

- 1- Good afternoon. My name is Jesse Darlington. I want to thank Senator Dush for giving me the opportunity to talk with all of you today. I'm going to apologize in advance if I get emotional because talking about eminent domain brings back memories of what my family went through when I was very young and now my family is going through it again.
- 2- I'm proud to be a farmer. Do you know today there's less than 2% of the population in the United States that are farmers, and that number is decreasing every year. Farms are going out of business because they don't have the next generation that wants to live that life. This is something that should be concerning for us today if we really care about our family's future.
- 3- Farming is not easy. Farmers spend thousands of dollars planting crops not knowing what it will produce. We spend countless hours working in the dust, sun, rain and cold. If we wake up with the flu, we still must go to work because our livestock depend on us. We get criticized when traveling our public roads because we hold up traffic during our planting and harvesting seasons. So why would anyone want to farm? I will tell you why I want to farm at the end of this talk.
- 4- Our farming operation is a family farm, clearly named because it takes many hands to be successful. My story about my life as a farmer is very similar to most family farms. Growing up, our farm work got completed by my mother, my father, my two sisters and myself and our farm was located in Boalsburg. My family's love for farming goes far deeper than just a generation or two. I'm the 12th generation farmer in my family and I believe this number would be hard to beat. My mother and father raised horses (at one time over 50) and baled hay on that property to feed the animals. My parent's plans were not to build a big farm in Boalsburg. Their long-term plan was to move to Delaware County where my father grew up on his family farm, a farm that was deeded to my

family by William Penn in 1684. The farm that was known for their dairy and butter.

My love for farming started when I was very young. I can remember visiting my grandfather's farm in Delaware county. Every time we visited the farm, I couldn't wait till the early hours of the morning when I would hear my grandfather awake. I knew if I would get up before my grandfather left for the barn, he would take me to help feed the horses, cattle, and the pigs. Looking back now, I know it took grandfather longer to do the barn chores those days but we had fun doing it. Sadly, my grandfather was killed in a car accident when I was only 10 years old. After that, the township decided to take our Willian Penn family farm for eminent domain for open space because they saw an opportunity to do so. My father and mother really wanted to farm that Delaware County farm to do what generations did before them and build on its history, but they didn't have any opportunity nor a say.

5- My mother and father purchased a farm in State College which got squeezed out by developments surrounding it, and they eventually purchased a farm in Centre Hall, near Colyer Lake which already had a rich farming history. Our family farm today, Darlington Farms, is comprised of three farms which were purchased several years apart. Those 3 farms total more than 250 acres of land. My wife and I got married on the farm soon after college and moved into one of the old farmhouses on site. We had the privilege of working with my mother and father on the farm supporting our horses, Angus beef cattle, goats, chickens, etc. We raise corn, soybeans, hay, oats and wheat to support our animals and also crops to sell to supplement our income. My mother and father eventually gave my wife and I the opportunity to take over the family operation and soon after my father passed. He now rests on the farm he loves. Now my wife, our 3 boys, my mother, and I handle all the workload that is necessary to run the farm. My wife and I

also purchased land that became available adjacent to the farm to grow our operation because our plan is to pass this farm on to our sons, the 13th generation of farmers in my family. Growing up, our sons' interest in farming was obvious (working and 4-H). Two are currently enrolled at PSU in the College of Ag, one as an undergrad and the other in the Master's program, and our third son just got accepted to Penn State's College of Ag. As you can imagine, my sons have many hours invested in the farm and dollars into their education and now much of that is on the line for applying it to our family farm. They have worked hard their whole lives, and we feel they deserve the right to carry on the family farm legacy, just like my parents did for us.

6- Eminent domain on our current farm- With the need for a 4 lane highway to connect Potters Mills to Boalsburg, we all know that someone will be affected. My family wants to make it clear that we don't want to push this on anyone, but we also want people to realize that taking a highway through a farm will put that farm out of business. We have three proposed routes showing on PennDOT's maps that hit our farm and all three threaten putting us out of business. The only route that we see that gives us some hope is the route that runs along the northern edge of our property, along the existing Route 322 which takes our house, barn, some buildings and fields but still keeps the rest of our farm whole. The other routes not only divide the farm, it takes the majority of our prime farm land rendering our farm unusable. Farming alone is stressful but the leadership making these decisions about the road needs to know that imposing eminent domain on a family farm is not moral and is far more stressful than anyone can imagine. We work our whole lives to build for the next generation. Farmers must do their part today so the next generation can survive and with the number of farms decreasing in the country, the current farms need to grow, not shrink. The technology across agriculture alone is being developed at a rapid pace, and the price of equipment is very

expensive so you need to produce more to pay the bills. We also want to people to understand that there is a difference between a family farm and a landowner who has nothing to do with farming except renting their land to a farmer, and the farmer renting that land knows that they will lose that ground at some point, so being independent is important.

7- My wife and I found out that our farm is going to be affected by eminent domain when we attended the public meeting in September of 2021. I will never forget walking around to the stations and just trying to learn about how things were going to evolve. My wife and I didn't ask any questions because we just wanted to see everything first. Our second time around I was listening to a PennDOT representative talk with a couple explaining how they came up with the routes and he said they chose these routes to avoid houses, businesses, churches/ Cemetery, and ballfields. (If you study the routes, he was correct.) It was clear to me that farms are not looked upon as a valuable business. Farms are looked at as an opportunity of ease because the decision makers only have one voice to hear, and the land is already cleared for the taking. Other routes got removed from the study in September of 2022 because of the environmental impacts they hold. Our farm has had a pair of nesting bald eagles for several years. The eagles are nesting on our farm for a reason. They have everything they need to thrive nearby. Farms have their own ecosystems that support many species of plants and animals which supports a rich environment.

Since learning about the eminent domain, our farm is currently in limbo because we can't purchase more land when it becomes available nearby, purchase new equipment, or build a better infrastructure because we don't know if we will be in business a few years from now and can't afford to put our family in debt with such uncertainty. We are hoping that we can convince our state leadership to value our farmers

and support the hard work they do to put clothes on people's backs and food on their plates. Farms can't just be moved.

Now to conclude my talk and answer a question that I left you with earlier. Why do I choose to spend thousands of dollars, spend countless hours working, and putting the stress on our bodies? I get satisfaction seeing the foals, calves, goat kids, and chicks being born. I feel closer to mother nature and seeing our Lord's creations and more importantly I can say I do my part to support society with the fiber and the food it takes to live.

Thank You