



**Counties fight child homelessness. Pg. 7**



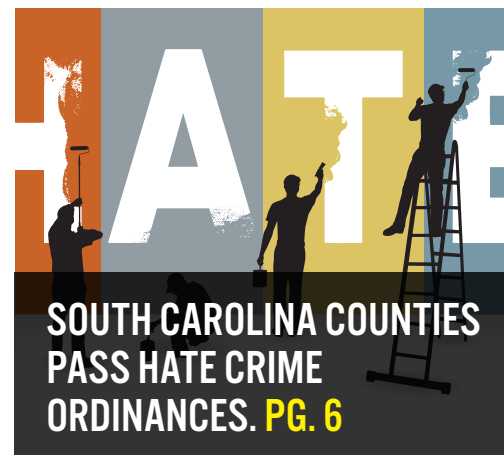
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**MURAL IN RURAL COUNTY LIFTS SPIRITS OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES. PG. 5**



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

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## Record high Capitol Hill meeting schedule pushes public lands funding



**Prairie County, Mont. Commissioner Todd Devlin and Fremont County, Colo. Commissioner Dwayne McFall prepare for their Capitol Hill visits during the PILT Fly-In Sept. 10. McFall is the Western Interstate Region first vice president.** Photo by Charlie Ban

**by Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

When he visits Capitol Hill, Jerry Taylor takes along a 33-inch stick, representing the 3.3 million acres in Garfield County, Utah, where he is a commissioner and chair of NACo's

Public Lands Policy Steering Committee.

Different colors on the stick represent the portions of the county owned by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, the state and the last 7% of the stick represents pri-

vate ownership.

"As you can see, we get the short end of the stick," he said.

That joke belies a serious tension in public lands counties — a frighteningly small tax base supports not just the developed

*See PILT page 3*

## SNAP needs funding and flexibility, official testifies

**by Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Stable support of the Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is essential to effectively serve the people who depend on it, county official Joy Bivens told a congressional committee last week. Nearly 42 million people across the country depend on SNAP benefits each month.

Bivens, the deputy county administrator for Franklin County, Ohio's Health and Human Services Department and vice chair of NACo's Human Services and Education committee, testified before Congress on



**Bivens**

behalf of NACo in the Sept. 9 "Exploring State Options in SNAP" hearing.

Addressing the House Committee on Agriculture's Subcommittee on Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture, Bivens emphasized the importance of stable funding and flexibility for counties that administer SNAP. Bivens also highlighted the critical role of operational tools, such as Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility and the Standard Utility Allowance, to streamline applications.

"Stable federal support and practical flexibility are essential to effective SNAP delivery," Bivens said. "County-specific responsibilities vary by state

*See TESTIMONY page 4*

## FEMA reform bill advances to House

**by Brett Mattson**

A bill that would dramatically change federal disaster response will move on the House floor following passage out of the Transportation and Infra-

structure Committee.

The Fixing Emergency Management for Americans (FEMA) Act (H.R. 4669) passed Sept. 3 by a bipartisan 57-3 vote.

The bill would establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency as an independent, cabinet-level agency, removing it from the Department of Homeland Security. It would also dramatically change both public and individual assistance policies and would reform mitigation programs. Read NACo's full analysis of the

FEMA bill here.

### Take action

Counties can send letters of support to their members of Congress during this template letter. Any other communications with members of Congress regarding the bill should refer to H.R. 4669.

NACo provided actionable recommendations to congressional staff throughout the drafting process and are proud to see many of these items

*See FEMA page 2*



# Bill responds to county feedback, including reforms to ease administrative burdens

From FEMA page 1

represented in the final text. A NACo letter to committee leadership expresses support for the legislation and outlines how its provisions strengthen emergency response and recovery efforts for counties.

The bill would make sweeping changes to expedite funding and make the Public Assistance program more effective, including:

- Transitioning to a grant model with the opportunity for grants to be made directly to counties, away from the current reimbursement model. FEMA would have 120 days from the date of cost estimate submission to make funding available.
- Creating a sliding federal cost-share ranging from 65%-85%, tied to the implementation of state and local mitiga-

tion measures.

- Streamlining environmental and historic preservation reviews.
- Incorporating the NA-Co-endorsed Disaster Management Cost Modernization Act (H.R. 744/S. 773) which would allow management costs to be spread across multiple disasters, offering counties more flexibility in administrative planning.
- Creating a dashboard that publicly displays information for each major disaster declaration including cost estimates, status of review and approval and project-level updates.

The bill includes several changes to FEMA's suite of mitigation programs, including:

- Allowing states to develop a list of pre-approved mitigation projects and requiring at



least one mitigation project per county, enabling faster implementation once funding becomes available.

- Restructuring FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program by moving it to a formula-based grant to improve predictability.
- Consolidating applications for pre and post disaster mitigation funding to expedite the review process and reduce administrative burden on counties.
- Ensuring flexibility in definition of building codes to allow for states to account for state-specific hazards.

The bill would also streamline and improve aid for disaster survivors through the Individual Assistance program by:

- Creating a universal disaster application to simplify and speed up the process of accessing assistance.
- Expanding FEMA's authority to repair homes beyond basic habitability, addressing a current limitation that often leaves survivors in unsafe conditions.
- Prohibiting FEMA from issuing denial letters prior to final determination of available insurance.
- Directing FEMA to provide alternative methods of determining eligibility for disaster survivors without a fixed address.
- Clarifying that receiving a loan or receiving charitable donations does not constitute

duplication of benefits.

This bill responds to county feedback, including major reforms to speed recovery timelines, ease administrative burdens and improve support

for survivors. Counties will be encouraged by the PA reforms, universal disaster application and PA dashboard — essential to building stronger, more resilient communities. Many proposals were recommended by the NACo Intergovernmental Disaster Reform Task Force, which continues its work on FEMA reform to improve disaster mitigation, response and recovery efforts across the country. [CN](#)

*Brett Mattson is the NACo legislative director for justice and public safety issues.*

## IS YOUR COUNTY PREPARED? TOOLS YOU CAN USE

FEMA's Ready Campaign offers a comprehensive toolkit of both general resources and those specific to the 2025 theme: "Preparedness Starts at Home."

The theme focuses on the four key actions county residents can take to prepare for any disaster.

- Know your risk
- Make a family emergency plan
- Build an emergency supply kit
- Get involved in your community by taking action to prepare for emergencies

### LISTEN TO COMMUNITY STORIES

Host key stakeholders and county residents with lived experience of disasters and impactful insights to inform local decision making. By including state and federal policymakers in these discussions, county leaders can advocate for preparedness priorities and highlight specific challenges in local capacity.

### BUILD LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Form strategic partnerships with industry leaders, service providers, local universities and neighboring counties to maximize resources and capacity.


### PARTICIPATE IN NACo'S COMMITTEES

The Resilient Counties Advisory Board (RCAB) connects county leaders and staff involved in disaster mitigation, recovery and environmental resilience. Members have access to monthly committee meetings, an opportunity to share experiences and learn from your peers and guest speakers. Please contact [committee@naco.org](mailto:committee@naco.org) to learn more.



Scan the QR code to access NACo's County Participation Toolkit.

## SNAP/STATS



### SEPTEMBER IS National Preparedness Month

#### PREPAREDNESS BY GENERATION:

Gen Z/Millennials (ages 13-44):	55%
Gen X (ages 45-60):	51%
Baby Boomers (61-79):	39%

#### SURVEY RESPONDENTS HAD ON HAND:

Pet supplies	29%
Extra gas	22%
Printed map	13%

Source: Talker Research



## More than three dozen county officials blanket Capitol Hill to talk PILT, SRS concerns

From PILT page 1

communities but services of all kinds throughout those federally owned lands that can't be taxed. The counties provide services on those lands, including road maintenance, law enforcement, search and rescue and emergency medical services. If a recreational visitor who is exploring the forests while in town to hike Bryce Canyon National Park gets lost, a county search and rescue team is probably sent looking.

Likewise, when heavy oil and gas trucks tear up the dirt roads in Duchesne County, Utah, Commissioner Greg Miles knows 23% of his county's budget is trying to keep pace to support infrastructure to make that industry possible.

"It's pretty staggering when you look back and look at it from a distance and think, gosh, we spend almost a quarter of our budget on this," he said. "We wouldn't probably have a full time Department of Transportation officer in our county, but because the state has one DOT officer that covers three counties, we need more enforcement when it comes to commercial traffic. We've had to outfit that officer and buy a set of scales and equipment for him to be able to regulate the increased traffic."

Taylor and Miles were two of more than three dozen county officials who visited Washington, D.C. Sept. 10-11 to meet with staff from more than 80 congressional offices — a high in recent history for public lands fly-ins. They advocated for full funding of the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program and the reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program. PILT pays counties a fraction of the property tax that they aren't able to levy on federally managed lands and SRS compensates counties for timber sales they've forgone because of litigation and federal legislation. SRS has lapsed after last paying out \$232 million to roughly 700 counties in 2023. PILT paid \$644.8 million to 1,850 counties in 2025.

The benefits of public lands, they argue, extend beyond their own borders, particularly as outdoor recreation continues



**Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.) meets Sept. 11 with county commissioners, mostly from Montana, during the PILT Fly-In. Clockwise, from center: Daines, Daines' Legislative Assistant Jaana Syme, Prairie County's Todd Devlin, Fergus County's Ross Butcher, state association Executive Director Eric Bryson, Rivalli County's Greg Chilcott, Tim Bertling from Boundary County, Idaho and Blaine County's Miles Hutton. Photo by Brett Mattson**



**(L-r) Twin Falls County, Idaho's Don Hall, NACo First Vice President George Dunlap, Idaho Association of Counties Executive Director Seth Grigg, Crook County, Ore.'s Susan Hermreck, Boundary County, Idaho's Tim Bertling and Montezuma County, Colo.'s Jim Candelaria. Photo by Rachel Yeung**

to draw visitors from across the country. Likewise, the resources extracted from their public lands often leave and are consumed by the national market. Either photos or memories or raw materials from those counties spread across the country.

Miles joined three other officials to illustrate the challenges their counties face because of uneven revenue-sharing from natural resource extraction in a pair of panel discussions organized by the National Center for Public Lands Counties.

Paul Anderes, a Union County, Ore. Commissioner, noted that 15% of his county's population fall below the federal poverty line, and 43% live dangerously close to financial ruin. A

calamitous drop in timber production over the last 40 years has put his county in that position, a timeframe that has seen the number of lumber mills in his county drop to five from 169 in 1975.

"The adjoining counties to Union County do not have an industrial mill, which is obscene," he said. "We are in the heart of timber country; we grow trees well. We manage our forest very well."

Klamath County, Ore. also saw its fortunes decline over the last 40 years, as it tumbled from being the wealthiest county per capita in the state down to one of the poorest thanks to decreased timber harvesting.

"It's frustrating, because the

timber is there and so is the infrastructure," he said, noting that forests in Western Oregon can regrow at more than twice the rate of forests elsewhere in the country.

"We didn't need to tax our citizens — we had all the money we needed from timber harvests. When environmental protection started in 1991, we went from receiving ridiculous money to no money overnight."

