris Lunger, Section 8 Coordinator, Susquehanna County
–Needless to say, paying a higher rent on a limited budget means that you can assist fewer families in the process.*

We have learned that as demand for Natural Gas fluctuates, so does the demand for local housing fluctuate. It seems to be a moving target with the number of units the gas industry will be demanding. One of our major concerns is to guard against over-building so that we are not left with a large number of vacant units 5-10-15 years down the road. This is not to say that our region would not benefit from additional housing units; however, we are cautious due to the fact that we are unable to determine if our permanent population is going to grow. Therefore, what we are striving for in the future is a mechanism to provide stability in the housing rental market.

Wyoming county is poised to utilize Act 13 Marcellus Shale Impact Fee monies through PHARE funds to the best of our ability. It is our intent to apply for funds to utilize a program to assist landlords in the renovation of their existing buildings for an extended commitment from them to rent to more needy citizens of our community. Our Housing Authority surveyed our current and past landlords regarding the possibility of a Rental Rehabilitation Program, with favorable results. We followed up with a Roundtable discussion. Many were in attendance, and again, we received very positive feedback about the program. This type of program should have a more immediate impact in providing safe, affordable housing and at the same time, create some job opportunities for smaller contractors in our area. The key to this program is that it is immediate. It requires a very short period of time to institute the program with results of stability. The use of the funds will help stabilize our future housing needs for some of our most at-risk community members. We have been and will be looking for programs to continue our efforts to provide stable, safe and affordable housing for our residents.

We look forward to working with you in the future on all aspects of the development of the Marcellus Shale and its impact. We greatly appreciate of all that you have done to date.

Thank you.

