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April 29, 2020

Governor Tom Wolf
Office of the Governor
508 Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Secretary Rachel Levine
Pennsylvania Department of Health
625 Forster St., 8th Floor West
Harrisburg, PA 17120

RE: Reclassification of Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties

Dear Governor Wolf and Secretary Levine,

We send this correspondence in support of efforts by local officials, economic development professionals, small business owners, and residents of Susquehanna and Wyoming counties to become part of the northcentral region, rather than the northeast region announced as part of your plan to reopen Pennsylvania. This reclassification aligns with the existing geographic boundaries utilized by the Department of Community and Economic Development's Partnerships for Regional Economic Performance program and is endorsed by the commissioners and other community leaders.

As state government weighs critical decisions on where and when to allow business reopening, an important consideration is how smaller, more rural counties are treated.

We realize that every elected and appointed official is hearing from a wide range of voices who offer starkly disparate advice on the methods and wisdom of reopening. We want to make absolutely sure that the deeply held views and desperate needs of rural counties are not drowned out in this commentary.

Science and common sense are critical in the decision making. If counties such as Susquehanna and Wyoming, which have a relatively low number of coronavirus cases and few concentrations of population, are judged simply in terms of proximity to more populous counties, it will be a matter of injustice. Longstanding partnerships and collaborations established as a result of numerous demographic similarities would prove useful during various stages of recovery and for multiple community sectors. Health care systems in both counties also bolster hospital capacity in the northern tier.

During the great recession, rural counties were hit hardest economically, and have encountered a higher degree of difficulty and tougher road in recovering. This is not a matter of speculation. Recent studies show the slow comeback of employment opportunities, even with the boost some have received from

energy development, an industry that is also taking a big hit from the negative economic forces arising from the pandemic.

A signal accomplishment of your administration was development and implementation of the rural health initiative to save small community hospitals and health centers, something each of us strongly advocated. People sincerely hope that the recognition and resolve state officials invested in that plan will be applied during the decisions made about reopening the economy.

If there is a possibility for discussions to accommodate this request, we would be glad to engage in such a constructive exchange. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jonathan A. Fritz
State Representative
111th District



Lisa Baker
State Senator
20th District



Tina Pickett
State Representative
110th District



Gene Yaw
State Senator
23rd District



Karen Boback
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