The timber industry has moved on to private lands while national forests load up on more wildfire fuel.

Rio Blanco County, Colo. Commissioner Jennifer O'Hearon also suspects federal timber policy contributed to more fuel for a fire in her county.

"We used to have a sawmill in Rio Blanco County, but because of all of the timber not being sold or not being able to be accessed by permitting, we do not timber or we do not harvest our timber," she said. "The lack of harvesting could have led to more fire."

The Secure Rural Schools program would, in theory, help provide a portion of that revenue, but it has gone more than two years without reauthorization. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.)

who wrote the SRS legislation in 2000, is trying to change that, encouraging county officials to expand their advocacy beyond members of Congress to every possible elected official.

"I fear if we don't get it done now, we're going to start all over," he said.

But he also wants to see logging return to national forests.

"There is this point of view going around that you can either be for Secure Rural Schools, or you could be for harvest. That's not my view," he said. "My view is we can have multiple use (timber harvesting and conservation) on our forest. We can get the harvest up and have Secure Rural Schools. These two are not mutually exclusive."

Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ore.) hopes to include Secure Rural Schools in the farm bill. He also hopes that H.R. 1 will ease a return to logging.

"It includes ways to get back into the woods," he said. "It's not perfect. There's one portion of it that does not allocate money to counties, but that was not possible under the reconciliation process (which was used to pass H.R. 1). So better to get some wood out and keep sawmills going than nothing at all." **CN**



## *H.R. 1 will increase SNAP administrative burden and shift costs onto counties*

From TESTIMONY page 1

law and by the design of state technology systems and policies. Where states permit counties greater operational flexibilities, counties have deployed innovation and improved outcomes.”

H.R. 1 reduces the federal share of the SNAP administrative match from 50% to 25%, meaning counties will have to substantially increase contributions starting in fiscal year 2027. In Franklin County, the cost shift will require approximately \$7.5 million in additional local spending each year to maintain current service levels, so funding and flexibility moving forward are “critical,” according to Bivens. The majority of Franklin County’s more than 183,000 SNAP recipients are children or seniors, Bivens noted.

“This shift arrives as counties across the country face outdated technology, staffing challenges and increasing pressure to improve timeliness and reduce payment errors,” Bivens said. “With stable funding and operational flexibility, counties can continue to deliver timely service without shifting unsustainable burdens on local taxpayers.”

While it’s important for localities to maintain flexibility, there must also be accountability for high error rates that “prevent benefits from being directed to our most vulnerable populations,” said Rep. Tracey Mann (R-Kan.).

“I believe that everybody in this room shares the same goal, ensuring that SNAP benefits reach those who truly need them,” Mann said. “If there are ways to make improvements to how states and localities are administering this program and ways to root out waste, fraud and abuse, we should pursue these solutions and ensure that they are implemented effectively, as Congress intended.”

Monitoring obligations have dramatically increased due to expansions to work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, Bivens said. In Ohio alone, an expected 17,000 veterans, former foster youth and people



Joy Bivens testifies Sept. 9 on Capitol Hill, on the plight of SNAP benefits. Photo courtesy of Franklin County

experiencing homelessness will now be subject to work requirements.

To meet the new demands established by the legislation, counties need targeted support to recruit and train staff, who often need more than a year to be proficient in their roles, Bivens noted.

States with payment error rates of 10% or more must pay a 15% cost-share of total SNAP benefits under H.R. 1. States with an error rate below 6% will not have to pay a cost-share of benefits, but will still be required to bear more administrative costs.

In Franklin County, increased administrative costs “will cause a decrease in our contractual services, meaning less dollars to our nonprofits to support our most vulnerable, less dollars in our food pantries, less dollars in our workforce programs,” Bivens said.

In fiscal year 2024, only eight states had an error rate below 6% — Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Wisconsin and Wyoming. The national payment error rate for fiscal year 2024 was 10.93%.

Ohio’s payment error rate has gone down in recent years, but if it remained the same as it stands today, it would cost the state \$300 million, according to Bivens — which would “debilitate” the human services branch, she added.

“There are always going to be errors, because it’s not error proof,” Bivens said. “And so, what this could possibly do to communities and counties is it would ‘lean’ our budgets, and then we would have to make decisions on what other areas do we cut and how does that impact the residents in our communities?”

Rep. Brad Finstad (R-Minn.), the House Subcommittee on Nutrition and Foreign Agriculture chairman, said the legislation is “finally creating real accountability incentives for states with high payment error rates.”

“We are protecting the hard-working American taxpayer who has been footing the \$100 billion annual SNAP bill that increased by close to 70% in five years,” Finstad said. “... The facts are that this program was on an unsustainable trajectory, and H.R. 1 is putting it back on a better path. SNAP must be based on the goal of reaching nutrition independence, financial independence and the American dream.”

Rep. Angie Craig (D-Minn.), the Agriculture Committee’s ranking member, said that the reduction in federal funding will only contribute to higher error rates, and the legislation is setting up states and local governments to fail.

“The combinations of added red tape and paperwork, program changes and fewer staff

create a perfect storm that will send state error rates upward, putting states at risk of being fined millions of dollars by the federal government,” Craig said. “... None of these changes help reduce hunger in our communities.

“Seniors who rely on SNAP to stay healthy and live independently, parents who use SNAP to keep their children fed, veterans struggling while finding stable housing or employment who use SNAP to keep food on the table do not benefit from states being intentionally overwhelmed and under-resourced.”

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility is a SNAP policy that allows states to raise income and asset limits and helps ensure “working families don’t have to choose between accepting a promotion and losing benefits or turning down a better paying job to keep food on the table,” Bivens said.

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility is currently utilized in 24 states and territories — “red and blue, alike” — to ease SNAP benefit “cliffs,” but because of H.R. 1, states could be forced to opt out of the option, according to Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-Conn).

Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility also lowers administrative burden, streamlining applications and recertifications for households already screened through other public assistance programs, which

cuts down on time spent processing applications, according to Bivens.

Rep. Jim McGovern (D-Mass.) discussed how removing Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility would impact his constituents.

“When it comes to food assistance, Categorical Eligibility makes sure SNAP is a bridge, not a trap,” McGovern said. “So, if someone is working hard but is still struggling — making, say, \$30,000 a year — they can still get some food assistance in Massachusetts.

“In Mississippi [a state that doesn’t offer Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility], that same person would be cut off at \$20,000. You get no benefits in Mississippi — you’d have \$20,000 a year to cover rent, utilities, health care and food. And that is the recipe for keeping people in poverty.”

Finstad said the “status quo” of the food benefits program isn’t working, and H.R. 1 will help address the “root problems struggling Americans face.”

“After the passage of H.R. 1, we have the opportunity to serve folks on this program better,” Finstad said. “To remove some burdens from the taxpayers and get people off SNAP into independent futures.”

People will have to find out how to pay for these services at the local level — “there is no other way around it,” Craig said in her closing remarks. States will be left to make hard decisions, even ending SNAP altogether, because of the legislation, she said.

Counties want “to work together to strengthen administration, maintain integrity and improve outcomes.” However, under the administrative cost shift and expanded work requirements, counties will face an increased fiscal and administrative burden, putting other supportive services, such as workforce training and childcare, at risk and making innovation more difficult, Bivens said.

“It’s almost like whack-a-mole,” Bivens said. “We would defund a lot of supportive services for our residents in order to figure out how we move forward.” **CN**





North Vermillion High School students in Vermillion County, Ind., pause for a photo next to a mural that features all of their signatures. Photos courtesy of Vermillion Parke On The Level

## Mural, signatures make Indiana county tunnel a must-see

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Traditions start somewhere. In Vermillion County, Ind., one started from a bottleneck. A few minutes from North Vermillion High School, County Road 600 North narrows to one lane as it passes under CSX railroad tracks.

For years, the walls of that tunnel were covered in graffiti. It was an inconvenience that people ended up driving around to avoid, and just as easy to overlook if a driver did pass through.

"I saw it and knew we could do something better with those walls," said RJ Dunavan, a Vermillion County commissioner.

He had two bottlenecks of his own — reaching CSX to get permission for the county department of transportation to paint the railroad's tunnel — and convincing other commissioners to support adding a mural.

The former took a lot of persistence on the phone and the latter took four years of wait-

ing for supporters.

"It wasn't until 2025 that we had other commissioners who supported it," Dunavan said of the work, done by the county's department of transportation to prepare the blank canvas.

With those obstacles out of the way, the county hired an Indianapolis-based pop artist, Theodore Winters, to envision and paint the mural, reading "Once a Falcon, Always a Falcon."

He also included a "state champs!" mural on the opposite wall with a large trophy.

With Winters' work done, North Vermillion's graduating seniors have taken over. This summer, the 34 members of the class of 2025 signed their names to the wall.

The county highway department closed the road on either side of the tunnel to protect the graduates as they celebrated.

As Libby Farrell gets to know her fellow freshmen at Purdue University, she hasn't heard of many of them with such a distinctive rite of passage, and virtually none among

classmates hailing from similar-sized schools.

Farrell was the student council vice president for the class of 2025.

"It was awesome to get everyone together for that and start something new," she said.

"I never heard about earlier classes doing anything like that. I think it's going to be a point of community pride when people see that, and it'll be more than just us who have the good memories of signing our names."

Dunavan said each student took a different approach to signing their names.

"You could tell some people wanted to be fancy and write in cursive, but your signature is only as good as the wall you're trying to write it on, and all the paint in the world can't make it like a piece of paper."

Farrell was neat, deliber-



The names of the North Vermillion High School Class of 2025 adorn the mural.

ate and straightforward while signing, choosing simplicity.

"I wanted to make my mark," she said. "If someone looks at the wall, they'll know my name is on it."

Dunavan said the school will work to reunite members of the 2002 girls' basketball team and 2014 football team to add their names to the wall.

"Anytime you can turn an eyesore into a community project and have the kids buy

in, that's a great win for everyone," Dunavan said.

She's only been out of high school for a few months, but the wall already means a lot to Farrell.

"Whenever I drive by, it's heartwarming," she said. "A piece of my high school memories."

That's not the only place Dunavan has added murals in Vermillion County.

The GIFT VIII Wabash River Blueway Grant has funded two murals on the Big Vermillion River on bridge embankments, painted by local artist Lindsey Franz.

Both play off the state tourism office's IN Indiana campaign. One features a kayaker — "Kayak IN Indiana" — and the other features a fisherman — "Fish IN Indiana."

"It's really hard to envision how big they are until someone who is about 6'2" stands next to it," Dunavan said. "For us, it's a quality-of-life thing. Kids love it, parents love it, everyone loves it and it gives people a reason to explore a little and check them out." **EN**



# Two S.C. counties pass hate intimidation laws

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Many county elected officials take a while to find their footing and get their bearings before proposing legislation. Not Tyra Little.

At her first Richland County Council meeting in 2025 after being elected two months before, she showed up with a goal: Passing a hate crime law that had thus far eluded the state of South Carolina. South Carolina and Wyoming are the only states without hate crime laws that cover federal bias categories: Race, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender/sex, gender identity or disability.

"I talked to the sheriff (Leon Lott) and I asked him how many charges could have been brought over the last 10 years if we had a hate crime ordinance," she said. "He

came back with something, around 110. I knew this was something we had to do."

