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CountyNews

COUNTY PROGRAM ALTERS YOUTH JUSTICE, FOR THE BETTER. PG. 5

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'TIERED' EMERGENCY RESPONSE CLOSES PARAMEDICS GAP. PG. 9

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES VOL. 57, NO. 16 OCTOBER 20, 2025

Counties grapple with data center boom

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

As data center development continues to drive the U.S. economy, counties are tasked with determining whether the increased revenue data centers bring in is worth their drain on electricity and water and residents' complaints of noise and rising utility bills.

This year, U.S. GDP growth has been almost entirely driven by investment in data centers and information processing technology; excluding data centers, the GDP growth was 0.1% in the first half of 2025, according to Jason Furman, a Harvard economist. And according to Renaissance Macro Research estimates, the dollar value contributed to GDP growth by artificial intelligence data-center buildout surpassed U.S. consumer spending for the first time ever in August.

> 'If you haven't looked into the data center development trend, start yesterday.'
>
> *— Broderick Green, Google*

Google's Public Affairs Manager Broderick Green and Franklin County, Ohio Commissioner John O'Grady led a session on data centers Oct. 9 at the NACo Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) symposium in Milwaukee County, Wis.

"If you haven't looked into the data center development trend, start yesterday," Green told the room of county officials, "because even if it doesn't come to your community directly, I can assure you, one will be nearby. So, get up to speed on the latest technology, how they're built, their resource management, their job numbers, community involvement."

Data centers typically use the same amount of water each year as 1.5 to 3 golf courses, according to Green. In Northern Virginia, data centers consumed nearly 2 billion gallons of water in 2023 — a 63% increase from 2019 — with roughly 900 million gallons of water consumed in Loudoun County alone.

Virginia has the largest concentration of data centers in the world, and is home to 35% of all known hyperscale data centers, according to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

The average data center in Fairfax County uses more water than the average office building, but less than the average retail employer or hotel, according to Fairfax Water planning value analysis. To curb water waste, Fairfax County Supervisor Rodney Lusk said the county is looking to adopt

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Attendees at the Large Urban County Caucus Symposium in Milwaukee County, Wis. pause for a photo Oct. 8 while touring a rehabilitation project that transformed South Shore Beach. The $8 million project was a part of a larger effort to clean up Milwaukee's waterways. Photo by Front Room Studios ***Look for full coverage of the LUCC Symposium coming up in the Nov. 3 issue of County News.***

Missouri association building to make horror film debut

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Jay Shipman spent eight years presenting the Missouri Association of Counties to the world. Almost 15 years after he left for a new career, he's still at it.

When horror film buffs watch "The Mortuary Assistant" upon its release next year, they'll see the exterior of a funeral home in Cole County — home to state capital Jefferson City — featured in a scene. County officials from across the state will better know it as their state association's new office building when it opens after extensive renovations.

In late 2024, while in Missouri for work, Shipman was visiting with colleagues from the association, where he

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Pa. counties consider furloughs as state budget lapse continues

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Untold numbers of traditions have developed over a few hundred years in Pennsylvania, but counties in the Keystone State would rather nip one in the bud.

For the third time since 2015, an unresolved state budget dispute that has dragged on for several months has left counties without the revenue that they depend on to provide critical services.

"It's not dire yet, but it's getting dire," said Northampton County Council President Lori Vargo Heffner.

Some counties without significant reserves have begun furloughing employees and consolidating services to make the money last longer. Others are exploring short-term loan options, including an offer from the state treasurer.

The state House passed a bipartisan $50 billion budget Oct. 8, which awaits action in the Senate, which recessed. With no money left in its human services account as of Oct. 3,

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Building relationships with utilities is key for counties when considering data centers

From DATA CENTERS page 1

the closed-loop cooling model that Loudoun County has found success with in many of its data centers.

A closed-loop cooling system recycles water, recirculating it to cool equipment. The system significantly reduces water consumption — by as much as 70%, according to the World Economic Forum.

In March, the Loudoun County Board of Supervisors approved amendments eliminating the previous "by-right" administrative approval process for data center development. Developers are now required to undergo a public hearing and review process by the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors, which includes proposing methods for reducing water consumption, such as implementing a closed-loop system.

Loudoun Water, the county's water authority, also offers a reclaimed water program for industrial cooling that data center operators can connect to, to reduce their impact on the potable water supply.

It is key for counties to build relationships with their utility partners, because they are often the ones pitching tech companies to consider their areas for development, according to Green.

Google uses an approach it refers to as "climate conscious cooling," meaning the company looks at each market it's going into to determine the best cooling solution for it. "What might work best in Columbus, Ohio might be different than what's done in Georgia," said Green. "We don't think there's a one-size solution."

The tech corporation is working to replenish 120% of the fresh water it uses in its data centers, and achieve net zero emissions, powering its data centers and campuses on carbon-free energy, by 2030, according to Green. The data centers Google is building now are six times more efficient using energy than data centers it was building just a few years ago, he noted.

"Data centers use a lot of power," Green said. "There's no use beating around the bush on that. And the newer ones — whether it's AI or the more cutting-edge technologies — it's a lot more power … We don't want to stress infrastructure, and we spend a lot of time thinking about how we can operate better and more efficiently."

In O'Grady's home state of Ohio, American Electric Power has already committed to supplying electricity for 30 data centers in the region by 2030, meaning the area of Columbus (Franklin County's seat) will reach power consumption levels as high as Manhattan's. Factoring in tech industry proposals to develop 90 more data centers, Franklin County's power consumption could be comparable to the entire state of New York during a peak summer day, as reported in August by The New York Times.

In Franklin County, "a lot of local folks were concerned that their bills are going to go up based on these data centers, as opposed to the data center paying for it," O'Grady said. The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio determined that American Electric Power, the local utility company, could apply a different fee structure for data centers and other users, to ensure that tech companies are paying for the infrastructure upgrades needed for development, according to O'Grady.

In December 2024, a Virginia agency found that even though data centers have generally been paying their fair share of grid upgrade expenses, costs to residents could still rise $276 a year by 2030, because of data centers — and that cost could be substantially higher if construction plans for data centers are delayed, or if they're never built or use less electricity than planned, the New York Times reported.

As environmental concerns and community backlash to data centers increase, local governments are cracking down and creating more regulations around development.

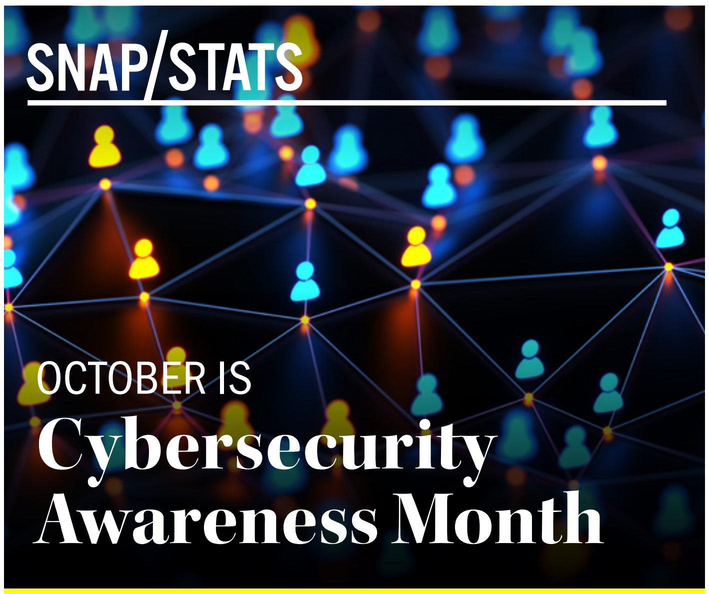
As of June, tech companies looking to build data centers in Henrico County, Va. will now have to attend a public hearing, allow the public to comment and get approval for a provisional use permit from the Board of Supervisors. Previously, companies only needed approval from the county's Planning Commission to buy property and start building.

The Henrico County Board of Supervisors committed $60 million — tax revenue generated from Quality Technology Servies' (QTS) data center in the county — toward an affordable housing trust fund. The developer is contributing an additional $5 million to a solar program for low income residents in Henrico County, according to Reverend Tyrone Nelson, a Henrico County supervisor.

"That was one of the things that kind of won us over, even though there were some environmental concerns, use of water and energy and even noise, and all the things that come with this conversation now," Nelson said. "We also looked at the fact that we were in a housing crisis, and we feel like we still are, and anything that we could do to make housing more

See DATA CENTERS page 4

El Paso County, Texas Commissioner Jackie Butler asks a question Oct. 9, during a presentation on data centers at the LUCC Symposium in Milwaukee County, Wis. Photo by Front Room Studios



Ransomware attacks in 2024: 34%

Cyber attacks in 2024: 60%

Average cyber-attack recovery cost: .... $2.83 million

Average cost of data breach: .... $9.5 million

Surge in phishing attacks:.............360% from 2023-2024

Sources: Sophos News; Computer Integration Technologies; Security Boulevard

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

Former funeral home gets new lease on life as county association headquarters

From SPOOKY, page 1

worked as communications director, when Executive Director Steve Hobbs told him about their impending purchase — the long-dormant former Buescher Memorial Home.

