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County of Berks / COVID-19 Leadership Team Press Alert

Berks County Commissioners Press Gov. Wolf on Small Businesses & CARES Act Money

Reading, PA— 5/15/2020 — Today Berks County Commissioners Leinbach and Barnhardt participated on a County Commissioners Association of PA Board Conference call with Gov. Tom Wolf. Commissioner Leinbach addressed concerns regarding small businesses in Berks County while Commissioner Barnhardt addressed the CARES Act money.

Details of the discussion with Governor Wolf and the Berks County Commissioners

Commissioner Leinbach first challenged Gov. Wolf that counties desperately need collaboration with the Commonwealth and currently that is not happening. He went on to say *“Gov. Wolf - We are seeing numerous small businesses in our county that are closed and getting closer each day to never reopening. Yet their competition, Walmart, Target, Home Depot, Lowes and other big box companies are making a killing with packed stores and parking lots. How can you say that it is safe or fair to our local jewelers, flooring stores, florists, computer stores, clothing boutiques, etc.? These big box stores are selling the same things as our small businesses. A small store has a much easier time controlling and protecting employees and customers than these big box stores. If this goes much longer our big box stores will be bigger than ever and our small main street main businesses will be much diminished. You are the person that has the power to return some common sense to our local economy. What will you do to correct this unfairness?”* Gov. Wolf indicated that he acknowledges the system *“has not been perfect.”* The Governor indicated that this is something the Commonwealth needs to revisit. Commissioner Barnhardt asked the Governor about the status of the Federal CARES Act

money that is supposed to go to counties to help address the COVID-19 health crisis. Governor Wolf indicated that he didn't think the Governor should control the CARES Act money and that he intended to work with the legislature to determine how it should be distributed.

Commissioner Barnhardt responded by letting the Governor know that Berks County needs to be part of those discussions with the Governor and the legislature.

Commissioners encourage small businesses competing with “Big Box” stores to act

All three Berks County Commissioners are requesting that any small business that is currently under an order to be closed partially or completely and competes with “Big Box” stores that are currently open selling the same types of products reach out to Berks County as soon as possible. Please email the county at Comments@CountyofBerks.com and provide the following;

1. Include the name, address and type of business you own or operate. Please include the name and contact information of the owners or operators of the firm.
2. Indicate how the “Big Box” stores directly compete with your company and what they are currently selling that competes with the same types of products or services you provide.
3. Include what detailed measures you are going to take to address the COVID-19 issue should you be able to reopen your business.

The County Commissioners plan to forward these requests to the Governor and to press the Governor to allow these stores to reopen. Please note the County will only forward those requests that answer the above items clearly and have a direct competitive challenge from “Big Box” stores that are currently open in our region.

Additionally, The County Commissioners noted that they are looking at other options to address the current economic challenges facing Berks County businesses.

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