Lott confirmed that figure.

"She came to me soon after the election, asked what an ordinance like this would mean for Richland County," Lott said. "I told her it would be a very important tool for us in law enforcement."

Little saw Richland County as a leader taking the first step to wider adoption of similar ordinances.



**LITTLE**

"Maybe by taking the first step, we could inspire other counties to do the same or show the state Legislature that this is a priority.

In South Carolina, 19 municipalities have ordinances, including two of three in Little's district.

"That showed me there was not just a need, but an interest in an ordinance," she said. "I wanted to make sure it was airtight. I talked to the county attorney, the sheriff, the so-



licitor. I brought my concerns to each of the 10 other Council members, and we talked things out."

The ordinance would make hate intimidation a misdemeanor, punishable by a \$500 fine or up to 30 days in jail. That includes targeting someone for their ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or disabilities.

"We've had people take advantage of someone who is disabled and drain their finances," Little said. "This protects a lot of people."

The ordinance passed unanimously in June, and by late July, a Richland County man was the first charged under the ordinance.

"We had a white individual who said he was going to shoot a Black man totally based on his race," Lott said. "He told us that verbally and we had video of him shooting the gun."

Richland County's example inspired another first-year official, Latisha Walker, who brought the same ordinance to the Orangeburg County Council, where it, too, passed unanimously.

"I've heard from at least one county that wants to pass an ordinance of their own," Walker said.

Lott said Richland County's ordinance had broad appeal in a county that includes the state capital, Columbia.

"All the Council members contacted me personally about it and it was passed unanimously by Republicans and Democrats on the Council," he said. "Hate is not about politics, and I think politics is taken out of this and it was done because it was the right thing to do." **CN**



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# COUNTIES FIGHT CHILD HOMELESSNESS

by Patrick Spence

Between 1% to 3% of children in the United States face homelessness over the course of a given year, with even more experiencing housing instability at some point in their lives. Child homelessness rarely takes the form most Americans picture. Instead, it's often hidden, woven into the margins of communities and schools.

Unlike many adults who may be seen sleeping outdoors, children experiencing homelessness most often stay in shelters or motels, or they "couch surf" with friends and relatives. Of the nearly 1.4 million children and youth identified by public schools as experiencing homelessness in the 2022-2023 school year,

only 5% were unsheltered, while the remaining 84% stayed in motels or other temporary arrangements.

This makes the issue harder to measure and address than adult homelessness. In general, child homelessness exists downstream of poverty and the high cost of living in the United States — and differences in levels across counties is mostly explained by variation in cost of living. Most often, a family already on the margins of economic precarity faces an economic shock — a lost job, an unex-

pected expense — and misses rent payments, gets evicted and falls into homelessness. Where the rent costs more, shocks are harder to endure and child homelessness happens more often.

## Economic pressures drive housing instability

"What I really deeply care about — and what I campaigned for as a county commissioner— is preventing homelessness and eviction in the first place," said Lori Stegmann, a former Multnomah County, Ore. commissioner and current director of the county Youth and Family Services Division. "[Counties] should not wait until people are being taken to court by their landlord" to help pre-

vent homelessness, she said.

In 2024, Multnomah County processed about 9,400 evictions, a number projected to rise to 11,000 in 2025. With a family shelter wait-list already six months long, the county sees eviction prevention as essential.

"We try to come in with emergency rent assistance," Stegmann explained. "Good luck trying to ever rent again if you go through the eviction process."

At a broader level, Stegmann pointed to the core economic pressures driving housing instability: Rising rents, utilities, gas, groceries and childcare costs—combined with stagnant wages.

"We aren't producing

See *UNHOUSED* page 8



# Counties have creative options to help stabilize homeless families in their communities

From UNHOUSED page 7

enough housing, and wages are stagnant,” she said.

With federal and state funding cuts reducing the county budget by nearly two-thirds to 2025 compared to 2024, Multnomah County is prioritizing the highest-impact strategies: Eviction prevention, rental assistance and intergovernmental collaboration.

Multnomah County and the City of Portland have adopted the Homelessness Response Action Plan, an intergovernmental agreement to jointly contribute funds. The plan focuses on preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place — through eviction prevention programs and expanding affordable housing development to ease cost burdens on families.

### Rental price surges

In Travis County, Texas, home to the city of Austin, rents have surged 25% from 2020 to 2023 before declining slightly. During this period, youth homelessness almost tripled — the on-the-ground reality of families falling through widening cracks as the cost of living climbed.

At LifeWorks Austin, a non-profit partner of the county, CEO Liz Schoenfeld describes the impact.

“Youth homelessness has increased dramatically in Austin

over the last several years for a variety of reasons — a trend that has been exacerbated by the affordability challenges faced by so many in our community,” she said.

Through coordinated entry, 1,171 unaccompanied youth were on Austin’s by-name list of those experiencing homelessness as of August 2025 — up nearly fivefold since 2020. While the broader rental market cooled in 2024 and 2025, young people often could not access these gains due to high move-in costs, credit barriers and unstable incomes. In response, Travis County and the City of Austin invested deeply in the Life-Works housing and prevention programs.

Recent funding supported Works III, a deeply affordable 120-unit apartment complex for youth exiting homelessness, alongside emergency shelter, GED classes, workforce training and mental health counseling. These interventions have helped hundreds of young people and families stabilize and kept them from entering the homelessness system, even as overall need has continued to climb.

The fallout from homelessness during childhood is profound. Lost stability disrupts critical developmental stages and chips away at well-being. Children who become homeless are more likely to have experienced domestic violence,

neglect, or parental struggles with substance use and mental health.

### Seeking stability

Stegmann underscores the connection between family violence and housing loss.

“Domestic and sexual violence is the number one cause of homelessness for women and many of those women have children,” she said.

‘I’m very proud of this, because so far, we haven’t had to turn any youth away.’

– Lori Stegmann, Multnomah County

Parents facing homelessness often go to great lengths to remain unseen, out of fear that losing their housing might also mean losing custody. This invisibility makes it harder for counties to get an accurate count and provide timely support.

The physical and emotional costs for children are steep. Unstable living conditions can mean limited access to nutritious food, routine medical care or safe environments — leading to higher rates of malnutrition, asthma and delayed growth. Schooling is often disrupted, too, as children experiencing homelessness transfer fre-

quently due to unstable housing. That instability translates into lower academic achievement, chronic absenteeism and higher dropout rates.

To confront these challenges, Multnomah County invests in youth-specific shelter and stability programs. Stegmann noted that the county currently provides about 4,000 nights of shelter beds for youth each year.

“I’m very proud of this, because so far we haven’t had to turn any youth away,” she said.

Case management services focus on family reunification, emergency shelter and long-term stability.


The county also funds Safe-Place Northwest, which partners with local businesses to offer safe pickup locations for youth in crisis. Multnomah County will pick up a young person wherever they are and take them to a shelter.

Hennepin County, Minn. is pioneering a prevention-driven answer. Through the Stable Homes Stable Schools (SHSS) initiative — a collaboration between the county, the City of Minneapolis and Minneapolis Public Schools — families with elementary-age kids receive holistically layered support.

Since 2019, SHSS has supported more than 6,400 kids and 2,300 families, with nearly \$8 million in annual funding from public and private sources. The first tier of support offers emergency short- and medi-

um-term financial assistance to families to prevent homelessness, which can be used to back pay rent, fix a car needed to get to work or other forms of assistance to keep families in their current housing. The second tier is multi-year rental assistance and wraparound services helping families escape or avoid homelessness and placing them into stable, long-term affordable housing.

“Stable Homes Stable Schools is a perfect example of what’s possible when state, local and philanthropic partners are aligned around a common goal,” said Brandon Crow, director of Housing Choice Vouchers at the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority. “We look forward to expanding the critical work of ending student homelessness in Minneapolis with this new funding.”

Permitting more housing construction makes the cost of living more bearable, but building alone isn’t enough. Alongside supportive construction policies, targeted programming such as early screening for housing instability, robust family support services and education-centered outreach give counties powerful tools to disrupt cycles of homelessness and stabilize families. 

Spence is an economic mobility program manager in the NACo County Practices and Innovations Department.

## County News Podcast: Childcare aims to be a boon to Missouri county

by Charlie Ban senior writer

Before Janet Thompson was a Boone County, Mo. commissioner, she was a public defender, and she saw the kinds of problems in her clients’ lives caused by the lack of access to early childhood education.

“If you want to make a change in a child’s life, the biggest change you can make is providing access to high quality, early childhood education,” she said. “When you look at families that do have that access and you look at individuals that don’t have

that access, all of a sudden you see the disparities that are created in systems, and then you see the paths that people might take and communities might take when there is not that access.”

Within her first month on the commission, she attended a NACo-sponsored conference that set her on a path to championing and expanding that access.

Thompson recently joined the County News Podcast to talk about what access to early childhood education could mean for children, their families and their communities. That includes her efforts net-




Boone County, Mo. Commissioner Janet Thompson Photo by Leon Lawrence III

working both statewide and nationally and the plans for Boone County’s Public Safety Childcare Center, which will provide childcare services to dispatchers, road deputies

and detention staff. That center was funded in part by a sales tax approved by Boone County



Listen to the County News Podcast on your favorite podcast player, at [www.naco.org/podcast](http://www.naco.org/podcast) or by scanning the QR code.

voters. “The goal is to collect the data, to look at the changes, again, are we transforming lives?” she said. “Are we transforming kiddos’ lives? Are we transforming parents’ lives and the trajectory of lives?” “We have to show to the community that this kind of investment works. And it works on various levels.” 



# COUNTIES ADVANCE PRENATAL-TO-3 INITIATIVES IN CHALLENGING TIMES



by Ruby Baxley

The dynamic landscape of early childhood education, shaped by the social, political and economic climate pose new challenges for families and local leadership. Counties continue to navigate these challenges and remain committed to supporting local children and families.

County-led prenatal-to-3 (PN-3) strategies are emerging as powerful tools to strengthen the foundation for lifelong health, learning and success.

During the first few years of life, brains establish 1 million new neural pathways per second; shaping educational readiness, behavior and overall growth. Counties have embraced the call to invest in robust early childhood education programs that set children on a path to thrive. Ensuring families and children have long-term access to education programs and services is at the forefront of county priorities.

For Waukesha County, Wis. Supervisor Larry Nelson, children losing access to services is a key concern.

“Once the child turns 3, they lose all county supports, which can be unsettling to a family embarking on the transition to a school setting,” he said.

## Funding hurdles

Counties continue to grapple with funding shortfalls as state and federal funding for local governments dwindle. Counties often shoulder the financial responsibility of education initiatives. Financial constraints and disproportionate financial commitments at all government levels hinder local leaders’ efforts to reach all families.

## Waukesha County’s fiscal innovation

Sharing services among counties, local organizations, health departments and educational institutions streamlines counties’ ability to deliver programs and services to children and their families. Sharing services boosts the quality of services delivered, preserves



financial viability and makes programs more accessible to families and children.

Waukesha County demonstrates this approach through its partnership with Lutheran Social Services and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services for its Birth to 3 Program (B-3). Joint government funding allows the program to serve families and children with developmental delays and equips them with educational resources and tailored therapy services to promote children’s growth. Cost-sharing mechanisms can alleviate the fiscal responsibility of Waukesha County and expand eligibility to the program.

The B-3 program focused on marketing the program to local hospitals, pediatricians and childcare agencies with the hope of increasing enrollment and helping youth access the program earlier in their life to ensure program participants get as much support as possible prior to turning 3, Nelson said.

Shelby County, Ohio is breaking new ground in education programs. Through community partnerships, it recently launched Little Playful Bears, providing childcare and

During the first years of life, brains establish 1 million neural pathways.

education through Montessori and play-based approaches. Groundwork Ohio provides policy expertise and Kids First Ohio Coalition works with private funders to find champions of PN-3 issues.

## Community engagement in Multnomah County

Collaboration is the linchpin of county success in prenatal-to-3 services. Property tax levies are one notable solution, enabling residents to shape investments in tax levies to fund education programs and services. County voters approve these taxes intermediately. Through a ballot measure, Multnomah County, Ore. residents voted to support preschool for all (PFA) with a tax increase for high-income residents. The County Department of Health Services implemented Preschool For All. The program provides tuition-free, culturally responsive and inclusive

education to 3- and 4-year-olds. In FY2026, PFA will provide free education to more than 3,000 children. The program is investing in effective steps toward universal childcare for all children and families.

Rachel Pearl, deputy director for the county’s Department of County Human Services, echoed the importance of collaboration between various partners to implement PFA.

“Our model was intentionally designed based on direct feedback from early childhood experts, parents and providers,” she said. “By prioritizing the voices of communities of color and families who have historically lacked access, we’ve built a system that ensures better outcomes for children, stability for providers and living wages for educators.”

Pearl suggested other counties hoping to build a similar program prioritize family choice and leverage a mixed-delivery model, based on Multnomah County’s experience and success.

## Partnerships across networks

Organizations like NACo reinforce solidarity among coun-

ties. These organizations offer peer learning opportunities, site visits and tools (including policy briefs and reports) to accelerate system innovation. Initiatives like the Childcare Supply Network (CSN) propel dialogue and resource-sharing among county leaders to drive the progress of childcare supply building. The CSN is a specific tailored opportunity to support a pilot program.

The CSN cohort includes Wayne County, Mich.; Multnomah County, Ore.; Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Pima County, Ariz. and Columbus-Muscogee, Ga. Resources shared by the cohorts are available at the Childcare Supply Network. By championing PN-3 initiatives through partnerships, fiscal ingenuity, community engagement and national collaboration, counties prove that local leadership can spark lasting change for children and families, setting the stage for lifelong learning and prosperity. [CN](#)

*Baxley is an intern in the NACo County Practices and Innovations Department. This CN Spotlight is supported by NACo’s Research Foundation (NACoRF).*



# RURAL COUNTIES FIND CREATIVE WAYS TO ADD CHILD-CARE OPTIONS

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

America's childcare crisis is exacerbated in rural communities, where local governments have limited funding and families have fewer options and farther distances to travel.

However, rural areas have more unique strengths than their urban counterparts that they can leverage when building childcare, such as being more naturally collaborative and community-oriented, said Heidi Hagel-Braid, president of First Children's Finance. Hagel-Braid launched the organization's Rural Child Innovation Program over a decade ago.

"Childcare in rural spaces requires leaning on 'What is the very best about rural communities?' They're flexible, they're innovative, they're highly connected," Hagel-Braid said.

Urban areas usually require more formality around establishing partnerships, whereas rural communities tend to have more of a willingness and capacity to collaborate, she said.

## Seven hats

People in rural communities "walk into a room wearing seven hats. They may be a county commissioner, a superintendent — they've got connections all across the community," Hagel-Braid said. "What is unique about rural communities is that people have multiple roles. They're interconnected, so we really like playing to that strength and positioning rural communities as their own problem-solvers."

The Rural Child Innovation Program helps rural counties create tailored action plans by gathering local data and engaging community leaders to inform where its childcare gaps are.

"You can't open up a needs assessment for a county any-

where and say, 'I know exactly what they need to do,'" Hagel-Braid said. "We've got some ideas, we know what has worked in other places, but the magic of it is allowing the community to lead their own process, and that's what makes it sustainable."

## Economic impact

According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, the economic impact of the childcare gap in rural areas falls between \$32.79 billion and \$49.93 billion (the estimates represent the initial year's economic loss plus the residual burden over the next 10 years).

It's important to frame childcare through the lens of economic development, because it's essential to the health and vibrancy of a community and a strong rural economy, Hagel-Braid said.

"We don't expect the community pool or the library to be a revenue maker in our com-

munity," Hagel-Braid said. "We invest in it because it provides a quality of life, an amenity to families who live here, and I think positioning childcare as a part of the infrastructure [is important]."

"What childcare does is so much bigger than what the library or pool is, but we sort of have this idea that it should exist and succeed on its own without any public investment, and so I think that is a really great way to continue to move that conversation forward at a community level. If you really want people to live and work in your community, making sure childcare is available is key to the survival of those rural communities."

## Transportation

A 2021 Bipartisan Policy Center survey on rural childcare found that parents in rural communities were significantly more likely to drive more than 10 miles to access childcare than parents in suburban and urban areas, and only 26%

were able to find childcare within five miles.

Rural areas also often have limited public transportation, which can make access even more difficult.

Redlands Christian Migrant Association (RCMA), a non-profit providing childcare and early education to the children of farm workers and low-income rural families across 21 Florida counties, operates its own bus system, providing transportation not only to its childcare and schools, but also to other services, such as health appointments.

## Home-based childcare

Because rural communities have limited childcare options and further distances between childcare centers, rural families are significantly more likely to use home-based childcare than their urban counterparts. Across the country, the number of licensed home-based childcare programs has been decreasing since 2005, which can partly be attributed to fewer people having the financial means to become homeowners, according to Hagel-Braid.

Home-based childcare programs "used to be one of the lowest barrier businesses to start, but it's incumbent on you owning a home, so as we see

home ownership rates shifting, that is shifting who can start these businesses," Hagel-Braid said.

If local governments want to incentivize individuals to create home-based childcare programs, they need to provide education and funding, according to Isabel Garcia, RCMA's executive director and a member of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services.

"You almost really have to start with helping them design a business model," Garcia said. "What is the contract process? What is the licensing requirements? How do you manage your money?" I also think there need to be startup funds available, because there's a lot you have to do — if you don't have a fence outside your house, you need to put one up for children, so that itself is already a big expense."

Stanislaus County, Calif.'s In-Home Child Care Expansion Project, a 12-week cohort program that walks participants through the necessary steps of launching home child-care businesses and provides the startup funds to do so, has already created 536 licensed childcare spots and is on track to help launch roughly 230 home-based childcare businesses in the county over the course of two years.

## Training a workforce

The Community Action Corporation of South Texas, serving 16 counties, works to get more childcare providers licensed in rural areas. The organization's trainer prepares individuals for a state credential exam and works with high schools and colleges to create a Child Development Associate Credential program, that would function like other certification processes where participants enter the workforce after graduating, said April Anzaldúa, director of community services and development.

## Funding

First Children's Finance worked with one county that initially planned to create a childcare center, but didn't have the funding to do so, so instead the county set up a



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# COUNTIES SUPPLEMENT CHILD-CARE WAGES TO ADDRESS A MARKET THAT'S BROKEN

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Parents in Johnson County, Iowa needed to start saving for their children's education much earlier than they anticipated.

In 2022, a family with two children in childcare would pay \$26,300 per year — more than twice the tuition at the nearby University of Iowa.

"And they're not walking out of it with a big degree or a higher paying job," said Laurie Nash, Youth and Family Service manager for the county.

That's not to say there aren't tremendous benefits to early childhood education, but the cost has been enough to force families into challenging decisions about parents' participation in the workforce and frustration at trying to find care for young children. The wages paid in the childcare sector — averaging \$11.16 per hour — were the lowest for any tracked profession in the county. Challenges staffing childcare programs drove a 12% decrease in their numbers in the prior five years.

"The childcare business model is very different than almost any other business model," Nash said. "If they raise their rates, they're going to price families out, but if they take on more families, they have to add another staff person. It's not as simple as 'lower your costs or increase your profits' — childcare doesn't work that way — so that is why we have to come up with creative solutions because business solutions just don't work."

Different state-mandated



ratios of children to adults only complicate staffing. Infants require more supervision than toddlers.

Johnson County is trying out a wage-enhancement program that helps make the childcare sector less burdensome for workers, with hopes of improving the overall business model in the county. Workers at licensed childcare centers serving children up to age 5 that pay at least the county's recommended \$11.56 minimum wage are eligible for a \$2 per-hour wage paid for through a public-private partnership.

The three-year pilot program combines funding from Johnson County and Iowa City, along with sponsorships from the local business community.

"We don't see this as charitable giving," Nash said of the outreach to the business community. "We don't want to compete with their charitable giving. This is more like workforce development. Lots of businesses might pay for part

of their employees' health-care or for a gym membership or help with transportation. Childcare is just another infrastructure piece that has to be there for employees to be able to come to work."

The program is two years into its three-year pilot — the public funding came from the American Rescue Plan Act. Roughly 100 childcare staff are participating, compared to a 110-person control group. So far, surveys have shown that fewer people in the wage-enhancement program are identifying their financial situation as "not secure" and participating employers are seeing lower turnover.

"We're also seeing that some of the providers are able to lower their tuition," Nash said. "That was one of the things that we were hoping would happen, was that we would be able to increase childcare provider wages without increasing tuition for parents."

Providers have also reported feeling like they're in a more competitive recruiting position.

"When they have a position to fill, they're getting more applications and they're getting higher quality applicants, so they actually can choose well-qualified applicants instead of just having to take whatever applications kind of walk in the door," Nash said. "And if they stay in the field and gain more experience, they're better prepared to deal with some of those challenges that come up."

A human resources director responded to a survey that the wage enhancement had given her childcare center a similar boost.

"Thanks to the program, we consistently receive a higher volume of applicants for these roles compared to our other job postings," the director wrote. "This directly supports our ability to staff the children's center with experienced professionals who are deeply committed to the care and development of the children we serve."

The federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act will end in 2026, but the county is

working to continue the wage enhancement program. Voters will decide a local option sales tax in November, and if passed, a portion of that revenue will fund the program. Private sector promotion will continue.

"We know that not one sector is going to be able to do this to sustain this all by itself, but if we're working together with both of those groups then we're hoping that that will be enough just to sustain the program," Nash said.

Other counties are trying similar efforts to supplement childcare wages:

- King County, Wash. is offering up to four \$2,080 payments each through 2027 thanks to a pilot program funded by a 2021 levy, Best Starts for Kids, The Seattle Times reported.
- A 2020 sales tax in Alameda County, Calif. is funding a total of \$165.8 million in the form of \$85 million in grants to cover childcare providers' operating expenses and staff, \$25 million in grants for family support and \$20 million in facilities grants, with the rest covering administrative and evaluation costs, The Oaklandside reported.
- North Shore Community Radio reported that Cook County, Minn. used a \$385,000 Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development grant to supplement \$6.11 per hour.
- Travis County, Texas voters approved a tax increase that will fund \$75 million to add 1,900 spots for newborns and 3,900 after-school and summer programs. It would also match employer contributions to make childcare an employee benefit, according to the Texas Standard. **CN**

## 'Taking small steps' on childcare initiatives can create momentum in rural counties

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pool of forgivable loans to start family childcare businesses.

"What they ended up doing was creating the same amount of spaces for \$50,000 instead of a probably multimillion-dol-

lar price tag of one childcare center that may not have been able to survive and sustain itself," Hagel-Braid said. "They created the same number of slots with a significantly less amount of money with greater flexibility, and it was dispersed

across a geographic area that allowed for people to access it who live in different places across the county."

The childcare crisis can feel like an overwhelming obstacle, especially for rural communities that don't

have funding to build out expensive solutions, but small initiatives and progress can be really meaningful, Hagel-Braid said.

"I think communities can get really overwhelmed by the size and scale of the issue,"

Hagel-Braid said. "... But, just taking small steps forward can create momentum in your community ... because there's immense power in a rural community, and harnessing that really can be transformational." **CN**



# NACo in the '60s: A new vision and a new name

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

As NACo celebrates its 90th year, *County News* is serializing a book commemorating the occasion. You can read it in full and learn more about NACo's anniversary at [www.naco.org/90](http://www.naco.org/90).

In 1957, what was then the National Association of County Officers recruited Bernie Hillenbrand, assistant director of the American Municipal Association, a precursor to the National League of Cities. He was the only full-time lobbyist in the nation's capital for cities, counties and state governments and was busy covering a variety of issues ranging from highway funding to water pollution. Hillenbrand accepted the job of executive director after noticing the emerging national influence of counties. He became NACo's first full-time staffer.

Hillenbrand worked out of an unused Mayflower Hotel laundry room and took meetings across the street in the hotel's opulent lobby. Hillenbrand's desk that once occupied that laundry room now rests in NACo's current office.

The Wilmington News Journal described Hillenbrand's secret to NACo's success over his 25 years as executive director, a time in which he outlasted the leaders of virtually every other public interest group:

"His lobbying method was to research an issue of concern to counties, decide upon a strategy, give county officials a crash course and send them over to Capitol Hill to corner legislators they knew. It worked."

In 1957, NACo compiled all of its previous policy resolutions into a single guiding document: The "American County Platform."

That platform included a basic policy that was included in the first report of President Eisenhower's Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, known colloquially as the Kes-



**Bernie Hillenbrand raises his hat in front of the U.S. Capitol. He was hired as NACo's first executive director in 1957, serving until 1982.**

tnbaum Commission:

"Leave to private initiative all the functions that citizens can perform privately; Use the level of government closest to the community for all the public functions it can handle; Use comparative intergovernmental arrangements where appropriate to obtain economical performance and popular approval; Reserve national action for residual participation where state and local governments are not fully adequate and for the continuing responsibilities that only national government can undertake."

NACo also fought for representation on the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), a successor to the Kestnbaum Commission, after the body was announced to include just state and city leaders. Sen. Karl Mundt (R-S.D.) responded with a successful amendment which provided that three county officials nominated by NACo be added to the four city officials nominated by NACo's sibling associations, the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

NACo nominated three representatives: Westchester County, N.Y. Executive Edwin

G. Michaelian, Wayne County, Mich. Supervisor Edward Connor and Plumas County, Calif. Supervisor Clair Donnenwirth. They played leading roles in the work of the commission and were critical to the appointment of William G. Colman as ACIR's first executive director. The commission would last until Sept. 30, 1996.

Hillenbrand and NACo's growing staff moved out of the laundry room and into other office space in the same building, though they still entertained in the Mayflower Hotel's lobby.

## Maturity

NACo President Mark Johnson, a Salt Lake County, Utah commissioner, empaneled the "Committee on the Future" to figure out a funding fix that would allow counties, rather than individuals, to become NACo members. Fulton County, Ga. Commissioner Jim Aldredge noted that counties could legally purchase services that included printing, painting and plumbing. Why not market NACo as an information service? That solution was the County Information Service, which offered publications, information, analysis and other materials with fees

based on population. The service also required that counties be in good stead with their state associations.

The plan made NACo fiscally viable in 1959 but also met a longstanding desire of a generation of leaders: for counties to have a single home and to match the drive for equitable apportionment of representation in state legislatures and Congress. The new membership structure allowed NACo to demonstrate that its actions reflected the needs of citizens.

In 1962, the association found its home in a name, when the National Association of County Officers became the National Association of Counties, reflecting the change that the counties, rather than offi-

cers, were the members.

"NACo was a place where county leaders can get together, talk about the problems they are facing and find solutions," Hillenbrand said in June 2018. "There was a comradeship you can't get anywhere else, and bonding, seeing the same people every year at our meetings. People would look forward to 'next year.'"

As the role of the federal government expanded during the Great Depression and World War II, the federal government needed an effective way to partner with counties to administer the growing number of social service and economic development programs. NACo tried several methods for reaching out. A series of state-by-state syndicated articles examined federal aid programs, then a newsletter tailored to the needs of state associations and affiliates. A grant from the Ford Foundation in 1958 funded a full-time position to expand information services offered in *The County Officer*.

The Monday Letter followed in the wake of NACo's increased influence in Washington, D.C. Every Friday, the entire NACo staff summarized the week's developments in terms of possible local implementation or action opportunities. It was mailed to several hundred leaders, arriving on Monday mornings. In the 1960s, it was replaced by NACo News and Views, which offered broader content for a wider circulation. It would later be supplanted by *County News*, which continues to this day, regardless of challenges to its deadline.

## Quick work

Hillenbrand applied in 1958 for a five-year matching grant of \$160,000 from the Ford Foundation, which foundation staffer Paul Ylvisaker approved. When Ylvisaker called Hillenbrand to tell him the grant would be approved, he set off a minor panic. Ylvisaker asked for NACo's tax exemption number under Section 501(c)(3) but NACo



**A predecessor to *County News* reports on Washington.**

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was a civic organization organized under 501(c)(4). Without a tax exemption number, NACo would not be awarded the grant.

Hillenbrand immediately retained a Wilmington, Del. law firm to draft new bylaws and incorporation papers for "The Local Government Education And Research, Inc.," later changed to The NACo Research Foundation.

The papers were delivered to the NACo office, and a party of staffers carried the completed package by hand to the IRS regional office in Baltimore. The new documents got the group a temporary exemption and a number that satisfied Ylvisaker and the Ford Foundation.

That was a Friday afternoon, and Hillenbrand sent the documents via special delivery to Ylvisaker's home in Sussex County, N.J., and NACo's staff celebrated. Prematurely, it turned out.

The following Sunday brought a blizzard that paralyzed the New York area, and Ylvisaker spent the next day trying to navigate to the Ford Foundation offices, arriving with only five minutes before the Board was set to adjourn.

That grant fueled expansion that would have otherwise taken five years to finance. NACo was able to move to a more traditional office space at 1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, an ironic address because in 1960, Connecticut abolished county governments.

The funding helped establish a central clearinghouse on administrative reorganization, charters, state enabling legislation, modern budgeting and finance and other aspects of streamlining county government. Staff analyzed administrative problems and published results. Training programs and educational sessions were added to regular NACo meetings.

**Urban expansion**

The demographic shifts and migration to cities and suburbs placed 60 percent of the nation's population in the largest 300 counties by 1959. In response, NACo conducted its first Urban County Con-

gress that March. The three-day meeting drew more than 900 attendees and represented a quick pivot away from the reputation of county governments that one attendee noted was "a unit of government that was outmoded, archaic, a product of horse and buggy days and probably doomed to extinction."

NACo's President C. Beverly Briley, Davidson County, Tenn. judge, served as keynote speaker and told the attendees: "The way to focus the babble of voices (on urban problems) into a single strong voice is to make county government again the dominant local government. I say this is the only way."

The meeting drew two national luminaries — Vice President Richard Nixon and Sen. John F. Kennedy (D-Mass.) — who would compete for the presidency the next year.

Nixon: "You are faced with a thousand challenges. Further, your responsibilities for the welfare of your fellow citizens will be greatly increased, as an estimated one million acres become urban and suburban each year. Men, it seems, have always been faced with a form of the problems you must now solve. As our ancestors met the challenges of their times, so I have faith that you will help us meet this generation's."

Kennedy: "It is clear that our city governments cannot always assume the sole responsibility for the solution of these pressing urban problems. I repeat they cannot — our state governments will not — the federal government should not — and therefore you on the county level must. It is up to counties and similar area governments to play a more important role in the solution of urban problems."

In 1962, NACo shifted its attention from primarily rural issues to a balanced program that assisted every county, regardless of population. A county urban advisor joined the staff and represented a contact point between urban counties and key federal agencies that provided technical and financial aid on problems such as urban renewal, civil defense, mass transit and sewage treatment.

Hillenbrand staked out

NACo's position that year.

"We recognize the need for federal and state government, but we strongly believe that federal and state participation should supplement and not replace local decision making," he said.

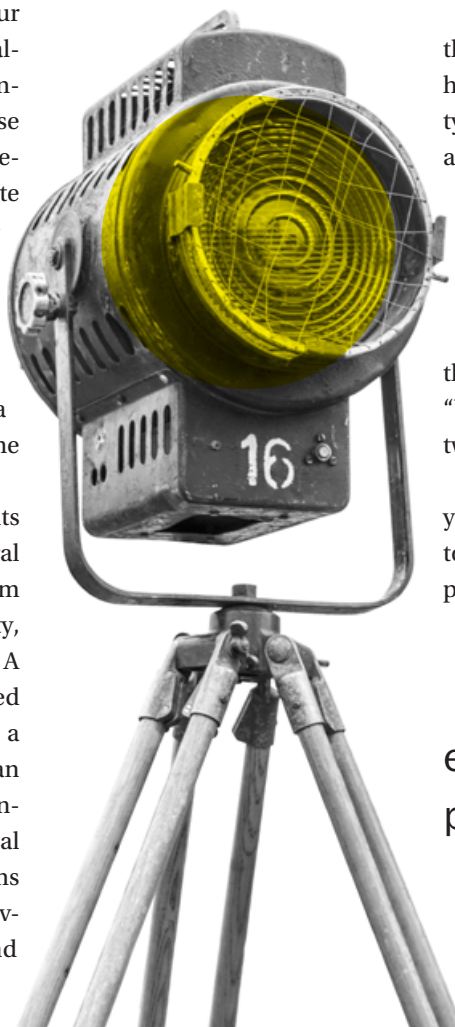
Counties' place in this intergovernmental partnership became evident that October, when NACo was among the organizations summoned to the Pentagon for an emergency consultation during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Counties would need accurate and timely information to keep their citizens as safe as possible, and NACo staff would be placed on alert to pass on new information as quickly as possible to local officials. That meant constantly staying in touch with Pentagon leaders for the next two weeks.

"It was clear to us that if the Communists did not back down, there would be war," Hillenbrand said.

**The spotlight shines on NACo**

The presidential campaign of 1964 provided NACo with several opportunities to build its rapport with national leaders.

