Overview

The mission of the Rural Counts advocacy program is to research, develop, and advocate for innovative, sound, and nonpartisan policy solutions to address rural North Carolina's economic development challenges and improve the quality of life for our state's rural people and places. Our positions are informed by leading-edge, unbiased research and data, and by the wisdom and expertise of the people who call rural North Carolina home.

2021 Advocacy Priorities

Expand Accessible, Affordable High-Speed Broadband

- Provide $50 - $100 million of increased funding for implementation and administration of the broadband grant program, Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology (GREAT), to greatly expand eligibility, accessibility, and adoption.
- Establish a revised broadband definition that creates a minimum service threshold of 25/5 that can be used for grant funding.
- Encourage public-private partnerships by clarifying the ability of local governments to raise and spend funds for broadband infrastructure and to lease existing assets to private and nonprofit partners to help expand broadband to the last mile.
- Address broadband adoption rates by establishing an incentive-based program to provide low-cost options in underserved areas, fund technology access and digital literacy programs, and explore a subsidy program for low-income households.

Stabilize and Transform Rural Health

- Close the health insurance coverage gap in North Carolina.
- Expand efforts to recruit and retain rural health providers, including specialists in underserved areas of the state.
- Implement recommendations for a statewide telemedicine policy made by DHHS in 2017.
- Investigate opportunities to attract mid-level health care providers to rural areas by allowing full practice authority and increasing scope of practice.
- Advance broad-based solutions for the substance abuse crisis that addresses both prevention and treatment.
- Support the Healthy North Carolina 2030 attainment goals that seek to holistically address and improve the health, safety, and well-being of North Carolinians.

For more information visit: ncruralcenter.org/advocacy. Follow @RuralCounts on Twitter
**Advance Sustainable and Affordable Housing**

- Increase recurring funding 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 recurring funding to the North Carolina 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.

**Revitalize Water and Wastewater Infrastructure**

- Implement the infrastructure, organizational, and financial management recommendations detailed in the 2017 State Water Infrastructure Authority Master Plan.
- Promote consistent, adequate funding to strengthen, restore, and protect our rural wastewater systems.
- Establish partnerships with higher education institutions to develop a workforce pipeline that is better prepared to manage water utilities.
- Provide increased training and supports for local elected officials on utility finances.
- Create a disaster and hazard mitigation response and recovery plan to address the growing needs of rural communities affected by natural disasters.

**Invest in Stronger Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Systems**

- Adopt *North Carolina’s New Small Business Plan*—a statewide small business agenda that fully addresses the needs of entrepreneurs and small businesses, with special attention on underserved areas, and businesses owned by people of color, veterans, and women.
  - This plan has four pillars:
    - **Funding**: Equal access to the right kind of capital everywhere.
    - **Support**: The ability for all to take risks.
    - **Opportunity**: An equitable, level playing field with less red tape.
    - **Knowledge**: The know-how to start a business.

*To view North Carolina’s New Business Plan and join the NC Small Business Coalition. visit:*

bit.ly/small-biz-coalition

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