"When he told me that, I nearly fell over," he said.

Shipman, now several years into his film production career, was working as a production coordinator for "The Mortuary Assistant," and had been looking for a location for the film.

He struck gold, thanks to the Show Mo Act tax credit, which he called critical to the on-location filming.

The film is based on a videogame of the same name, in which a woman, played by Willa Holland of "The O.C." and "Arrow" fame, encounters supernatural forces after taking a job embalming bodies. You may remember her costar, Paul Sparks, from such television shows as "Boardwalk Empire" and "House of Cards."

The association bought the building from the city in March.

Built in 1868, the funeral home closed in 2009 and was later condemned by the city, then auctioned in an effort to revive East Capitol Avenue. In addition to the opportunity to preserve architectural history, Hobbs liked the 80 parking spots, three-block walk to the capitol and capacity to accommodate dozens of county officials. But more on that later.

Hobbs first explored the building a year ago, solo. With no electricity, he relied on a flashlight to find his way around.

"It's like you stepped back in time to the '70s," he said. "When we took it over, clothes were still hanging in the closet."

Some rooms were filled with four feet of garbage and debris. The embalming room was intact, with syringes and scalpels in place. More than 100 coffins littered the showroom.

"I was terrified I was going to find someone sleeping in one of them," Hobbs said.

A local mortician will store the coffins and sell them to counties at cost for use in indigent burials. The building also contained 11 vehicles, including a mid-'50s Packard Hearse.

The city's bomb squad had to come in and dispose of sticks of dynamite dating back to 1951. There were 11 $100 bills from 1977 in one basement room and Hobbs is confident any valuables had been ransacked from the property while it was vacant for 16 years.

He and his staff spent most of the summer cleaning the building out, and aside from the film, the scary stuff seems to be behind them.

State historic preservation tax credits will defray 40% of the brick restoration cost, which Hobbs estimates will save the association several million dollars from the overall project.

Hobbs had experience in historic preservation work at the Audrain County courthouse when he was a county commissioner. The original funeral home building will house the association's offices. The basement has room for more offices and 3,000 square feet of storage space.

An attached chapel seats 96 people, which will accommodate the association's 72-person Board of Directors, saving on facility rentals five times a year for Board meetings. An annex, with views of the capitol and the governor's mansion, seats 160. More meeting space will seat 120 with a divider.

"We were going to tear down the annex and build something new, but once the engineer got in there and checked it out, he said it was solid enough that we didn't have to do too much work on it," Hobbs said.

The new building is a block away from the association's headquarters from 1990-2019. Hobbs had hoped to restore that building after a tornado rendered it unusable, but space limitations proved insurmountable.

Shipman worked in the old building.

"It's exciting to be a part of this history, even just a small piece of it," he said of the film. "It was just a great experience, especially when there was so much tragedy of losing the old building, that much history, to get to start a new chapter for the association." CN

Staff of the Missouri Association of Counties stand in front of the historic "Buescher Memorial Home" sign located at 429 Capitol Ave. in Jefferson City. From left: Intern Isabella Grander, Deputy Director David Owen, Member Engagement Director Carah Bright, Finance and Operations Manager Cindy Wells, Administrative Support Assistant Charlotte Onstott, Event and Marketing Coordinator Meredith Melahn and Executive Director Steve Hobbs. Not pictured due to traveling: Trust Risk Manager Sean McGonigle

Counties weigh pluses, minuses of data centers

From DATA CENTERS page 2

affordable, that was important to us."

There has not been a data center project approved in the county since the new regulations went into effect earlier this year.

"Personally, I just don't want them all over my district," Nelson said. "... If it was up to me, we wouldn't approve any more."

During the construction phase, the average data center employs 1,688 local workers and provides them $77.7 million in wages, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

While data centers don't employ many people after they're up and running, they're high-paying jobs — an electrician can make up to $150,000 to $200,000 a year, O'Grady noted.

Fairfax County is looking at training opportunities for its lower-income residents through its Workforce, Innovation, Skills Hub to "prepare them for the jobs of the future," particularly at data centers, Lusk said.

"Because as we grow more of these facilities, you're going to need talent to be able to equip them and build them out," Lusk said. "... The money that's generated to the county and to the cities and others is really based on that refresh of the technology over time, as well.

"You've got some people working, but that's not where the lion's share of the tax base and the revenues are coming from," he noted.

"And the good thing is, we see with quantum computing and AI, it's growing so fast, so there's not a need for less data centers."

Data centers aren't going anywhere or slowing down development any time soon, so it's up to counties to determine which projects are the right fit for their community, Green said.

Counties should be leveraging data centers to improve their communities, not hinder them, so local officials need to be asking themselves whether a given project is supporting their local economy, schools, constituents and "all of the things that make your communities great," he noted.

"There're some bad projects out there, and sometimes the deal you don't do ends up being the best thing, based on the evaluation for your community," Green said.

"So, wherever you are in a given moment of time, use that as your anchor point when you make this decision, because sometimes it can feel like that freight train is coming and you're on the tracks and can't get out of the way and there's nothing you can do about it, but you absolutely can.

"You have every right to," he said.

"And then run the numbers. At the end of the day, it's a business decision for both parties." CN

Pa. counties tighten their belts

From BUDGET page 1

Armstrong County, in Western Pennsylvania, closed eight of its 10 senior centers.

Kopas

"We furloughed all those managers and support staff that are related to the senior centers," said Armstrong County Commissioner Pat Fabian. "That's not going to get us very far, maybe one more payroll."

Heffner

Residents who depend on home-delivered meals will still be eligible for the program. The more challenging reality comes with dwindling funding for Children and Youth Services. Three weeks ago, police found four dead infants in a home in the county.

Fabian

"The last thing you want to do is take caseworkers out of the field," Fabian said. "Covid wrote the playbook for reducing services and keeping essential services open in county government. We're considering doing county-wide furloughs except for essential workers, if this goes on past October."

Fabian is concerned that school districts might not return to class in January after winter break if the impasse lasts that long.

Neighboring Westmoreland County furloughed 125 employees from across county departments.

"These aren't nameless, faceless government employees. These are real people with families who do important jobs here," Commissioner Ted Kopas told WTAE News. "Unfortunately, the state's inaction has put us in a position where we had no choice."

Vargo Heffner decried inaction from the state government.

"They're sitting in Harrisburg and they don't really know what's going on," she said. "There are places where Children and Youth Services workers aren't able to go into the homes, where elder care people aren't able to provide that service or programs are cut, that's affecting our residents. We have to balance our budgets."

In 2015 and 2023, the impasses lasted more than five months, with the 2015 budget passing two days shy of six months past due. That year, Wayne County scaled back its payments to social service providers, 50%-60% for large providers and 85%-95% for smaller agencies.

State Treasurer Stacy Garrity is offering $500 million in short-term loans to county governments and Head Start providers, but the 4.5% interest rate is turning off many counties.

"We're not even interested in that program unless it's zero interest," Fabian said. "We have no interest in taking the state's money they're going to make money off of us.

"That's essentially a tax increase." CN

New approach transforms youth justice in Pierce County

Taylor Woodruff, executive director of Youth Serving Agencies Network member organization Alchemy Skateboarding, outlines his community-based programming for court-involved youth centered around skateboarding and manufacturing skills. Photo by Bryce Wilkom

by Bryce Wilkom

Twenty-five years ago, Remann Hall Juvenile Detention Center was overcrowded, housing an average of 163 youths under conditions that were widely considered inadequate.

Pierce County, Washington's juvenile justice system faced a pivotal decision.

"Either we build a new jail to house kids, or we change the way we do business," said TJ Bohl, who was appointed juvenile court administrator in 2000.

In a hallmark collaborative approach, the county council, county executive and judges — whom Bohl described as "courageous" in their decision — chose the latter.

The county partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to become a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) site and by 2003, had closed a portion of Remann Hall and reinvested funds into community-based alternatives to detention.

In September, Bohl welcomed participants of the NACo Fall 2025 Youth Justice Peer Exchange to Pierce County to learn from that pivotal decision made in 2000.

Since then, Pierce County has achieved an 88% reduction in youth detention even as the county's overall population has grown by approximately 30% over the same period.

Today, Pierce County serves as a nationally recognized leader in youth justice, driven by its commitment to alternatives to detention, evidence-based practices and deep community engagement.

Diversion accounted for 54% of all case outcomes in 2024.

The goal, said Kathleen Holand, early intervention supervisor, is to make diversion and alternatives to detention "so attractive" that it becomes the preferred option for youth and the prosecutors that handle their cases. Of the youth diverted in 2024, 80% did not reoffend.

For youth under traditional community supervision, Pierce County has introduced Opportunity Based Probation (OBP), a new juvenile probation model co-created with researchers at the University of Washington. Grounded in adolescent brain research, OBP emphasizes positive incentives and rewards over punitive measures.

Youth in the program set achievable short-term goals and outline action steps that build responsibility and self-efficacy.

Progress is tracked through a points system based on goal completion, attendance and active participation. Points can be redeemed for meaningful rewards such as food, gift cards, movie tickets and other experiences.

Youth who reach 30 points, meet all probation requirements and demonstrate behavioral changes may qualify for early graduation from probation.

Opportunity Based Probation began as a pilot program involving a small group of staff and youth. Early implementation focused on testing the model and gathering feedback. As data showed improved outcomes — such as reduced recidivism and increased engagement — support for the program grew.

Youth, families and staff reported meaningful improvements, helping build trust among long-tenured probation counselors. Judges also showed confidence in OBP by approving early releases, signaling belief in the model's effectiveness.

> Pierce County has achieved an 88% reduction in youth detention even as county population grew by 30%.

Pierce County's progress and success is not only thanks to the mission-driven dedication of Juvenile Court staff, but also by the vital role played by community partners across the county. These organizations receive referrals from the county for court-involved youth and work collaboratively through an internal network known as the Youth Serving Agencies Network.

The network was established in 2018 with just eight member organizations. It has grown to include 31 organizations that offer a wide range of youth development programming including glass blowing, boat building, tutoring and more. Through sustained engagement, youth are strategically matched with programs that align with their interests and needs, fostering meaningful growth and connection.

Taylor Woodruff, executive director of the network member organization Alchemy Skateboarding— which offers community-based programming for court-involved youth centered on skateboarding and manufacturing skills — described his role within Alchemy and the network as being similar to a hotel concierge, helping young people navigate available resources and opportunities.

The collaboration goes beyond "sending a hyperlink or writing down a phone number for a kid" for something they're interested in, he noted. Instead, this proactive approach fosters meaningful connections and ensures youth don't fall through the cracks.

"Community partnerships are the key to our success"

See YOUTH page 9

SPONSORED CONTENT

Missoula County makes the most of its cash flow

cashVest by three+one

Tourism isn't the only thing skyrocketing in Missoula County, Mont.

Two years ago, when the county's finance department started using three+one to manage its cash flow, it had a cashVest score of 71. Now, it's 95.

The cashVest score synthesizes several measures: Liquidity, interest rates, cashflow optimization investment policy and the proportion of available funds providing value. A higher score means the county is making the most of its available cash to earn interest.

"We have a lot more confidence going forward, knowing what our cash availability will be and what our investments are doing," said Missoula County CFO Andrew Czorny. "I wasn't doing any of those things before, and we weren't taking advantage of ebbs and flows of our cash flow."

Missoula County is in a difficult position. The state Legislature has limited the amount of property tax counties can collect, and despite record high tourism numbers, the lack of a sales tax means counties are limited in how they can benefit from visitors. At the same time, demands increase on the county to maintain infrastructure and provide essential services.

"We've got literally millions of people coming to the state and using all our infrastructure and then leaving," Czorny said. "The folks who live here are paying for the repair and the use of our rivers and our waterways and all our other amenities. It's tough to figure out how we're going to navigate those waters."

That puts more pressure on Czorny and his staff to do more with increasingly less.

That's where cashVest comes in, providing financial data that helps counties capitalize on cash management decisions.

"They've given me some real predictability in what my cash needs are going to be," Czorny said. "I can look out in the future with a great deal of confidence knowing 'These are going to be my peaks and valleys and here are my strategic balances and here's my cushion.' I'm able to draw down that cash in advance of a capital project and advance the bond insurance, and that gives me a lot of comfort."

It wasn't a hard sell with the Missoula County Board of Commissioners.

"They like the quarterly report that three+one puts together," Czorny said. "We go through that as an investment committee on a quarterly basis. They enjoy knowing what the cash is doing and what our cash position is, and what the next three months hold."

And it goes beyond optimizing investments. cashVest offers insight into what goes into different financial mechanisms counties use.

"I don't know if you ever tried to understand your bank statement and what the charges are, but they are experts at going in and figuring out what the bank is charging you for, and changing them to upfront, hard charges that we can plan for. They've saved us so much money in just the bank statements alone. It's been unbelievable." CN

CountyNews HOT topics

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Childcare means work, growth options. **pg. H4**

Unlocking land for affordable housing. **pg. H6**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION *of* COUNTIES

OCTOBER 20, 2025

MOVING ON UP!

Counties search for ways to stimulate upward mobility.

COUNTY LEADERSHIP GUIDES SHARED PROSPERITY

by Alseta Gholston

There's no chicken-or-egg debate: Economic mobility is not just a by-product of growth — it is the result of intentional county governance.

County governments shape the growth of their economies through guidance, assistance and investment. And county leaders often have the vantage point to note where the private sector has missed a spot.

County leaders often examine how to best drive economic growth so that communities attract and retain long-standing residents and industry investments that nurture local pride, prosperity and increased quality of life. Planning and economic development experts are often at the center of envisioning and mapping out the pathways toward these goals for the community.

"I have a philosophy in Lake County and many other rural communities," said Lake County, Calif. Supervisor Bruno Sabatier, chair of the NACo Health Policy Steering Committee.

"Poverty is an unfortunate ongoing conversation to deal with, and rather than providing help and assistance to help those that are struggling, how do we do economic development and economic mobility to really provide those tools to the individuals to be able to raise themselves up?" Sabatier said, adding "because government can only do so much, and we definitely can't do everything to make people deal with the poverty that we have."

Integrating economic mobility goals into planning and economic development strengthens access to shared prosperity for the whole community. Understanding the distinction between economic development and economic mobility is crucial to shaping and sustaining long-term economic growth.

Understanding economic mobility

The goals of economic development concentrate primarily on attracting business, supporting infrastructure that facilitates commerce and meeting industry's needs for workers. Economic mobility, however, shifts the focus to individuals and families. Economic mobility is defined as the ability of individuals or families to improve their economic status — measured through income, wealth, education or quality of life — over time, across generations. Upward economic mobility ensures residents can climb the economic ladder regardless of their starting point.

Counties remove barriers

Counties are frontline drivers of opportunity. Typically, they determine land use policies, deliver essential services and convene stakeholders. They can:

- **Use data to drive decisions** through disaggregating data by demographics, household income, employment status and geography to identify opportunities to target resources more efficiently.
- **Foster cross-sector partnerships** with schools, nonprofits, employers, community groups and philanthropies to address root causes.
- **Remove barriers** through zoning reform, expanded access to affordable housing and education, and ensure county contracts and services reach residents and make a difference in their economic outlook.

Urban counties

In urban counties, residents generally have access to higher education, transportation and employment opportunities. County governments leverage these resources to ensure that all residents benefit from them.

Mecklenburg County, N.C. used Opportunity Insights' Opportunity Atlas to target investments in under-resourced neighborhoods and expanded early childhood education and small business support in those areas.

King County, Wash. embedded equity impact assessments into all policy decisions and expanded apprenticeships and affordable housing near transit networks.

Alameda County, Calif. invested in cooperative business ownership and local hiring ordinances and channeled procurement dollars into historically excluded communities. procurement dollars into historically excluded communities.

Rural counties

While large metropolitan counties often have more resources, rural and lower population counties also demonstrate that strategic, data driven planning can deliver measurable gains in economic mobility.

Union County, Ore. (a participant in NACo's Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility initiative) used Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Data Dashboard to obtain disaggregated data to identify neighborhoods with the lowest economic outcomes. Workforce pipelines in healthcare, advanced manufacturing and sustainable forestry plus microgrants for small businesses have increased participation in training and growing local enterprises.

Dubuque County, Iowa aligned workforce and housing policy by targeting affordable housing in neighborhoods with a lot of public investment and creating workforce training programs. That added up to greater participation in apprenticeships and lower eviction rates.

Boone County, Mo. built a public data platform linking health, housing and workforce datasets to identify "opportunity deserts" and expand broadband into under-served areas. These measures improved access to online education and boosted job placement for residents without four-year degrees.

Garrett County, Md. developed a social services dashboard to coordinate wraparound support for families facing multiple barriers, cutting down on service duplication and improving long-term employment outcomes. The dashboard data is updated in real time.

