

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
PENNSYLVANIA

COMMITTEES:
FINANCE

HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

SELECT COMMITTEE
ON INTELLIGENCE

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 5, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

I write today in support of the application from the City of Chester for funding from the Distressed Area Recompete Pilot Program. I understand that the City of Chester is applying for a strategy development grant as well as approval of a Recompete plan. I urge you to give this application full and fair consideration.

The Recompete Pilot Program reflects an increased commitment at the federal level to spurring economic development in communities that have long been left behind. By making large, place-based investments tailored toward communities with a high prime-age employment gap, the program prioritizes job creation for residents, creating a unique opportunity for persistently distressed communities to harness their potential by leveraging local resources and partnerships.

The City of Chester is at a delicate point in its history in which a timely investment from EDA could tip the scales towards equitable growth. Navigating bankruptcy with the assistance of the Commonwealth, the City and its leaders are working to restructure, rebuild, and reimagine Chester. Officials tell me that the Recompete opportunity provides a much-needed source of capital to assess needs, plan interventions, and implement solutions to pressing workforce issues in the city. I am told that, by utilizing regional partnerships, the City sees an opportunity to invest in capacity building, career development, wrap-around services, and local business support for its residents that will help the City close its prime-age employment gap.

Officials with the City of Chester inform me that the community is experiencing a significant prime-age employment gap, with a prime-age employment rate of 65 percent and an employment gap of 13 percent. I understand that, compared to the surrounding regions, Chester's workforce is younger, less white, and has lower incomes. In addition, the median income in Chester is considerably lower than neighboring communities, at \$32,403, which is less than half of the household median income for the state. Moreover, white and Black residents in Chester face educational inequity, with lower percentages of high school and bachelor's degree attainment than the county and state averages.

Providing support in Chester would advance equity locally and in the broader region. Chester is the largest majority-Black municipality in Pennsylvania, with 68% of its population identifying as Black or African American and there has been an increase in the Hispanic and multi-racial population with the city as well. Despite the prosperity of some neighboring communities, Chester has continued to face challenges, in part because most residents commute outside the city for work and only a small portion of residents both live and work in Chester. Because it has the potential to provide family-sustaining wages while simultaneously increasing the local tax base, creating good jobs in Chester and training residents for those good jobs is a meaningful step towards community stabilization.

As Senator of Pennsylvania, I have worked with communities across the Commonwealth that once thrived but now find themselves in need of new ways to generate economic growth and support working families. Recent legislation, including the CHIPS and Science Act, reaches for these communities by extending new federal resources to help drive locally rooted, sustainable economic growth. It is critical that these types of transformational investments come to Pennsylvania, including for projects in communities such as the City of Chester.

Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration. Please include this letter in the official record of the application. Consistent with all applicable laws, rules, and regulations, I also respectfully request that you keep me informed of the status of this grant application. Finally, if you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please feel free to contact me or my staff at (202) 224-4195.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator