

CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC HEARING
Heroin Crisis in Pennsylvania

July 9, 2014
Susquehanna Health
Williamsport Regional Medical Center
700 High Street
Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Testimony of
Vincent J. Matteo, DPA
President/CEO
Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce
And
Industrial Properties Corporation

GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA. MY NAME IS VINCE MATTEO AND I AM PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE WILLIAMSPORT/LYCOMING CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIAL PROPERTIES CORPORATION. FOR THOSE OF YOU NOT FAMILIAR WITH OUR ORGANIZATION, WE ARE COUNTY-WIDE IN SCOPE AND HAVE APPROXIMATELY 900 BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE MEMBERS. WE ALSO OPERATE TWO SATELLITE CHAMBERS – ONE IN THE JERSEY SHORE AREA AND ONE IN THE MONTOURSVILLE AREA OF LYCOMING COUNTY. IN ADDITION, THE CHAMBER SERVES AS LYCOMING COUNTY'S DESIGNATED TOURIST PROMOTION AGENCY OPERATING THOSE PROGRAMS AS THE LYCOMING COUNTY VISITORS BUREAU.

I HAVE HAD PEOPLE, BOTH MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS ALIKE, WHO HAVE ASKED ME WHY THE CHAMBER IS INVOLVED IN THE LYCOMING COUNTY HEROIN TASK FORCE AND WHY DID I AGREE TO SERVE AS CHAIRMAN OF THE BUSINESS SUB-COMMITTEE. THERE ARE SEVERAL REASONS.

THERE WAS A TIME, NOT THAT LONG AGO, WHEN I WOULD HEAR FROM BUSINESS PEOPLE THAT THEY WERE HAVING SOME TROUBLE HIRING PEOPLE BECAUSE MANY LACKED THE BASIC SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN TODAY'S WORKPLACE. STARTING ABOUT FIVE YEARS AGO OR SO, I STOPPED HEARING THAT CONCERN VERY OFTEN. WHILE IT MAY STILL BE A PROBLEM, WHAT I STARTED TO HEAR WAS AN INCREASING NUMBER OF BUSINESS PEOPLE SAYING THEY WERE HAVING TROUBLE HIRING BECAUSE MANY APPLICANTS WERE FAILING DRUG TESTS. IN FACT, WHEN I FIRST STARTED HEARING THIS COMPLAINT WAS WHEN THE NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY CAME TO LYCOMING COUNTY. IT WAS NOT BECAUSE THEIR EMPLOYEES HAD PROBLEMS OR WERE ANY DIFFERENT THAN OTHER INDUSTRIES; IT WAS BECAUSE AT THAT TIME THEY WERE ONE OF THE FEW INDUSTRIES IN OUR AREA THAT TESTED THEIR WORKERS AND JOB APPLICANTS FOR DRUG AND/OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE. THERE WAS MORE THAN ONE TIME THAT I WOULD TELL SOMEONE THAT THEIR BACKGROUND WAS PERFECT FOR THE NATURAL GAS INDUSTRY BUT THAT THEY BETTER BE READY TO PASS A DRUG TEST. NOW, I AM HEARING FROM MORE AND MORE COMPANIES – NOT JUST GAS INDUSTRY COMPANIES – THAT HAVE BEGUN TESTING AND ARE HAVING SOME PROBLEMS FINDING QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS WHO CAN PASS A DRUG TEST.

JUST ABOUT ONE YEAR AGO I RECEIVED AN INVITATION TO ATTEND A MEETING BEING CALLED BY JUDGE NANCY BUTTS REGARDING THE FORMATION OF THE LYCOMING COUNTY HEROIN TASK FORCE. I ALMOST DID NOT ATTEND BUT IT WAS BEING HELD IN THE SAME BUILDING WHERE MY OFFICES ARE LOCATED AND THOUGHT IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO GET A BETTER PERSPECTIVE. WHEN I CAME OUT OF THAT MEETING I KNEW THE CHAMBER COULD NOT STAND ON THE SIDELINES. TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM ARE A GOOD

WORK FORCE AND A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE. WITHOUT THOSE, IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO BRING NEW COMPANIES INTO AN AREA AND TO KEEP THE ONES WE ALREADY HAVE. BUT, SEVERAL QUESTIONS NEED TO BE ANSWERED. FIRST, HOW WIDE SPREAD IS THE PROBLEM AND THE IMPACT ON THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND SECONDLY, WHAT CAN WE, AS THE ORGANIZED BUSINESS COMMUNITY DO ABOUT IT.