Carteret County, N.C. used labor market analysis to diversify its coastal economy into ecotourism and marine science industries by offering microgrants to startup businesses and creating training programs that have increased youth workforce retention.

Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog contains dozens of case studies to guide program design and implementation.

INLAND PORT OFFERS OPPORTUNITY FOR HERTFORD COUNTY, N.C.

by Jack Callahan

Hertford County Commission Chair André Lassiter Sr. Photo by Devin Zagar/7 Foot Productions

Hertford County, N.C. doesn't have a lighthouse, but that hasn't stopped its economic future from shining thanks to what became known as Project Green Lantern.

This rural county of less than 20,000 residents and its state partners are celebrating a big win for residents across the state, with hopes of new prosperity for the county and its residents.

Over the past six months, the county worked with leadership in the state Legislature, the state department of commerce, neighboring counties, area educational institutions and local industry to secure $51 million in state funding to build a new inland port, including a county-owned and county-operated barge transportation system, with an additional $6 million in infrastructure upgrades.

"I think the opportunities are unlimited," said Commission Chair André Lassiter Sr. "I think this will spur economic growth that the region has never, ever seen. We're going to be open to business from Nova Scotia to the Gulf of Mexico."

During the 2010s, the county lost roughly 3,000 residents, due in no small part, Lassiter said, to limited economic opportunities. Now, this state funding will unlock significant industry investment for new manufacturing plants, employment opportunities and workforce training in high-demand jobs.

Lassiter and Economic Development Director Kelly Leggett Bowers explored applying a community benefit agreement approach to their negotiations with corporations considering opening new production facilities in the county after discussing the concept as part of NACo's Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility program (RLEM).

This approach can lead to a binding agreement between the county and industry partners to both make meaningful contributions to county residents and to provide support for development projects.

Hertford County's RLEM team recognized that the county has much to offer industry looking to locate near key customers and supply-chain networks. The county's existing anchor institutions are clustered around manufacturing and steel production, including Nucor Steel and Structural Steel Coatings. The county is an hour from the Norfolk Naval Shipyard, which is a major end-user of manufactured goods.

Bowers leveraged these assets in piquing the interest of new companies considering a move to Hertford County.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

"We painted a picture for our partners of a company that comes into Hertford County and manufactures steel parts for all industries across the United States, from nuclear, hydrogen, offshore wind, oil, aeronautics. automotive and shipbuilding," she said.

Lassiter was excited by the prospect of adding new jobs and taxable entities to the county, but he wanted to be sure that current residents truly benefited from these new opportunities. He was skeptical of outmoded business attraction approaches that incentivized business by forgoing county revenue in property tax waivers or with little commitment to employing local residents. For example, in 2000, the state Legislature awarded a lifetime tax break to a corporation that allows for $2 billion in personal property to remain in the county untaxed.

"We wound up with a major industry in our county that had very little tax benefit," he said. "We didn't want that to happen twice. This time, when the topic of a tax break came up, we wanted to make sure we had the foundation for a good corporate partnership."

Lassiter found those partners within Project Green Lantern. Together they developed a proposed community benefit agreement that pledged up to $24 million over 10 years to support education and workforce development initiatives, thereby ensuring job creation, training and workforce housing for the community.

In coordination with these private industry commitments, the county worked with state partners to secure funding to build essential port infrastructure needed to ship manufactured goods from both existing and new businesses to key markets. State legislators recognized the potential statewide benefits of the inland harbor, including business attraction to the state, new high-wage employment and regional economic growth in an economically distressed rural area.

The county also worked closely with local stakeholders to ensure transparency and community benefit. Bowers engaged with Roanoke Chowan Community College, Chowan University, the NC East Alliance and Eastern Carolina University to align industry workforce needs with training and education programming. Monthly county-led meetings provided space for coordination and collaboration with local community organizations, state officials and interested residents. These partnerships will support long-term sustainability of a thriving regional economy with both local and statewide benefits.

The county sits an hour away from the port city of Norfolk, Va., "but they don't have anywhere to build out industrial capacity," Lassiter said. "One of our greatest assets is that we have land at a good price.

"I think we have positioned ourselves for a future that's limitless and I'm excited for the opportunity. I think this would mitigate our outward migration situation," Lassiter said. "Our brain trust has left because there were no job opportunities — I think we will see an influx of those young people and families coming back to the community because people don't want to travel an hour-plus to work when these industries are built out."

Callahan is an economic development professional for Navajo and Apache counties in Arizona and previously served as a program associate for economic development at NACo.

HOT topics

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CHILDCARE MEANS GROWTH, WORK OPTIONS

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Childcare costs money. Not having childcare costs much more for a county's economy.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation pegs those total costs at $5.4 billion across the entire state of Ohio and $650 million just in Cuyahoga County.

"Inadequate access to affordable quality childcare is one of those big barriers [to labor force participation], and I don't hear them talking very much about, but they should be," said Caroline Taich, an economic consultant based in Cleveland. She heard the same problems confronting employers today during her travels in 2015.

She recalled hearing: "'I've got all these jobs, I can't find the people that I need to fill them,'" she told an audience Oct. 1 during a panel discussion at a NACo Childcare Supply Network peer exchange in Cuyahoga County. "I can't find the skills that I need. I need nurses, I need technicians, I need educators.

"'If you can help me find the talent, the business growth will follow,'" they told her.

MidTown Cleveland's Ashley Shaw describes childcare challenges Oct. 1. From left: Caroline Taich, Kara Porter, Shaw and Melissa Altman. Photo courtesy of Cuyahoga County, Ohio

Lack of childcare options keeps would-be workers at home or at the very least, gives them an unpredictable schedule for work. Counties should consider public-private partnerships to help address the lack of affordable, available childcare, panelists said. If not just to help families out, then to help their economy fully realize its potential.

"What we heard in enrolling our residents in the workforce program was, 'I don't have childcare, I can't do it,'" said Ashley Shaw, executive director of MidTown Cleveland, Inc. "'I don't care if it's a six-week program and I can make $60,000 when I'm done with it,'" she recounted hearing, calling childcare a barrier to helping people connect with jobs and allowing families social mobility.

"From small mom-and-pop, immigrant-owned restaurants up to major Fortune 500 corporations, they cannot attract and retain talent today and that is one of all of our biggest barriers."

Melissa Altman found out how much employers value childcare when her nursing home and childcare center were pur-

See CHILDCARE pg H5

ESSENTIAL DATA TOOLS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY

COUNTIES ARE USING DATA TOOLS FROM NACO PARTNERS TO FIND BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC MOBILITY, FOCUS ON AREAS THAT NEED HELP MOST, AND CHOOSE EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR INVESTMENT.

Economic Mobility Catalog

Results for America Economic Mobility catalog has more than 50 strategies and nearly 200 specific practices and programs that have demonstrated positive results in rigorous evaluations. The catalog synthesizes the relevant research, identifies best practices in implementation and aggregates additional resources for users interested in learning more.

The resource also contains dozens of case studies that focus on how evidence-based strategies are successfully implemented in cities and counties across the country.

Recovery Corps

In a rural county of nearly 11,500 people, Greene County, Ill., is breaking the cycle of substance use and recidivism through its Recovery Corps Program. Individuals with persistent substance use-related challenges receive targeted support to improve their lives and steer clear of criminal activity.

Sixty-four percent of participants increased their Recovery Capital Score, which measures progress individuals make across various dimensions of recovery, including mental and physical health, housing and employment and other social supports.

The program's success is attributed to staff with lived experiences who meet one-on-one with program participants to help set goals and connect them to the appropriate services. Additionally, the program strengthened coordination of services for participants through creating bridges between law enforcement, the county jail and drug court, local nonprofits, schools and employers.

Upward Mobility Data Dashboard

Urban's Upward Mobility Data Dashboard provides Mobility Metrics data for 24 predictors that measure progress on economic mobility goals. The predictors fall into five areas that support people to achieve upward mobility including rewarding work, high quality education, opportunity-rich and inclusive neighborhoods, healthy environment and access to good health care, and responsive and just governance.

Every county (as well as 480 cities) can access its own dashboard of these 24 predictors. This easily accessed, visual data helps county leaders to measure key indicators of economic opportunity for county residents, set priorities to improve outcomes and monitor progress.

Equity Dashboard

Using Urban's Upward Mobility Data Dashboard as a model, San Mateo County, Calif.'s Shared Prosperity Coordinating Council (SPCC) is in the process of building its own equity dashboard. By customizing Urban's dashboard to the local context, the council is ensuring its work is aligned with national best practices while still being responsive to the specific needs and disparities of San Mateo County.

The Equity Dashboard will be a dynamic data tool for tracking key indicators and measuring progress on economic mobility goals. This dashboard will integrate disaggregated data about San Mateo County to highlight demographic and geographic disparities and help the county ensure interventions are targeted where they are needed most.

