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Testimony at the
Pennsylvania Senate Urban Affairs & Housing Committee
Public Hearing on Blight
City of Altoona
September 26, 2019

Good morning Senator Ward and members of the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee. My name is Matt Pacifico. I am the Mayor of the City of Altoona. On behalf of the City, I want to welcome you and thank you for holding a hearing on blight, here in Altoona.

In 2015 while I was campaigning to be mayor, the biggest concern I heard from residents and voters was blight. Questions like “what can be done to get owners to take better care of their properties,” “when will that fire-damaged and abandoned house be demolished,” and “how can we make our city more attractive to new residents and businesses” were frequently asked of me. In response, I started to gather resources and information to provide answers and chart a course for making blight a top priority for my administration.

Like most post-industrial Pennsylvania cities, Altoona has been impacted by blighted and abandoned properties and disinvestment due to loss of population and jobs, as well as changing market conditions. While the City has no concentrated area of blight, scattered pockets of blighted residential and commercial properties exist.

Through testimony this morning, you will hear about some of the steps that Altoona has taken to address blight using laws passed by the General Assembly and other resources provided by the state and federal governments as well as private sources. We’ll also offer some thoughts and ideas on how this Committee and the legislature can further support communities like Altoona in combating blight and returning properties to productive use.

One particular law that I’d like to mention is Act 33 of 2018. Shortly after the law was passed, Altoona became the first municipality to adopt an ordinance as authorized by Act 33 - designating the Altoona Redevelopment Authority to act as its Land Bank. Creating a land bank was one of the top priorities identified by the

City's Blight Task Force. We are currently laying the groundwork for Land Bank operations. I want to acknowledge the Altoona School District and the County Commissioners and the Tax Claim Bureau for working with us to get the Land Bank started. All of the taxing bodies are working together to move vacant, blighted and tax-delinquent properties back onto the tax rolls. In addition, I'd like to acknowledge Operation Our Town which has donated \$10,000 to support the start-up of the Land Bank.

For the City, I am joined this morning by Winnie Branton and Rebecca Brown. Winnie is a consultant working through the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania to provide blight technical assistance to the City. Rebecca Brown is the City's Code Enforcement Director.

Thank you again, Senator Ward and your fellow Senators and Committee members, for holding this hearing today and for your commitment to strengthening the tools available to fight blight and promote revitalization in Altoona.