NACo was meeting in Washington during the week the Democrats held their nation-



**President Lyndon Baines Johnson offers a ceremonial pen to a county official following a bill signing.**

al convention in Atlantic City, and Sen. Hubert Humphrey was to be NACo's banquet speaker. Humphrey was a likely vice-presidential nominee on Lyndon Johnson's ticket, and that raised expectations for press coverage. Staff went to the Sheraton Park Hotel to make arrangements with those responsible for the banquet.

"Do you want a spotlight?"

"Sure."

"The spotlight people charge \$100."

"That is unreasonable!"

"Those are the union rates."

"Well, OK. It's an important occasion."

"Is there any chance that Sen. Humphrey will speak longer than 25 minutes?"

Even by the standards of the U.S. Senate, Humphrey had a reputation for loquacity, so this question prompted a laugh.

"In that case you will have two spotlight people because they only work for 25 minutes at a time."

"This is highway robbery," the NACo staffer countered, "but I guess we'll have to have two."

"But union rules are that if you have two spotlight operators, there must also be a supervisor present."

"And how much do supervi-

**"I'm not an entertainer, I'm a politician and I'm working tonight. Please turn off the lights!"**

sors get paid?"

"They get \$150."

Eventually the expensive personnel agreement was handed out and the great night came. There were 82 NACo officers and directors at the head table. Senator Humphrey walked the entire length in a blazing spotlight, shaking every outstretched hand. There were lights from dozens of TV cameras. Then he came to the lectern, still in the spotlight. He held his arm up to shield his eyes and said, "I'm not an entertainer, I'm a politician and I'm working tonight. Please turn off the lights!"

Humphrey got the second spot on LBJ's ticket, and the Republican Party nominated Arizona Sen. Barry M. Goldwater and New York Rep. William Miller. A year in advance of its 1964 conference, NACo invited Sen. Goldwater to speak and he readily accepted. But in the late summer of 1964, things were different. Goldwater was the Republican nominee for president, and he had announced that he would be spending the next few weeks planning his campaign and not speaking in public.

"Senator," a New York leader told the Arizonan on the telephone, "we congratulate you on winning the presidential nomination, but we're disappointed that you were not going to address the NACo meeting."

"Who says?" Goldwater replied. "I told you a year ago that I would attend, and I don't go back on my word."

Goldwater's appearance before the Annual Conference turned out to be the opening speech of his campaign. **CN**



PROFILES IN SERVICE

DANNY DE HOOG

NACo Board Member  
President, National Association of Intergovernmental Relations Officials



DE HOOG

Number of years active in NACo: Nine

Years in public service: 10

My first NACo event was:  
The 2016 NACo Legislative Conference

Occupation: Public safety funding director and senior manager of government relations for Maricopa County, Ariz.

Education: Master's degree in public administration from Arizona State University (go Devils!) and bachelor's in political studies from Trinity Western University

The hardest thing I've ever done: Passed two master's-level statistics courses.

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Jane Austen, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Alicia Keys

A dream I have is to: Purchase and renovate an old property in Tuscany, Italy.

You'd be surprised to learn that I: Started my career in public service working for a member of the Canadian House of Commons from Newfoundland.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Zipline "Superman" style over Fremont Street in Vegas during the NACo Annual Conference.

My favorite way to relax is: Cuddling with my three dogs!

I'm most proud of: Successfully directing a citizens' public safety funding committee to review the current funding sources for the county jail operations. This led to a huge legislative lift getting a bill across the finish line that will allow the county to put a measure on the ballot next year to extend our existing public safety funding tax.

Every morning I read: "Wake up to Politics" and the Arizona Agenda — enough to get a summary of what is going on in federal, state and local government.

My favorite meal is: Fish tacos with fresh salsa.

My pet peeve is: Being late.

My motto is: It's gonna be great!

The last book I read was: "Murder on the Orient Express."

My favorite music is: California Beach Hip-Hop

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: We value the strength NACo provides to counties through partnership and collaboration.

My favorite movie is: "Pride and Prejudice"



(... "the 1995 version.")

ON THE MOVE

NACo MEMBERS

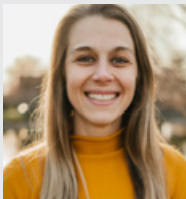
- President **J.D. Clark** and Budget and Grants Manager **Andrea Newsom** attended the Association of Arkansas Counties Annual Conference in Benton County.
- **Clark**, Executive Director **Matt Chase** and Program Director **Jennifer Kuiper** attended the Hawaii Association of Counties Annual Conference in Hawaii County.
- **Clark**, **Chase** and Associate Membership Director **Grace Dunlap** attended the Texas Association of Counties Annual Conference in Travis County.
- **Clark**, **Dunlap** and Chief Government Affairs Officer **Mark Ritacco** attended the South

Carolina Association of Counties Annual Conference in Charleston County.

- First Vice President **George Dunlap**, **Chase**, **Grace Dunlap** and National Director of Executive Relationships **Craig Holmes** attended the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Annual Conference in Pitt County.
- Northeast Region Representative **Tammy Tincher**, **Chase**, **Holmes**, Public Promise Procurement National Program Director **Anthony Chapman** and Legislative Director **Ben Gilsdorf** attended the New York State Association of Counties Annual Conference in Niagara County.

NACo STAFF

- **Shelby Butz** has joined NACo as associate program director for environment and land use. She was previously a scientist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. She earned a doctorate in environmental health and a master's degree in marine sciences from the University of South Carolina.



Butz

- **Heidi Cooper** has joined NACo as a senior program manager for workforce. She



was previously a technical officer for FHI 360. She earned a doctorate in theater and drama from the University of Wisconsin and a master's degree in puppetry arts from the University of Connecticut.

- **Jared Grigas** has joined NACo as an associate legislative director for community, economic and workforce development. He previously served as



Grigas

associate director of public policy at the Florida Association of Counties. He earned a master's of Public Adminis-

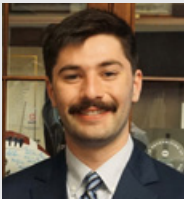
tration at Wake Forest University and a bachelor's degree in political science and government from the University of Florida.

- **Amy Maxon** has joined NACo as senior program manager for public health. She was previously a senior program analyst at the National Association of County and City Health Officials, and earned a master's degree in public health at the George Washington University.



Maxon

- **Andrew Nober** has joined NACo as a legislative



Nober

assistant. He previously served as an intern for Rep. Marc Veasey (D-Texas) and the U.S. Department of Transportation. He earned a bachelor's degree in social studies from Harvard University.

- **Michelle Ralston** has joined NACo as an assistant for the National Center for Public Lands Counties. She has served in municipal, county, state and federal government roles and earned a master's degree in English from Northern Arizona University and a bachelor's de-



Ralston

gree in education from Arizona State University.

- **Tammy Moore** has joined NACo as a staff accountant. She previously served as a certified medical coder for the Arkansas Heart Hospital and a staff accountant/office manager for Em/Urgent Care, Inc.



Moore

- Managing Director **Eryn Hurley** and Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Partner Engagement **Rick Hart** attended the Midwest State Associations Conference in Stone County, Mo.

- **Ritacco**, **Grigas**, **Holmes**, Legislative Directors **Blaire Bryant** and **Brett Mattson**, Associate Legislative Director **Julia Cortina** and Membership Manager **Pricilla Chrap-pah** attended the Maryland Association of Counties Annual Conference in Worcester County.

- **Mattson** and Special Assistant to the CEO **Alyx Hawkins** attended the Association of County Commissioners of Alabama Annual Conference in Baldwin County.

- **Chase** and **Grace Dunlap** attended the Maine County Commissioners Association Annual Conference in Sagadahoc County.

- **Grace Dunlap** attended the Utah Association of Counties Annual Conference in Davis County.





# INVEST IN COUNTY LEADERSHIP: NEW NACo LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

More than two-thirds of the nation's 3,069 counties are strengthening their leaders through the NACo Leadership Academies. Designed for busy professionals, these online programs deliver practical, immediately applicable skills without disrupting daily responsibilities.

A recent graduate from Pennington County, S.D., shared:

*"This program truly opened my eyes to what it means to be a leader... I now feel I have a stronger sense of the leader I aspire to become and the leadership style I want to embody." — Marketing Manager, Pennington County, South Dakota*

## A renewed commitment to county leaders

NACo and the Professional Development Academy have renewed their partnership for another five years with a shared goal to train more than 20,000 county professionals. The Professional Development Academy is widely regarded as the gold standard for developing leaders in local government — trusted by counties nationwide for its practical curriculum, expert faculty and measurable results.

## Why invest now

Even as counties navigate budget cuts, leadership development is a force multiplier — improving service delivery, team performance, retention and cross-department collaboration. The right skills help frontline supervisors and emerging leaders do more with less, accelerate projects and sustain momentum through change.

Now is the perfect time to take advantage of this opportunity. The program's standard tuition is \$2,995, but NACo member counties

receive discounted pricing starting at \$2,000 per enrollee, with additional group discounts available (five participants for \$5,000).

Questions? Contact Luke Afeman  
at [lukea@pdaleadership.com](mailto:lukea@pdaleadership.com)

## Enroll in these upcoming cohorts

### Leading on Purpose (Phase II for HPLA graduates) – Starts Oct. 15

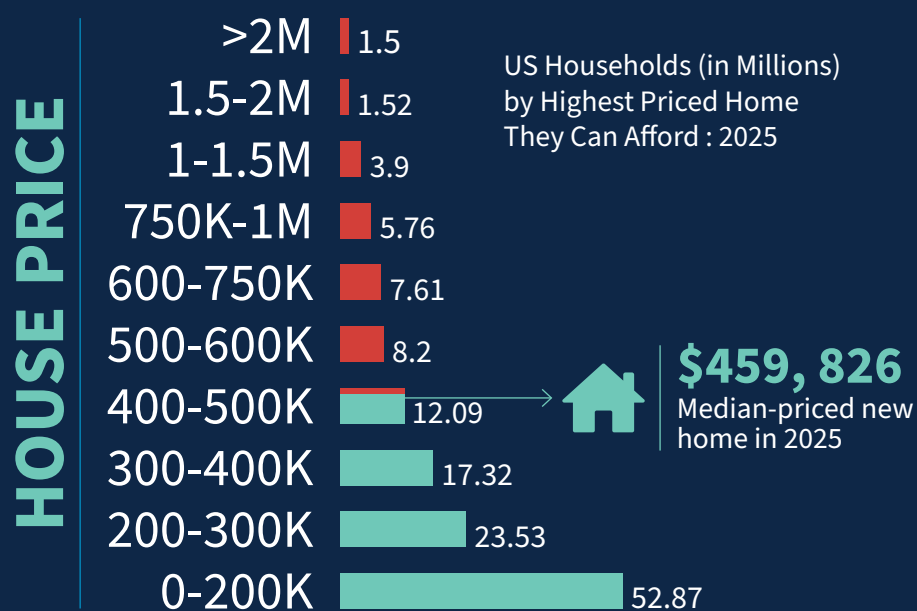
<https://edge.naco.org/naco-leading-on-purpose-academy/>



## AI Leadership Academy – Starts Nov. 15

<https://www.naco.org/page/naco-artificial-intelligence-ai-leadership-academy>

**Roughly 75% of all U.S. households are unable to afford a median-priced new home.**



## US Households (in Millions) by Highest Priced Home They Can Afford : 2025

**\$459,826**  
Median-priced new home in 2025



**Let's work  
TOGETHER**  
to make housing  
more attainable

Source: Calculations by the National Association of Home Builders Housing Policy Department, based on income data from the 2023 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample File, U.S. Census Bureau

Visit [nahb.org/homebuilding101](http://nahb.org/homebuilding101)







NOW I KNOW...

