



THE ADVOCACY PROGRAM OF THE NC RURAL CENTER

2023 Advocacy Priorities

The mission of the Rural Counts advocacy program is to research, develop, and advocate for innovative, sound, and nonpartisan policy solutions and initiatives 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.



Expand Accessible, Affordable High-Speed Broadband

... to connect the workforce, small business owners, students, healthcare providers, and residents of rural North Carolina with opportunities made possible by modern technology and innovation.

- Establish a revised broadband definition that creates a minimum service threshold of 100:20 Mbps to ensure equitable access to reliable, high-quality broadband in all areas of the state.
- Encourage public-private partnerships that clarify and enhance the ability of local governments to raise and spend funds for broadband infrastructure and lease existing assets to private and nonprofit partners to help expand broadband to the last mile.
- Leverage and coordinate federal and state funds to address broadband adoption and affordability rates, and fund technology access programs to ensure equitable access for low-to-moderate income households.
- Convene regional stakeholders, partners, and broadband service providers to effectuate universal last mile broadband accessibility and adoption goals in unserved and underserved areas of the state.
- Support viable infrastructure technologies, such as fiber and fixed wireless, to increase access to reliable high speed broadband services and efforts to accurately map broadband accessibility and adoption across the state to best identify needs in underserved and unserved areas.
- Support the state's goal to equitably close the digital divide through increased access to high speed internet and subscriptions and increased adoption rates for every household by 2025.

Advance Sustainable and Affordable Housing

... to ensure the availability, viability, and wealth-building accessibility of stable housing to improve rural communities' quality of life.



- Support collaborative efforts to create a systemic policy response to make high-quality housing for everyone an economic asset for all communities.
- Sustain 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. This is the most flexible pot of funding to finance affordable housing and can be used for purposes such as repairs, construction, rehabilitation, etc.
- Prioritize use of non-entitlement federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to meet the growing demand for quality, affordable rural housing.



Stabilize and Transform Rural Health

... to forge healthy rural communities, healthcare systems, workers, and local economies for generations to come.



- Close the health insurance coverage gap in North Carolina to ensure healthier, more economically viable communities.
- Expand funding and efforts to recruit and retain a diverse rural healthcare workforce, from direct care workers to specialists in underserved areas of the state.
- Advance legislation to attract and retain mid-level healthcare providers to rural areas by allowing full practice authority and increasing scope of practice.
- Address access-to-care barriers for standard, telehealth, and behavioral healthcare services and advance coverage parity efforts.
- Advance broad-based solutions for mental health and substance use disorders that address both prevention and treatment.
- Explore opportunities to fund and expand the establishment, operation, and evaluation of community violence intervention (CVI) programs in rural hospitals and community outreach organizations as a public health response to interrupt cycles of community violence, especially in rural areas.
- Support the Healthy North Carolina 2030 attainment goals that seek to holistically address and improve the health, safety, and well-being of North Carolinians by addressing the social determinants of health.



Revitalize Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

... to maintain financial, workforce, and operational rural community infrastructure.

- Implement the infrastructural, organizational, and financial management recommendations detailed in the 2017 State Water Infrastructure Authority Master Plan to sustain and ensure long term viability of water and wastewater utility systems.
- Sustain 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 fully equipped 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 & Small Business Development Systems

... to drive an equitable small business ecosystem that is the economic and social foundation of North Carolina.



- Advance *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.

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To view
North Carolina's New Business Plan
& join the NC Small Business Coalition, visit:

bit.ly/small-biz-coalition