By visualizing key metrics, the dashboard will empower stakeholders to make data-informed decisions and track progress and accountability. The dashboard is currently being tested and will be published later this year.

Opportunity Atlas

The Opportunity Atlas maps economic mobility data by county boundaries as well as internal census tracks to help county policy and program leaders identify neighborhoods with the greatest needs or the highest opportunity for upward economic mobility.

The Atlas allows users to filter data by demographic subgroups such as race, sex and parent income. This capability within the Opportunity Atlas helps pinpoint not only where opportunity exists, but also for whom.

Affordable housing siting

Through participation in NACo's Counties for Housing Solutions program, Jackson County, Mo. used the Opportunity Atlas to identify a site to build affordable housing.

As a result of its analysis, Jackson County is investing in site preparation for surplus land located near Kauffman Stadium. The goal is to convert this underutilized space into new housing opportunities that support local economic development. Additionally, the county is working on a plan to develop county-owned sites closer to Downtown Kansas City.

From CHILDCARE pg H4

chased by a chain of nursing homes two years ago. She's the director of Children Services at the Play Time Early Childhood Enrichment Center, which serves families from six regional counties.

Her new bosses asked her why they should keep a childcare center despite its losses.

Altman said that, at least in what she's seen from on-site childcare facilities, the children have a positive effect not only on productivity, but also morale.

"Happy people are happy, they enjoy coming into work," she said. "They know that even if they're not using the childcare center, the individuals are going to get to see the children. They're going to get to be involved with the children, they're going to hear laughter, they're going to hear joy."

"We have done research and surveys for individuals who use our childcare center… we retain 95% of our employees," she said. "I tried showing them, not only is it a win-win for them and the employees, but our residents; 350 residents live there. Some of them never get to see a family member in a day, a week, a month sometimes," but they get to see children and aren't isolated.

Her bosses later recognized childcare's value and are expanding their capacity.

Kara Porter, executive vice president at Starting Point, was surprised by what she heard from employers.

"We thought employers were not thinking about childcare. They are, and they don't know what to do about it," she said. "The problem that we need to solve is how do we make sure that they know that there are resources that can assist them around childcare and that they don't have to be the ones to find the solution."

Porter stressed that childcare, community development and economic development are indistinguishable.

"We should not be having community development and economic development conversations that don't include childcare," she said.

Starting Point is launching the MidTown Childcare Fund, a dollar-for-dollar match from the state Department of Children and Youth for employees in Cleveland's MidTown neighborhood, though Shaw said that's open to interpretation.

"Any private employer can be a part of this, if they don't have a connection to MidTown, we're helping to find them a connection to MidTown, because we really want folks to take advantage of this," she said. "Employers are exploring the idea of offering $100 to $200 per month in child-care benefits that the state would then match. That translates to $200 to $400 a month for a family to help them afford childcare."

Shaw said a three-way share among the state, employer and employee effectively splits the costs of childcare.

"They want employers to be a part of solving this problem, so I think we have a real opportunity to figure out 'How do we engage businesses on this, if they haven't thought about it?'" she said. "How do we get their voice at the table and help them advocate for policies that are going to be more effective for working families?" HT

COUNTY PROGRAM HELPS BOOST FOSTER YOUTH INTO ADULTHOOD

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

A Los Angeles County guaranteed income program, dubbed "BREATHE," is helping set up low-income residents — including more than 2,000 foster youth aging out of care — for success by providing them with monthly payments, no strings attached.

Los Angeles County launched the initiative in 2022, providing $1,000 each month over a three-year period to 1,000 participants who were randomly selected from a pool of applicants. A year later, 200 former foster youth were added to the guaranteed income project, and in 2024, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors expanded the initiative to more than 2,000 foster youth between the ages of 18 and 21, providing $500 monthly or $1,500 in quarterly payments.

Elijah, a former foster youth enrolled in BREATHE, is using his payments to help support himself while he pursues a master's in business administration with a focus in marketing, according to a testimony published on Los Angeles County's website.

"When you're a foster child, you're moving home to home, and in the back of your head, you're always like, 'Maybe this house isn't gonna work, maybe this foster parent won't work,'" he said. "We're always thinking like that, and that's how I was thinking when I applied. 'Maybe I won't get it, maybe I won't get it.' So, when I got the call, it was just a big relief, like a big exhale."

To be eligible for the program's extension for former foster youth, participants must have been in foster care on or after their 18th birthday (therefore, aging out of the system), not be currently enrolled in another guaranteed income project, qualify as low-income and live in a neighborhood that falls at or below 100% of the county's Area Median Household Income.

Karina Reyes, a Strength Based Community Change economic development coach, works with Elijah, a BREATHE participant. Photo courtesy of Los Angeles County

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

"When we're in the foster care system, when we're aging out, we're dealing with a lot of PTSD, a lot of trauma that we may not know how to deal with," Elijah said. "We're dealing with it in our own way. So, for years, it was like, 'Dang, what am I gonna do next?'"

BREATHE is funded through Los Angeles County and administered through Strength Based Community Change (SBCC). The nonprofit creates social support networks to build self-sufficiency, so that participants can remain stable and successful after the payments end.

Former foster youth "deserve a chance to be able to say 'I did it. I made it. I'm now thriving,'" said Karina Reyes, an SBCC economic development coach, in her testimony. "They've been stuck in survival mode for so long — they deserve that moment to shine."

The steady funding has helped Elijah launch a media entertainment company and clothing brand.

"This isn't about not working," Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly Mitchell said in a video posted to her X account. "This is about helping you by stabilizing your income, and to give you the space and room to breathe, to prepare yourself for a more economically stable future."

Some of the ways BREATHE participants have used their funding include securing housing, helping pay for their education and buying groceries.

When Jacqueline applied to the BREATHE program, she and her 10-year-old daughter were sleeping in her car.

"We weren't living anymore, we were just trying to survive," she said in her testimony. "When I got that call, it was literally a month after I became homeless, and we were already in the streets. It gave me hope and it just gave me something to look forward to."

Having structured meetings with SBCC economic development coaches and connections to supportive services were worth "even more" than the monthly payments, Jacqueline said.

"Just the value of having someone check in with you and say, 'Hey, how are you doing today? How's your day?'" she said. "Sometimes that's all you need to get up and say, 'I can do this.'"

Payments to the first two rounds of BREATHE participants ended in July and August, but the more than 2,000 foster youth aging out of care enrolled will continue to receive guaranteed income through April 2026. Los Angeles City Council also approved a similar guaranteed income project in August, which is providing survivors of intimate partner violence and current or former foster youth between the ages of 16 and 24 with $1,000 per month for two years.

The funding is "going to people who struggle, and who put one foot in front of the other every day, and somehow, they make it," said Colleen Mooney, SBCC's executive director, in a county video. "It was an opportunity to take a breath and know that somebody had your back." HT

COUNTIES UNLOCK PUBLIC LAND FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

by Patrick Spence

As the national housing crisis deepens, counties are finding new ways to put roofs over people's heads.

In Baltimore City, Md. and Shelby County, Tenn., two different but related efforts are showing how local governments can leverage county-owned land to expand housing opportunities and give families a better shot at stability. Stable affordable housing doesn't just determine where families live; it shapes their access to jobs, schools, transportation and community resources that make upward economic mobility possible.

Both Baltimore and Shelby County are part of NACo's Counties for Housing Solutions (C4HS) program, created in 2024 in partnership with Smart Growth America. The program provides county teams — including elected officials, agency staff and housing partners — with virtual technical support and individualized coaching. Both counties are leveraging publicly owned land to address housing shortages, demonstrating promising practices that could be replicated nationwide.

In East Baltimore, a vacant block near the Johns Hopkins Hospital has long stood as a reminder of disinvestment in this neighborhood. Now, the city is working with a developer to turn the empty lots into a 100-unit apartment building, with 50 apartments permanently affordable to low-income residents.

Baltimore City has worked with Broadway East Community Development Corporation President Doris Minor-Terrell and local developer Jimmie Robinson. The city will transfer to the developer an approximately 3-acre site at no acquisition cost in exchange for the project's inclusion of 50 permanently low-income apartments.

The developer, community association and consolidated city-county government collaborated on a financing plan and determined that this zero-cost land transfer would enable the construction of 100 units of housing, half of which will be below-market rate housing. In a scenario where this deal does not happen, the parcel of land would have sat vacant.

Robinson financed 50 low-income apartments through a combination of Low-Income Housing Tax Credit subsidies, public land and rental revenue from the other 50 market-rate apartments. The project will also include flexible space for a community meeting area and ultimately leasable as a grocery store.