... Solid Waste Is Complicated

by Will Naillon  
Custer County, Idaho  
commissioner

I started as a commissioner this year, and while I have some transferrable skills from working as a game and fish commissioner and working with the Department of Environmental Quality managing a mine site, there was still quite a learning curve. Solid waste was the biggest eye opener.

I'd love to go back to the days when your garbage just went away. It turns out it never does. It was one of the things that people often take for granted until it's their job to make sure it happens. That's the story of being a county commissioner.

We don't have a landfill, but residents wanted one and the commissioners were trying to make it happen, but the cost was incredible to get it done.

I think that coming in, I was able to bring some new vigor. The long hard effort was wear-

ing on people.


It was clear right away that I didn't know a thing about solid waste. You can get on the internet and learn things, but I wanted to see things firsthand. I felt like I owed it to the public.

Anytime I was somewhere outside of Custer County, I toured their landfills and transfer sites and tried to learn. I learned a lot from Elmore County, Idaho and Park County, Mont.

It was pretty clear early on that a landfill wasn't going to be a viable solution for us in a county of 4,400 people. You need between 8,000 to 10,000 people for a self-sustaining county — that's the magic number. Otherwise, the money's just not there. We couldn't ask the taxpayers to support that the way our county exists now.

So now we just want to build a transfer station so that we can be more efficient transporting our waste to a landfill outside of the county. We can

put that in the county seat, Challis, and locate convenience stations in two other communities and that should offer a good level of service.

In the process of running for office, I found out that my grandfather was a Custer County commissioner 100 years ago. My family homesteaded here, and we knew a lot of our family history, but nobody mentioned this grandfather until my sister mentioned that our grandmother said something about Grandpa Dave years ago. My mom didn't know anything about it and neither did virtually anyone else in my family until my sister went to the county clerk's office and looked in the old logbook. There it was - David Johnson. I wonder what he learned about county government in his first year? 

*Now I Know features leaning experiences from county officials as told to senior writer Charlie Ban.*

WORD SEARCH

HENRY COUNTY, ALABAMA

Created by Mary Ann Barton

U E K L N X X Q M Y E W S O M P E H D Z  
I J S A J Y Q V D Z T V X U A O Z J T N  
L C B U O S F S E I R X S Z H D V I D Y  
A R E U O T D H X W E C V V R W J W Z N  
U D P S S H P K W G O U Y X M E G K J R  
W B F R N J T V D G V X L C Y I G C U O  
F D I X V H F R E G P S G V K F C Y Y C  
E F E H P M Y E U N G Z R N Q W Y T H N  
M T G V I K Q T A O W O I Y P K F P P K  
S L U G K A R B R X C P G F D H K R A J  
Q T O S T G B V E A G M R E O E V S R U  
L W U R U E F P T S Q I C C N R D C G X  
X R I N V F M W S H H E A D L A N D O X  
T W E I A J G S A T E S C R F L I U P P  
P V L O B E U Y S A J N G M P D F C O Q  
J L E Z B M P I I P J V R X W W U B T O  
E Y A D P E R H D K T A W Y W O O R J K  
Z D B E N M A H W Q J F X L I S O J M W  
G Q P J V A I B M U L O C V A S T D E L  
I I E E L B A T O N B I T W S G I L S H

**ABBEVILLE:** The county seat moved several times: first Richmond (now defunct), then Columbia (1826–1833), before settling in Abbeville in 1833.

**COLUMBIA:** As a major trading center and steamboat port on the Chattahoochee River, Columbia served briefly as the county seat before being shifted to Abbeville in 1833.

**COURTHOUSE:** While the county has had several historic courthouses through the years, the current modern courthouse was constructed in 1966, is three stories tall and features a grand façade of 46 columns.

**DISASTER:** A devastating fire in 1906 destroyed much of its business district. Then, in 2002, an F2 tornado struck Kirkland Street, causing significant damage.

**FIRST:** Henry County was officially created Dec. 13, 1819, a day before Alabama became a state on Dec. 14, 1819.

**HEADLAND:** Founded in 1871 by James Joshua Head, Headland became the largest city in the county around 1960, briefly lost the title, but regained it by 1980. By 2020, its population reached nearly 5,000.

**HENRY:** The county is named in honor of Patrick Henry, the famed orator and first governor of Virginia.

**HERALD:** The Abbeville Herald is a weekly newspaper published in the county, in print since 1915, initially as the Southeast Alabamian.

**MUSCOGEE:** Prior to European-American settlement, the area was home to the Muscogee (Lower Creek) Native Americans for thousands of years and shifted hands between Spain, France, Great Britain and the United States.

**NOTABLE:** Some of the famous residents of the county include MLB baseball player Monte Irwin, rockabilly musician Curley Money and journalist Grover C. Hall.

**PEANUTS:** Henry County plays an important role in peanut production, supporting Alabama's identity as a leading peanut state.

**TOPOGRAPHY:** Part of the East Gulf Coastal Plain, the county is marked by gentle rolling hills, flat plains and river valleys, characteristics of the Wiregrass Region of southeast Alabama.

**URBAN:** The county is near at least three urban cities including Columbus, Ga. (85 miles NE); Tallahassee, Fla. (90 miles SE) and Montgomery, Ala. (110 miles NW).

**VAST:** At its formation, Henry County encompassed a vast region that later became nine other counties: Barbour, Coffee, Covington, Crenshaw, Dale, Geneva, Houston, Pike, and parts of others.

**WOOD:** Headquartered in the county, Great Southern Wood (which got its start in 1970), is the county's largest employer, with reportedly more than 1,000 employees.

BEHIND  
THE  
SEAL

YOLO COUNTY,  
CALIF.

The Yolo County, Calif. Arts Council commemorated the dedication of the new county administration building in 1982 by commissioning Sacramento artist Mike McCarthy to design a county seal. In 1984, the Board of Supervisors accepted the seal.

The seal's design feature a book that symbolizes the county's educational system, highlighted by the University of California, Davis

A barn is also featured, symbolizing agriculture, which is the county's leading industry



A boat illustrates port shipping, centered on the inland Port of West Sacramento, which joins California's Central Valley and its crops with the rest of the world.

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at [cban@naco.org](mailto:cban@naco.org).



## BRIGHT IDEAS | ERIE COUNTY, N.Y.

# Erie County Offers Paid Hands-On Training Program to Help Staff Park System Openings

**PROBLEM:** The county needed to fill vacant park staff positions, but applicants didn't have the necessary training.

**SOLUTION:** Create a training and internship program for people interested in working for the park service.

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Facing a lack of qualified candidates for its park system staff, Erie County, N.Y. created Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps, a training and internship program, to provide its low-income young residents with more job opportunities and better serve its park system.

Erie County is using federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding to put Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps participants through six weeks of paid, specialized training for skills needed to be an effective staff member of the parks department.

Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps is modeled off the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program that gave unemployed young men job opportunities and improved America's public lands and parks during the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, according to Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz.

The parks department is partnering on the program with the county's social services department, workforce investment board and Erie 1 BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services), a vocational training organization for youth.

Any county resident, ages 18 to 22, living at less than 200% of the federal poverty level is eligible to participate, and each six-week cohort has roughly 12 participants.

"If you hire individuals to work in a parks department, and they don't even know what a chainsaw is — let alone



Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps participants undergo six weeks of training to prepare them for working in the county parks system. Photo courtesy of Jason Hurley

how to use one — they're not going to succeed," Poloncarz said.

"And you're going to spend a lot of time training them on the job, when you really would hope that those individuals have the training beforehand."

Abner Garcia, a Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps participant, learned how to use tools, such as a chop saw and power drill, and the processes of facility and grounds maintenance, including measuring and cutting wood, during his training.

"I learned a lot with the little amount of time that we had," Garcia said. "... What re-

'I've gained a lot of trustworthiness, a lot of workmanship,' Garcia said. "And I'm just learning a lot, to be honest.'

ally helped me, aside from the work, was learning teamwork and cooperation. Me and my crew, we all had a role, and we played it very well.

"We had workers chopping down trees into little logs, and then me and my partner would grab those logs and we would chip it, so you keep a flow."

After the training is completed, participants begin paid internships with the parks department.

Garcia interned for six months, doing maintenance work, such as weed-whacking, leaf-blowing and shoveling and salting snow. He's since been hired as a seasonal park attendant.

Nearly every participant who completes the program

and wants a job has been connected to one — if not through the county's parks, then through New York state or the city of Buffalo's systems, according to Poloncarz.


"Once they get through the training, if they want a job, they've been able to find them," Poloncarz said. "And what's successful about it is, not only do they have careers in the future, but it saves us from trying to train people on the job, which is not easy and can take a lot of time and money, by giving them the specialized training needed up front for not a long period [of time]."

Because the program is intended to benefit the county's younger, low-income population, the social services department helps connect potential participants to it by identifying and reaching out to young adults who are unemployed or on public assistance, according to Poloncarz. Garcia first heard about the program through a friend who had seen a flyer for it.

"It definitely seemed like a good opportunity to connect to a job," Garcia said. "I was working retail before, so it seemed like a good change."

Garcia said he enjoys working seasonally for the parks and wants to continue doing so as long as possible.

"I've gained a lot of trustworthiness, a lot of workmanship," Garcia said. "And I'm just learning a lot, to be honest. I'm being shown stuff I've never seen before, so I'm just exploring and improving as I go."

As for advice Garcia has for future Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps participants: "Definitely get some steel-toed boots," he said with a laugh. 

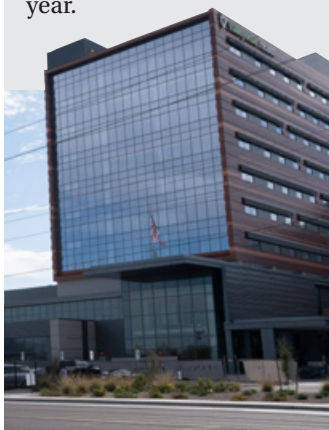
*Erie County's Workforce Buffalo Erie Corps program was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in Personnel Management, Employment and Training.*



## ARIZONA

Early voting on a public health measure begins next month, when **MARICOPA COUNTY** voters will decide on Proposition 409, a nearly \$900 million bond measure. Unanimously approved by the Maricopa County Special Health Care District Board of Directors in April, the bond would support Valleywise Health, the county's **public hospital system**. According to Valleywise chief clinical officer Dr. Michael White, the system is operating at capacity and struggling to provide timely care.