WE ACTUALLY HAVE STARTED DOING SOME THINGS BEFORE HAVING MORE INFORMATION. THE BUSINESS SUB COMMITTEE CONSISTS OF BUSINESS PEOPLE FROM MANUFACTURING, RETAIL, WHOLESALE, THE FINANCIAL SECTOR, BROADCAST MEDIA AND SERVICE SECTORS.

AWARENESS IS THE FIRST STEP. TOWARD THAT END WE HAVE STARTED TO PLACE A MONTHLY ADVERTISEMENT IN OUR NEWSLETTER, THE CHAMBER CONNECTION, DEALING WITH SOME ASPECT OF DRUG AND/OR ALCOHOL ABUSE AND WHERE YOU CAN GET HELP. FORTUNATELY, OUR NEWSLETTER REACHES BEYOND OUR MEMBERSHIP SINCE IT IS INSERTED IN THE WILLIAMSPORT SUN-GAZETTE THE FIRST MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH AS WELL AS HAVING LINKS TO IT ON OUR WEB PAGE AND FACEBOOK PAGES. WE HAVE ALSO JUST BEGUN A CAMPAIGN TO HAVE BUSINESSES INSERT MESSAGES ABOUT WHERE TO GET HELP IN THE ENVELOPES WITH PAYCHECKS AS WELL AS ASKING COMPANIES THAT HAVE A DIGITAL BULLETIN BOARD AND/OR A COMPANY NEWSLETTER TO USE THEM TO URGE EMPLOYEES WHO NEED HELP OR WHO HAVE RELATIVES WHO NEED HELP TO GET IT. WE HAVE ALSO OBTAINED THE EQUIVALENT OF \$40,000 IN RADIO AIR TIME FOR PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS ON BACKYARD BROADCASTING. THEIR RADIO STATIONS REACH APPROXIMATELY 80% OF OUR MARKET AREA.

IN AN EFFORT TO GET MORE DATA ON THE IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE ON BUSINESSES, THE CHAMBER WILL BE DOING A CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY OF ITS MEMBERSHIP ASKING OUR MEMBERS QUESTIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE. HOPEFULLY A GOOD NUMBER WILL RESPOND AND A BETTER PICTURE WILL EMERGE. WE CAN THEN LOOK AT PROGRAMS THAT MAY ADDRESS THE PROBLEM. I WILL BE HAPPY TO SHARE THE RESULTS WITH THE CENTER WHEN THEY ARE COMPILED. I KNOW THE WESTMORELAND CHAMBER IS DOING A SIMILAR SURVEY.

ONE OF THE QUESTIONS WE WILL BE ASKING IS IF THE BUSINESS WOULD BE WILLING TO HIRE SOMEONE WHO IS RECOVERING FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE. FROM ALL ACCOUNTS IT IS DIFFICULT FOR PEOPLE IN RECOVERY OR WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH RECOVERY TO GET JOBS. THAT IS A CRITICAL ISSUE. I AM NOT AN EXPERT ON RECOVERING ADDICTS OR ADDICTION, BUT I DO KNOW IF WE CAN FIND RECOVERING ADDICTS MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT – THEN IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR ADDICTS TO STAY CLEAN AND SOBER. THAT IS WHERE I THINK THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN HELP. AND

PERHAPS GOVERNMENT CAN HELP THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND INCENTIVIZE THEM IN SOME WAY TO HIRE RECOVERING ADDICTS.

FINALLY, I KNOW YOU ARE AWARE OF THIS BUT I BELIEVE IT WARRANTS REPEATING. THIS PROBLEM IS NOT LIMITED TO LYCOMING COUNTY NOR IS IT LIMITED TO RURAL PENNSYLVANIA BUT WE ALL MUST BEGIN TO TAKE CARE OF OUR COMMUNITIES. WE ARE TOLD THE FIRST STEP TO RECOVERY IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOU HAVE A PROBLEM. I THINK THE FIRST STEP TO SOLVING THIS PROBLEM IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE WE HAVE A PROBLEM. THAT IS WHAT WE ARE DOING IN LYCOMING COUNTY THROUGH OUR WORK ON THE HEROIN TASK FORCE. THERE IS MUCH MORE THAT CAN AND SHOULD BE DONE. WHILE I AM NOT BIG ON GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION, THIS IS AN AREA THAT GOVERNMENT CAN AND SHOULD HAVE A ROLE. THANK YOU