Robinson recalled that, "in 1962, my grandfather Jimmie Robinson Jr. began his ministry of serving the Broadway East community as the founder of Salem Baptist Church. Furthermore, Dr. Doris Minor-Terrell played a pivotal part in my father's life, my own life and the lives of many other close family friends.

To now have the opportunity to work alongside her in the mission to revitalize a historic community with endless possibilities and potential is nothing short of a blessing. Our goal for the proposed project is to advance the community's mission of creating a stable mixed-income community through creating economic opportunities and providing amenities for residents."

The project has already drawn interest from major funders, including JPMorgan-Chase and Bloomberg Philanthropies, which are exploring ways to help ensure long-term affordability and financial feasibility. The agreement could become a blueprint for transforming public land into lasting affordable housing.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

"Shelby County is building more than housing — we're building a movement."

– Commissioner Erika Sugarmon

Shelby County passes ordinance

While Baltimore is transforming an urban vacant block, Shelby County, Tenn. is building on multiple, non-contiguous parcels across a whole neighborhood. The approach looks different but carries the same urgency and public land use approach. Earlier this year, county commissioners passed the Building Home Ordinance, which allows the county to partner directly with the city of Memphis on housing projects. For families struggling with rising rents, that decision could accelerate development on unused or underutilized parcels of publicly owned land, turning them into homes.

Commissioner Erika Sugarmon led the effort to pass this ordinance, which directs the county to partner with real estate developers to develop 83 vacant parcels South Memphis.

This land is managed by the Shelby County Land Bank and has remained undeveloped for decades. Years of underinvestment in this area has left the neighborhood without comparable listings for housing units to evaluate development potential. Without value comparisons, private development has stalled, and the county has missed out on property tax revenue.

"Shelby County is building more than housing — we're building a movement," she said. "Government, private, nonprofit and community leaders are shaping an evolving ecosystem that transforms how we think about housing access, equity and opportunity. Our shared vision is to create a living model — one that continuously learns, grows and can be replicated across districts and counties — ensuring that every family has a place to call home and every community has the foundation to thrive."

Shelby County will transfer land parcels in a 20-city block area to a cohort of 15 to 20 early-career developers who will participate in the Emerging Developers Academy. Led by Memphis real estate professional Rasheedah Jones and funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA), the Emerging Developers Academy will build technical capacity starting in October 2025 and work on small-scale residential developments with predevelopment capital secured from a local community development financial institution. The hope is that this initial investment will spark a wave of private sector investment in the community with comps established.

"Shelby County is taking a bold step toward reimagining how public land can serve the public good," Jones said. "We're equipping local community-rooted developers with the tools, technical assistance and partnerships to turn what's been sitting idle into something that works for the community."

Counties are uniquely equipped to act because they control zoning and permitting and often own valuable land. By lowering land costs and streamlining approvals, counties can create "natural affordability" — making it possible for developers to build while keeping rents within reach.

With public budgets strained by high interest rates, rising construction costs and reduced federal funding, counties are using publicly owned land to boost affordable housing without straining limited resources.

This strategy may generate long-run county revenue by bringing vacant parcels onto the property tax rolls and attracting new residents and workers to the county.

Baltimore's project is still in negotiations and Shelby County's new ordinance has yet to produce its first housing deal. But these projects could demonstrate how counties — often overlooked in the housing debate — can take meaningful steps to ease the crisis. H

Spance is an economic mobility program manager in NACo's County Practices and Innovations Department.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN TELFAIR COUNTY, GEORGIA: A pathway to economic mobility through broadband expansion

by Madelaine Santana

In rural Georgia, Telfair County is taking meaningful steps toward expanding broadband access as a strategic lever for economic mobility. With a $50,000 "subgrant" through the NACo Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) initiative, the county plans to pilot an innovative Wi-Fi kiosk program to increase digital access and support long-term community development goals.

Telfair County, Ga. Commissioner Dakkia Bradsaw (left). Photo by Devin Zagar/ 7 Foot Productions

Filling the information gaps

When first joining the RLEM program, one of Telfair County's most immediate challenges was insufficient data about broadband infrastructure, available providers and funding opportunities. NACo facilitated connections with RLEM partner organization Rural LISC (Local Initiatives Support Organization), which provided technical assistance and strategic guidance for the county's broadband efforts through 2026.

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

With Rural LISC support, the county conducted GIS mapping to identify least-served areas and previously unknown internet service providers (ISPs). These new insights led to direct engagement between county leadership and providers, laying groundwork for future strategic partnerships and infrastructure planning.

"There are some parts of the county that have just never had much access to high-speed internet," said Telfair County Commissioner Dakkia Bradshaw. "We have an area in the unincorporated part of the county that we hope to attract some industrial and commercial development, but there's no reliable broadband out there. Having service out there is going to be crucial to growing our economy, and there are some parts of the county that won't even get service from certain providers."

Strategic subgrant funding

The goal of Telfair County's $50,000 subgrant is to launch a pilot project focused on deploying Wi-Fi kiosks in up to two of its five municipalities. These kiosks will be placed in public locations with high foot traffic, such as libraries, city halls and community centers. The intention is to provide free internet access to residents and to collect usage data to inform decisions about further investment in high-need areas.

The pilot is designed to improve access to resources, including telehealth, online education, workforce training and civic services, which are key drivers of economic mobility in rural communities.

"We're also going to be able to gather data on what kind of information people are using when they use the kiosks," Bradshaw said. "Are they looking for jobs, or accessing telemedicine?"

Data from the pilot, such as connection speeds, geographic usage and session duration, will inform the county's broader digital inclusion strategy and underpin future funding and partnership opportunities.

Local collaboration and innovation

As Telfair County advances this work, the partnerships formed during the early stages are proving vital. The county is not only engaging with traditional ISPs but also exploring alternative connectivity solutions, such as mobile virtual network operators, which are wireless communication service providers that do not own the wireless network infrastructure. Partnerships with social enterprise organizations like Human-I-T and PCs for People are helping bridge the digital divide with distribution of low-cost technology to residents who cannot afford market-rate computers and other devices.

This multi-pronged approach reflects a growing recognition that solving rural broadband challenges requires both physical infrastructure and access to digital tools.

"We're generally a bedroom community, but that means people who work from home need certain levels of service to do their jobs," Bradshaw said. "Or it's a matter of being able to access telehealth services from home. If you can't use video services, you might as well go to the doctor in person. And when some of your residents make $40,000 a year, a $69 internet bill for service that isn't very good is hard on them."

What's next?

During the pilot phase, Telfair County is building the relationships, infrastructure and data systems needed to scale broadband access throughout the county and region. The process has also fostered capacity-building within local government by helping to identify gaps, establish partnerships and strengthen the foundation for future economic initiatives.

Over the coming months, Telfair County will complete its community engagement, site selection and installation of Wi-Fi kiosk. By April 2026, the county plans to report on findings and recommendations to facilitate expanding broadband access across all five municipalities.

A model for rural counties

For rural counties facing similar digital access challenges, Telfair County's incremental, data-informed approach demonstrates that progress is possible, even with limited resources. With ongoing support from NACo and Rural LISC, Telfair County's story serves as an example of what's possible when rural counties have the right mix of funding, technical assistance, partnerships and peer learning to navigate complex challenges.

Santana is an economic mobility program manager in NACo's County Practices and Innovations Department.

County News Podcast: Food Policy Council promotes local agriculture

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Lake County, Calif. is not built for combine farming. Known for its pears, wine grapes and walnuts, the county's topography is rugged, and that puts many farmers at a disadvantage compared to large-scale agriculture elsewhere.

Sabatier

When Supervisor Bruno Sabatier proposed encouraging local farmers to grow more food to improve residents' economic prospects, his suggestion was met with a bucket of cold water: The farmers could barely sell what they grew. The Lake County Food Policy Council was borne from an effort to help give those famers a chance to sell more of what they grow.

"Why not find ways to support our local farmers to produce food and connect them with a delivery system and markets to be able to at least make it economically viable?" he asked.

The council represents a wide range of perspectives, including farmers, nonprofits, grocery stores, tribes and food pantries.

"My goal for the Food Policy Council is food sustainability," Sabatier said.

Sabatier joined the County News Podcast to detail the challenges his county faces and how the Food Policy Council can help family farmers achieve economic stability and mobility. NACo Senior Program Manager Alseta Gholston outlines NACo's work in economic mobility and ways NACo members can learn more and get involved.

Listen to the County News Podcast on your favorite podcast player, at www.naco.org/podcast or by scanning the QR code.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PROGRAM HELPS KEEP WORKERS ON THE JOB

Audrain County, Mo. Commissioner Leslie Meyer Photo by Devin Zagar/7 Foot Productions

by Jennifer Kuiper

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Employers are thriving in Audrain County, Mo. because their workers are thriving. But that wasn't always the case.

