RURAL HOUSING: ACCESSIBILITY, CAPACITY, AND FUNDING

As the needs of North Carolina’s communities are changing and our coastal communities are experiencing increased environmental risk, the issues of rural housing accessibility, capacity, and funding have become increasingly salient. Substandard stock, too few developers, small and hard-to-fund projects—as well as inadequate funding across the board—have created a complex set of conditions that require a multi-layered response.

Rural housing is a statewide challenge, but the specific hurdles vary by region; limited housing capacity hinders the ability for coastal communities to respond to acute housing needs exacerbated by hurricanes, and lack of middle class housing in the mountains means that quality, rural jobs in those areas go unfilled. And everywhere, families with limited income and wealth struggle to afford mortgages and rents.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes housing needs even more acute. The Chairman of the Federal Reserve recently stated that 40 percent of households in the US with incomes below $40,000 have lost a job since layoffs began during the pandemic. Millions of now-unemployed workers report that they are facing housing insecurity, which further underscores the devastating financial effect of the pandemic on low-income workers.

When the NC Rural Center launched the 10-point Rural Counts platform in 2016, we acknowledged that it was critical that we move the needle on each point. We have decided, due to the rapidly increasing urgency of affordable housing, to formally add rural housing as the 11th point on the Rural Counts platform.

Source: US Census Bureau – American Community Survey 2014-2018 5-Year Estimate
RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

• Appropriate funds to the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency for the Workforce Housing Loan Fund. This fund is critical to the financial feasibility of smaller scale applications for the Low Income Housing Tax Credit.

• Increase funding to the NC Housing Trust Fund from its current $7 million to $15 million.

• Prioritize use of non-entitlement federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to meet the growing demand for quality, affordable rural housing.

• Build a broad coalition through critical advocates, such as the North Carolina Housing Coalition and the Metropolitan Mayors Coalition, to create a systemic policy response to make high quality housing for everyone an economic asset for every community.

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