If approved, the \$898 million bond would fund the construction of a new 200-bed behavioral health hospital, a new outpatient specialty center and the expansion of pediatric and primary care services. It would also support enhancements in physician training and add observation beds at the main medical center. This follows a similar 2014 bond measure, when 63% of voters approved \$935 million for improvements that included a new medical facility opened last year.



## COLORADO

• **EL PASO COUNTY** is using **creative storytelling** to get the word out about preventable deaths. The third episode of



## FLORIDA

**OLUSIA COUNTY** is launching a farming initiative as part of its **Second Chance Reentry Services Program**, aiming to reduce the nearly \$112 daily cost of housing inmates. By expanding the jail garden by 1 acre to grow produce like lettuce, cabbage, potatoes and onions, officials hope to cut food expenses while providing inmates with fresh, healthy meals. The program expands its hydroponic gardening, that includes growing mangroves to protect coastlines from hurricanes.

Beyond financial savings, the program offers inmates hands-on training with farming equipment such as tractors and tillers, giving them skills that could lead to job opportunities after release. Reentry Coordinator Chris Lorenti emphasized the value of teaching inmates practical skills, while County Vice Chairman Matt Reinhart highlighted the dual benefit of reducing food costs and promoting rehabilitation. Leaders believe the initiative will give inmates a sense of purpose and structure, ultimately supporting a smoother reintegration into society.

a county video series on YouTube, "Dead on Arrival" opens with what appears to be a homicide: A man is found dead in his home, the front door kicked in and a trail of blood leading to his body.

The scene suggests foul play, but as the episode progresses, reenactments performed by county communications staff and the Coroner's Office reveal a more nuanced and tragic reality. The death is ultimately ruled accidental — caused by a combination of long-term alcohol abuse and a head injury. Like previous installments, this episode is based on a real case investigated by the coroner's office,

offering a sobering look into the often-unexpected truths behind sudden deaths, *The Tribune* reported.

According to County Coroner Dr. Emily Russell-Kinsley, the goal of the series is to educate the public about preventable causes of death and how individuals can protect themselves and their loved ones. The series began in 2023 with a debut episode focused on the risks of accidental fentanyl overdose — a year in which the county recorded more than 100 deaths linked to the drug.

• **PUEBLO COUNTY** commissioners are pushing back on

**unfunded mandates**, asking the Colorado General Assembly to reconsider state bills that require counties to change the way they spend money, joining a coalition that includes **MESA** and **GARFIELD** counties. A resolution to send the letter was approved recently by a 3-0 vote by the commissioners.

## FLORIDA

• As Florida's housing market continues to strain residents, **MARTIN COUNTY** is exploring ways to make **living there more affordable**: letting homeowners rent out their guest houses, WPTV-TV reported.

County commissioners re-

cently agreed to move forward with policy changes aimed at expanding rental opportunities through accessory dwelling units (ADUs), also known as guest houses.

"[It includes] primarily changes in definitions of family as well as better defining where certain accessory dwellings can and cannot go," explained Assistant County Administrator George Stokus.

## GEORGIA

As **online scams** continue to rise, **FULTON COUNTY** has launched a new initiative to protect its most vulnerable

See **NEWS FROM** page 19

## CALIFORNIA

**SONOMA COUNTY** has launched Open Doors, an initiative to **improve access to essential services** such as food, housing, healthcare, employment and childcare. Led by the Human Services

Department, the initiative brings together government agencies, nonprofits and community organizations to create a more connected and efficient safety net for vulnerable residents. As Supervisor Lynda Hopkins explained, the



**OpenDoors**

Supporting Sonoma County, Together.

goal is to eliminate confusion and delays by guiding resi-

dents directly to services without unnecessary referrals.

A central feature is the new website, [www.OpenDoorsSC.com](http://www.OpenDoorsSC.com), offering a directory of local service providers. By consolidating information, the site simplifies the process of

finding support for residents and service providers.

The County will get the word out by featuring messages on billboards, buses and local media, along with printed materials in English and Spanish.



## ILLINOIS

**LAKE COUNTY** and Naval Station Great Lakes recently entered into a new **intergovernmental support agreement** to help pave the way for one of the largest housing demolition projects in the Navy's history. Officials signed the agreement during a ceremony at the National Museum of the American Sailor.

The naval station can now use the county's job order contract services for demolition and other work. This approach streamlines the process for awarding and completing routine projects, reducing costs by leveraging shared contracts and economies of scale. The county contracts with third-party providers to deliver these services locally.

The agreement will help facilitate the demolition of the 89-acre Halsey Village site. Once home to 351 housing units for Navy personnel and their families, the now-vacant property will be cleared to make way for future development opportunities.



From NEWS FROM page 18

residents, WAGA-TV reported. County law enforcement has created the Avoid Cyber Threats (A.C.T) Training campaign to help older adults recognize scams and avoid becoming victims. The ACT Training campaign is a free self-paced training program designed for residents 55 and older.

It covers how to identify phishing scams, safeguarding personal information and protecting against new threats like AI voice cloning. According to data provided by the county, senior adults account for almost 40% of all fraud-related losses and scams targeting the group have risen by 60% in the last five years.

FBI statistics show that Americans 60 years old or older lost nearly \$4.9 billion to scammers in 2024. The average victim lost \$83,000.

## MISSISSIPPI

**FORREST COUNTY** is launching its first-ever **photo contest** for amateur and professional photographers in several categories, WDAM-TV

reported.

"It's a good way to get people connected and to connect us with them," Samantha Phillips, director of communications, told the local TV station. "It's a celebration of what we have to offer out in the community." The photo entry categories are landscapes, nature, sunrises/sunsets, transportation and architecture. Winning works will be displayed in county buildings.

## NORTH CAROLINA

**WAKE COUNTY** is launching the **Housing Opportunity Fund** with an initial investment of at least \$5 million to support affordable housing development. The fund is de-

signed to provide financing tools like site acquisition and gap loans to help developers create more affordable housing in areas near jobs, schools, transit and healthcare. It aims to ensure that affordable housing is integrated throughout all communities, not just concentrated in specific areas.

With nearly 8,500 families in Wake County spending more than half their income on rent, the fund is intended to level the playing field for affordable housing developers facing rising land costs and stiff competition. As a revolving loan fund, repaid loans will be reinvested into future projects, helping to maintain a steady pipeline of affordable homes countywide.

## OKLAHOMA

The **CLEVELAND COUNTY** Economic Development Coalition, a collaboration of public and private leaders, was recently recognized for its efforts with the 2025 Excellence in Economic Development Silver Award from the International Economic Development Council. Presented in the "Best Use of Federal Resources" category, the award highlights the county's **innovative use of ARPA funds** to support local development.

The recognition honors a series of workforce and community development projects, including an 18,000-square-foot small business incubator, backed by \$3.2 million in federal and city funding, which will offer services like mentorship and training for entrepreneurs. Another project is an AI-enabled workforce portal, created with \$800,000 in ARPA funds to connect job seekers with employers and educational opportunities. In addition, \$1 million was invested in new mountain bike trails at Lake

## NEW MEXICO

The **SANTA FE COUNTY** assessor's office used a little humor to get the word out to residents to **update their addresses** with the office. Posting on Facebook, the office wrote, in a nod to "The Twilight Zone" TV series: "You've now entered... The Lost Mail Zone. In a county not far from here...Tax bills. Notices of Value. Deadline alerts — all sent to outdated addresses, returned to sender, never seen again. This strange place isn't fiction. It's what happens when you forget to update your mailing address. Avoid the void." The county then gives ways for residents to update their address online or with a phone call.



Thunderbird, aimed at boosting outdoor recreation and sports tourism.

## NEVADA

**DOUGLAS COUNTY** recently marked a historic milestone with the official groundbreaking of the new Douglas County Justice Center, one of the most significant infrastructure investments in the County's history.

County Manager Jenifer Davidson opened the ceremony by highlighting the project's long trajectory, from early conversations and feasibility studies to the ceremony that "marks the culmination of over a decade of thoughtful planning, collaboration, and a shared commitment to justice, public safety, and excellence in service to the people of Douglas County."

The final cost of the new facility, including financing, will total \$65 million, with a projected completion date of spring or early summer 2027. Once complete, the Justice

Center will bring together courts, justice partners, and public safety stakeholders under one roof, creating a space that reflects the values of a 21st-century Douglas County.

## VIRGINIA

**FAIRFAX COUNTY** Supervisor James Walkinshaw has won a **special election to the U.S. House of Representatives**. He will succeed the late Gerry Connolly, who also served on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors from 1995-2003.

## WASHINGTON

**KITSAP COUNTY** recently invited its residents to participate in a **community survey** that will inform how county leaders prioritize services and allocate resources. This is the first time in 20 years that the county has conducted a comprehensive resident survey, a press release said.

The National Community Survey, which takes roughly 10-15 minutes to complete, examines key aspects of life in the county including public safety services; housing and development; economic development; transportation systems; utilities and infrastructure; environmental quality, community engagement and government performance.

*If you have news to share, please send your information and photos to Editor Mary Ann Barton at [mbarton@naco.org](mailto:mbarton@naco.org).*

## MONTANA

The **CASCADE COUNTY** Sheriff's Office is showcasing the **Community Resource Deputy program** to show how deputies build trust, protect students and make a real impact in schools. Nationally, 48% of schools had at least one school resource officer in 2022 and over 90% of those with a resource officer had an officer who was routinely armed, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. See the video created by scanning the QR code.



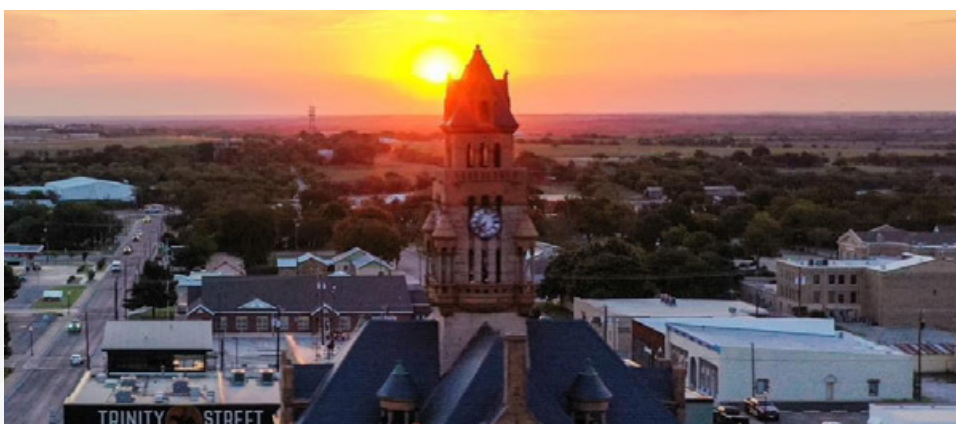


# SAVE THE DATES

Upcoming NACo Conferences

## 2025 NACo Fall Board of Directors Meeting

December 4-6  
Wise County, Texas



## 2026 NACo Legislative Conference

February 21-24  
Washington, D.C.



## 2026 Western Interstate Region Conference

May 5-8  
Maui County, Hawai'i



## 2026 NACo Annual Conference & Expo

July 17-20  
Orleans Parish/New Orleans, La.