When the Mexico Chamber of Commerce, in the county seat, saw 85 employees leave a single business in one year, it was apparent that worker dissatisfaction could be a crack in the county's economic foundation. In a county of 25,000 people, that's a significant exodus.

The chamber estimated that turnover costs employers roughly $5,500 per position in administrative time, coworker burden, overtime pay, hiring search firm or temp agency, advertising, interviews, pre-employment testing and lost productivity.

"We hear all the time about how businesses are having problems retaining their workforce, they can't find employees to stay, but our chamber is really addressing that," said Commissioner Leslie Meyer, a fellow in NACo's Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility (RLEM) program.

Audrain County welcomed the leaders program cohort in September to see how the Workforce Resource Assistance Program (WRAP) developed and addressed those needs.

The chamber and its partners started by understanding what led employees to leave. That shifted their thinking about not only the needs of workers but also how conditions of poverty create barriers to not only getting a job, but keeping it, too.

Community leaders studied the book "Bridges Out of Poverty" and consulted with co-author Ruby Payne to understand the 24/7 experience of living in poverty. These lessons provided a framework for community-wide poverty reduction through understanding the "hidden rules" of different economic classes, generational long-term poverty versus situational poverty that is often caused by a specific event, the importance of relationships and communication and the importance of resources beyond money, such as social capital and emotional health.

Based on that understanding and empathy for residents facing grinding financial hardship, the chamber worked with local employers and community leaders to create the Mexico Sustainability Project.

Guided by another resource, the book, "Workplace Stability" written by consultant Ruth Weirch, these Audrain County partners created WRAP to overcome key obstacles for low-income workers to stay employed and slash employer turnover costs.

> Turnover costs employers roughly $5,500 per position in administrative time, coworker burden and more.

The program's key components provide real solutions to external stressors that lead workers to quit. The program's staff conduct workforce stability training to ensure workers understand employer expectations and to develop strategies for on-the-job situations that typically lead to dismissal or departure.

Workforce specialists are on-site and on-call to respond immediately. Workers can participate in the WRAP financial wellness program and an emotional wellness program that support workers to manage stressors that may arise through family and home conditions.

The program's Emergency Small Dollar Loan Program has enabled workers to escape the predatory practices of payday loans to cover unexpected or one-time expenses, such as car repairs, medical care or back-to-school expenses for children.

"We have payday lenders in Missouri that charge interest of 500%," Meyer said. "If a family has an emergency, bridging that money gap could put them back months or years."

To provide an affordable alternative, WRAP secured local donations for a collateral fund to provide the financial backing for its own loan program guarantees.

Chamber Workforce Specialist Darlene Shopher worked with three local financial institutions to offer loans of up to $1,000 at a 7.99% interest rate to employees in good standing who have worked at least one year at the WRAP partner companies. After four years, WRAP made 114 loans valued at a total of $110,485 with an estimated cost savings of over $250,000 for participating employees who no longer drew on payday loans.

WRAP's Financial Wellness Program helps employees gain the knowledge and skills they need to not only work hard but save for a more prosperous future. WRAP partnered with FINRA Investor Education Foundation to provide monthly in-person education classes at work sites.

Topics include budgeting, how to manage debt, understanding credit scores, saving for emergencies, investing and preparing an estate plan.

At their workplaces, employee participants have 24/7 access to the online financial literacy platform ENRICH. They can also meet with a financial coach with ongoing support via phone and email. One business owner told the RLEM program members that his employees appreciate this free support more than any other benefit he provides.

Another business owner highlighted WRAP's Emotional Wellness Program component as essential for preventing staff turnover and contributing to a healthy workforce. Interested employees attend workshops to learn about the biological basis of trauma, effective communication, impacts of exercise on mental wellbeing, coping with anxiety, managing stress and confronting addictive behaviors. The business owner shared with the RLEM members an example of how an employee was able to use this learning to provide support to his son struggling with depression.

Darlene and the business owners at the RLEM presentation summed up by outlining the tangible benefits WRAP has provided.

For employees, they are more aware and better able to navigate support resources, including coordinating services with the court systems that has enabled participating workers to be heard first on the trial docket.

WRAP's loan program has solved temporary financial emergencies, stopped payroll advances and decreased 401k borrowing. For employers, WRAP has helped them to reduce human resource staff burden, decreased absenteeism, increased retention and dramatically lowered costs associated with these improvements.

"It's an all-encompassing approach that I just haven't seen before," Meyer said. "If it wasn't for Darlene Sopher or Dana Keller at the Mexico Chamber, I don't think this program would be anywhere as successful as it is."

Originally funded through a locally secured grant, WRAP is now self-sustaining through employer contributions. Business owners explain that they can't afford not to support this effective and cost-saving initiative.

As an RLEM participant, Meyer along with Presiding Commissioner Alan Winders (who sits on the chamber's Board of Directors) and Commissioner Tracy R. Graham (who sits on the Mexico Sustainability Project Board) decided that the county will be using part of its RLEM subgrant to expand WRAP programming to other underserved areas of the county. HT

Kuiper is the program director for Economic and Workforce Development in NACo's County Practices and Innovations department.

WORD SEARCH

LAFAYETTE COUNTY, MISS.

Created by Mary Ann Barton

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C R K M A W B B P T R E F N M Y S F I P
N N R E H T U O S O V C Y T Q R A D K O
L P A G V R K Z E Y X N O C A A M T K P
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Y P Y J G Y T M J C F I O H F F H A K L
K U L N X I H I G I Y L S R C Z O O V A
C M K S D N E W S P A P E R D N D L R T
Y E X E K I M M G Q T N D G E W E G F I
V A R Z D J L Y U R G Q U V Y V H R K O
X E K M H H L P P T F S F C F P I I F N
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P G L B E Q O V R C Z C O T B I P X U A
Q J H V X E X X U H H P Y C L C O Y B T
I X A U T H O R S I G X R S I J O T F F
V U I P E B A G C E S U O H T R U O C I
B P D X G D L K P U J L T B W M A L M S
H O I C I R A O L P W A S F O N V I Q H
L U O O B S P U D R Q H I N O W M V D T
N O A K A B K Q I B R Z H H Z S F X O Z
G P O W S X F F M Y I L F Z Y D Y S H A
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AUTHORS: The county was home to Nobel Prize-winning author William Faulkner. Author Willie Morris taught at the University of Mississippi and authors Donna Tartt and John Grisham were students.

BOOKS: The Square Books bookstore is a hub of the county, hosting book events and featuring a café on the square, since 1979.

CATFISH: Mississippi is the nation's top producer of catfish; in the county, locals stop at Taylor Grocery to get their fried catfish fix.

CHICKASAW: The land was once the homeland of the Chickasaw Nation. The land was ceded in the early 1800s when the Chickasaw moved to Oklahoma.

COURTHOUSE: The Greek Revival style courthouse, built in 1872, sits in a prominent spot on the Oxford Square. It replaced the former courthouse, burned during the Civil War.

FRENCH: The county is named for the Marquis de Lafayette, a French general who fought in the American Revolution.

HISTORY: The county was created in 1836.

MEREDITH: James Meredith, an Air Force veteran, became the first Black student to enroll at the University of Mississippi, in 1962.

NEWSPAPER: The county is served by the local newspaper, *The Oxford Eagle*, which began publishing in 1836.

OXFORD: Named after Oxford, England, the county seat sits 75 miles south of Memphis (Shelby County), Tenn.

POPULATION: The population of the county stands at about 59,843 as of last year.

RADIO: The Thacker Mountain Radio Show is a weekly public radio show that originates from Oxford.

SOUTHERN: The Center for the Study of Southern Culture is located at the University of Mississippi.

UNIVERSITY: The county is home to the University of Mississippi or "Ole Miss," which opened in 1848.

WAR: Union troops burned much of Oxford, including the county courthouse, in 1864 during the Civil War.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

STEVEN SCHETROM

SCHETROM

NACo Board Member
Hardy County, W.Va.
Commissioner

Number of years active in NACo: Three

Years in public service: 4.5 years

My first NACo event was: 2022 Annual Conference in Adams County, Colo.

Occupation: Investment advisor

Education: BA, Shepherd College; MBA, Wake Forest University

The hardest thing I've ever done: Completed B&A (Baltimore and Annapolis) Trail Half Marathon in Anne Arundel County, Md. in March 2023

Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner: Louis Zamperini, Viktor Frankl and Abraham Lincoln

My favorite way to relax is: My daily work out (3-4 mile run and calisthenics)

I'm most proud of: My family

Every morning I read: News and the current book I am reading

My favorite meal is: Breakfast – a bowl of Kellogg's Special K (red berry) with almond milk and coffee.

