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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Testimony Before the Center for Rural Pennsylvania

Subject: The Administrative and Infrastructure Impact of Data Centers on Municipal Governance

Presented By: Amy Evans, Salem Township Manager, Luzerne County, PA

The Core Challenge: The Real Cost of Digital Infrastructure

While data centers are often promoted as pillars of the modern digital economy, their massive physical footprints create profound, compounding operational challenges for rural local governments. For Salem Township in Luzerne County, hosting massive technological developments—including the **Amazon Web Services / Talen Energy (Cumulus)** campus and the rapidly advancing **QTS Data Centers overlay application**—transforms quiet municipal offices into high-stress corporate management hubs, straining physical infrastructure, local staffing, and administrative capacity.

Key Findings & Municipal Impacts

- **Administrative Gridlock & Right-to-Know (RTK) Abuse:**
 - The township faces a severe influx of RTK requests, heavily driven by public anxiety and corporate surveillance regarding the multi-billion-dollar projects.
 - Denials or time extensions trigger a cascade of unfounded appeals through the Office of Open Records, forcing limited township staff and legal counsel to spend exhaustive hours defending valid exemptions and extensions.
- **Media Saturation:**
 - A sudden influx of calls and visits from regional and national press turns the small township office into a public relations hub overnight.
 - Managing media inquiries pulls municipal officials away from essential, daily public service duties.



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- **Invoicing Inefficiencies & Corporate Bureaucracy:**
 - Data centers reject standard local billing procedures, demanding highly specific, individualized invoicing protocols.
 - Corporate protocols change frequently and without warning, requiring municipal bookkeepers to constantly troubleshoot submission systems and chase local revenue and reimbursements.
 - **Physical & Operational Strain:**
 - To keep up with severe work demands, Salem Township must invest heavily in infrastructure improvements, increase staff size, and procure upgraded office and technical equipment, including adding police officer, police cars, fire trucks and some paid fire personnel, and adding codes officials and codes vehicles.
 - Despite the clear need to expand local government capacity, the township faces a critical shortage of qualified applicants to fill these specialized municipal roles.
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Specific Context: The Digital Corridor in Salem Township

Salem Township has quickly become ground zero for Pennsylvania's data center expansion due to its proximity to the 2,475 MW Susquehanna Steam Electric Station, and the Moxie Freedom Gas Plant. Municipal leadership is currently managing:

- **AWS / Talen Energy (Cumulus Campus):** A 1,200-acre development directly co-located at the nuclear power plant.
 - **QTS Data Centers overlay application:** A massive, 1,700-acre mega-campus application encompassing 96 parcels. Because it falls within the township's Data Center Overlay Zone, it permits by-right usage for a projected 12 to 17 buildings, placing an immense, immediate burden on the township to manage complex master plans, land consolidations, and public street vacation requests.
 - **4-3 Glen Brook Group application:** This operational burden has escalated with the 4-3 Glen Brook Group applying to amend the township's Data Center Overlay Zoning District by more than 4,000 acres is scheduled to be reviewed by the Planning Commission this month.
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Policy Recommendations for the Center for Rural Pennsylvania

1. **Statewide RTK Protections:** Implement streamlined legislative frameworks to protect small, rural municipalities from weaponized or overly burdensome Right-to-Know requests and frivolous appeals.
2. **Standardized Municipal Billing Frameworks:** Establish statewide guidelines that prevent multi-billion-dollar technology conglomerates from forcing volatile, custom invoicing protocols onto rural township treasurers.
3. **Infrastructure Impact Fees:** Authorize specialized impact fees that allow host municipalities to directly fund the staffing increases, equipment upgrades, and infrastructure expansions required to manage these projects without burdening residents and residential taxpayers.
4. **Residential Benefits:** Allow municipalities to offer property tax rebates to specifically residential, owner occupied, property owners within a municipality that is hosting data centers or energy infrastructure related to data centers.

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