TESTIMONY ON
DATA CENTERS: IMPACTS, OPERATIONS, AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

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by
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Thank you, Chairman Miller, Senator Flynn, and members of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am Frank Mazza, Director of Government Relations for the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP). CCAP is a non-profit, non-partisan association representing the commonwealth's 67 counties.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer remarks on data centers, focusing on their impacts, operations, and policy considerations from the county government perspective. Counties recognize the growing and evolving demands surrounding information and technology and understand there are physical facility needs to store that infrastructure. Counties are open to thoughtful conversations about Pennsylvania's opportunities and the community impacts of building data centers, while preserving the integrity of our communities, the environment, and the role of local governments in zoning and planning.

Counties, through their planning departments, play a critical role in coordinating development across the county by assisting municipalities with technical planning, land development, and the implementation of the Municipal Planning Code (MPC). While counties do not take a position on whether or where data centers should be built, we strongly encourage the General Assembly and administration to recognize the importance of county land use planning and our limited zoning authority in balancing environmental, infrastructure, public health and safety, economic development, and energy needs. As with any industrial or commercial property, counties share concerns about community impacts related to the siting and zoning of these facilities.

Legislative proposals related to data center development would restrict local governments from imposing planning and land development requirements more stringent than those applied to other industrial uses. While counties understand the intent is to speed up timelines and reduce bureaucracy, we oppose any legislation that would override local zoning ordinances or county land development plans. Without local authority, communities lose their primary tool for managing growth responsibly.

County comprehensive plans, developed under the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC), serve as blueprints for development, balancing environmental, infrastructure, economic, and public safety needs. These plans guide municipalities as they update zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and land development policies, ensuring that individual projects—such as data centers—fit into a coordinated countywide vision for growth, infrastructure, and community character.

County Land Use Planning
In Pennsylvania, land use planning is governed by the MPC. Because Pennsylvania tradition places the greatest emphasis on land use controls at the municipal level, counties' primary responsibility is the development of the countywide comprehensive plan. These plans are guidance documents that advise county and municipal governing bodies, provide useful reference to local municipalities, and promote general consistency of local plans. They also offer direction for land use patterns that extend beyond municipal boundaries.

County comprehensive plans, which must be updated every ten years, are required to identify:

- Land uses as they relate to important natural resources and appropriate utilization of existing minerals.
- Current and proposed land uses with regional impact, such as large shopping centers, major industrial parks, mines, office parks, storage facilities, large residential developments, regional entertainment and recreational complexes, hospitals, airports, and port facilities.
- A plan for the preservation and enhancement of prime agricultural land and compatibility with existing agricultural operations.
- A plan for historic preservation.
- A plan for the reliable supply of water, considering current and future resources, uses, and limitations, including protections for water supply sources.

County planning commissions are to prepare advisory guidelines that promote consistency with the adopted county comprehensive plan. These guidelines foster uniformity in zoning terminology and common types of land use regulation. While the county plan is not a controlling document, it must be consulted by municipalities in developing their own plans and ordinances. In the absence of municipal or multi-municipal zoning, counties may exercise zoning and subdivision authority, though county ordinances are preempted once a municipal or multi-municipal zoning ordinance is enacted.

All counties in the commonwealth have planning agencies that, in addition to developing and administering the county comprehensive plan, are required to comment on and review municipal plans, zoning and subdivision ordinances, and proposals for land development, including subdivision plats and plans.

If state legislation were to supersede or weaken local control of planning and zoning, it would undermine the ability of counties and municipalities to anticipate, evaluate, and respond to the unique impacts of data centers. Local governments must retain the ability to manage land use in ways that reflect the values and priorities of their communities.

County plans exist to protect public interest and infrastructure, and data centers would have impacts that need careful consideration, including stormwater control, energy use, light, sight, and sound. Local governments must do their due diligence in assessing these impacts and regulating zoning and development accordingly. While local zoning codes and permitting processes may need to be reviewed and updated to facilitate development, local governments must work with industry partners to achieve the best outcomes for residents.

In addition to planning and zoning, counties also note physical safety and emergency response considerations for data centers. Because these facilities house significant amounts of information and technology, they can be targets for both physical security risks and cybersecurity threats. While security itself is not under county control, counties often play a role in emergency response for large-scale incidents.

Counties agree that data centers are part of the fabric of our technological world, and we welcome advancements in technology, particularly when they serve as economic development drivers for the commonwealth. With that in mind, counties maintain that local governments must retain oversight of development, zoning, and regulatory frameworks to ensure the best interests of our communities remain at the forefront.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.