My motto is: "When the building simply has what it needs with the resources available, it has character, or dignity, which is the same thing." – Antoni Gaudi

The last book I read was: "Shoe Dog" by Phil Knight

My favorite movie is: "Forrest Gump"

My favorite music is: I like almost all genres of music.

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: We love the opportunity to network and learn from other high-level individuals actively engaged in this experiment in self-government.

The most adventurous thing I've ever done is: Purchase a campground as an investment almost immediately after graduation from business school in 2008.

ON THE MOVE

NACo OFFICERS

- President **J.D. Clark**, South Region Representative **Ron Berry**, Legislative Director **Brett Mattson** and Associate Membership Director **Grace Dunlap** attended the Tennessee County Services Association Fall Conference in Knox County.

NACo STAFF

Green

- Special Projects Assistant **Jamara Green** presented on the role counties will play in space policy and industry growth to the International Astronautical Congress in Syndey, Australia.and earned master's degrees from the University of California, Los Angeles and George Washington University

BEHIND THE SEAL

CROOK COUNTY, ORE.

Named after U.S. Army officer George Crook, Crook County, Oregon's seal design incorporates several elements representative of the county landscape.

The Crooked River winds through the county and is a central geographic and historic feature.

The canyon and rimrock are iconic geological formations in the region that reflect the county's unique topography.

The sun symbolizes the high desert climate and open skies of Central Oregon.

The overall shape of the logo mirrors the outline of Crook County's boundaries.

The overall color palette reflects natural landscape tones.

Would you like to see your seal featured in County News? Contact Charlie Ban at cban@naco.org.

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.

BRIGHT IDEAS | PASQUOTAK COUNTY, N.C.

Facing a Paramedics Shortage, County Creates 'Tiered' EMS Response

PROBLEM: Pasquotak County, N.C. was facing a paramedics shortage.

SOLUTION: The county decided to create a "tiered" response to emergencies.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

An emergency vehicle in Pasquotak County, N.C.

Facing a shortage of paramedics, Pasquotank County, N.C. created an Emergency Management Services (EMS) Tiered Response Program to put its emergency responders to better use.

Before creating the tiered approach, Pasquotank County emergency management sent out a paramedic to respond to every emergency, whether or not paramedic services were actually needed, according to Jerry Newell, chief of Pasquotank County EMS.

"It didn't matter what the level of call was," Newell said. "If it was a cut finger, you got a paramedic. If it was a cardiac arrest, you got a paramedic.

"So, what we did was sit back when these paramedics started to drop out in our system and other systems too, to look and see how we could save the paramedic for when a paramedic is needed, just to use that resource better."

At its highest point, Pasquotank County EMS faced a 9% staff shortage. Because a paramedic was assigned to every ambulance, they were not being used as effectively as they could be, Newell said.

With the tiered response program, which only assigns paramedics to Quick Response Vehicles (QRVs), paramedics are freed up to assist in more dire emergencies, so that each emergency response can provide appropriate care, he added.

"If we have a blood sugar [problem], which is handled by a lower level, or we have a sprained ankle which can be handled by a basic life support truck, we keep our paramedics free to be able to respond in numbers to the high acuity calls," Newell said.

"Now, we can have two or three paramedics on the scene of a cardiac arrest who are helping with a pit crew type of approach, meaning everybody can be assigned a task which is appropriate for their level.

"And then everybody can work together in concert to make that cardiac arrest have the best outcome."

Emergency Management dispatchers categorize call acuity, sending Quick Response Vehicles when an emergency requires paramedic intervention and/or additional EMS assistance. After implementing the tiered response model, Pasquotank County's need for paramedics on primary response ambulances on each shift was reduced by 50% and its vacancy rate fell to 0%, which it maintains today, according to county data.

A Quick Response Vehicle was recently dispatched when a woman in the county was experiencing anaphylactic shock.

Five years ago, only one paramedic and one basic level technician would have been on the scene, but because of the county's tiered response program, two additional paramedics were able to come to the scene, according to Newell.

"We treated the acute condition, got her turned around, and it was just a very successful outcome," Newell said.

"Not to say that it wouldn't have been otherwise, but it was treated more efficiently, it was treated quicker, and it was treated appropriately."

Pasquotank County currently has five Quick Response Vehicles on duty during peak times.

Ahead of the program's launch in 2022, EMS was able to purchase a new vehicle through the county budget.

The tiered response model could be adapted by counties across the country, but for it to work, everyone needs to be on board — both in emergency response and in county government, Newell said.

As a result of the program, Pasquotank County emergency medical technicians were re-trained, to ensure that they're ready to operate at a credentialed level without a paramedic onboard. Retraining will occur at least once a year moving forward, according to Newell.

"Everybody in the whole chain of command has to be willing to participate in this," Newell said. "And if your deputy chiefs and assistant chiefs and regular chiefs are not ones who want to get out and run in the street, this is not going to work for you — everybody's got to participate … so, take it to your teams early and be honest and forthright with your crews." CN

Pasquotank County's EMS Tiered Response Program was the 2025 NACo Achievement Award "Best in Category" winner in Health.

Invest in youth, change lives

From YOUTH page 5

Bohl said.

These partnerships not only reduce out-of-home placements, saving taxpayer dollars, and ensure that, upon completing probation or diversion, youth have a safe place to go.

The scale and impact of community organizations have grown significantly in recent years driven in large part by Tacoma Creates — a 0.1% sales tax approved by the Tacoma City Council and voters in 2018 that provides dedicated funding to expand access and programming for underserved youth.

In FY24, about $5.8 million was awarded to 65 organizations. Woodruff noted that many of these groups wouldn't be able to operate or grow without this critical support.

A similar effort is underway in neighboring King County, where the County Council recently approved the "Doors Open" levy, projected to generate nearly $800 million over the next seven years, beginning in January 2026, supporting more than 500 organizations, many which support youth.

In Pierce County, discussions are ongoing on additional funding mechanisms for public safety and youth justice.

In August, County Executive Ryan Mello launched a 15-member juvenile justice task force, which includes county officials, nonprofit leaders and individuals with lived experiences to explore and make recommendations on the creation and funding possibilities for a new juvenile detention center.

Pierce County's journey demonstrates that bold choices and deep collaboration can transform systems once rooted in punishment into ones grounded in possibility.

When communities invest in youth, they don't just change outcomes — they change lives. CN

Wilkom is a justice program associate in NACo's County Practices and Innovations department.

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

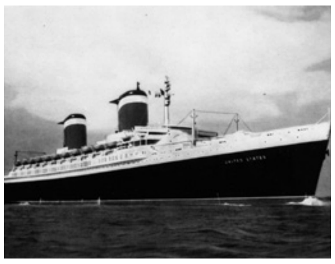
CALIFORNIA

- **VENTURA COUNTY'S** Economic Vitality Unit, in partnership with the Department of Airports and key regional partners, has been awarded $550,000 to establish an **Advanced Air Mobility Innovation Center,** the county announced.

The grant is part of a $9 million Catalyst Predevelopment Funding Program from Uplift Central Coast, an organization which provides strategic grants to support community-driven projects that promote equity, sustainability and regional resilience. The County's project was selected as one of 36 regional initiatives across six Central Coast counties that support economic vitality.

FLORIDA

Crews are making progress on preparing what's to become the world's largest artificial reef, WMBB-TV reported. In August, a federal judge cleared **OKALOOSA COUNTY** to sink the SS United States and turn it into an **artificial reef.** The county board said the ship is expected to be deployed 20 nautical miles south of Destin-Fort Walton Beach in late 2025. Okaloosa County commissioners have been collaborating with Coleen Marine salvage company, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, U.S. Coast Guard, ATF, FDLE, Okaloosa EMS, Emergency Management leadership and Destin-Fort Walton Beach Natural Resources staff and County leadership.



IDAHO

A new partnership between **BANNOCK COUNTY** and the United Way of Southeastern Idaho aims to provide affordable and accessible **childcare** to eastern Idaho's working families.

The KIDS First Coalition a pilot program that recently launched, is "designed to help more parents stay in the workforce, support local employers, and grow the regional economy," according to a Bannock County press release.

"The high cost and limited availability of childcare — driven by provider shortages, low waves and high turnover — are major hurdles for Idaho parents, limiting their participation in the local economy. At the same time, recent data shows a drop in southeast Idaho's labor force numbers from 2024 to 2025, meaning more people are leaving the workforce entirely. The high cost of childcare is a key reason why," the county noted.

MARYLAND

- **CECIL COUNTY** has launched its **redesigned website** to be "more user-friendly, transparent and accessible," according to the Office of the Cecil County Executive.

County Executive Adam Streight reported that the redesigned website is the result of "months of careful planning, migration and clean-up of existing content. One of my many goals as County Executive is to make government more accessible and transparent. This website does just that. I look forward to future enhancements coming over the next few months that will make it even easier to interact with County government."

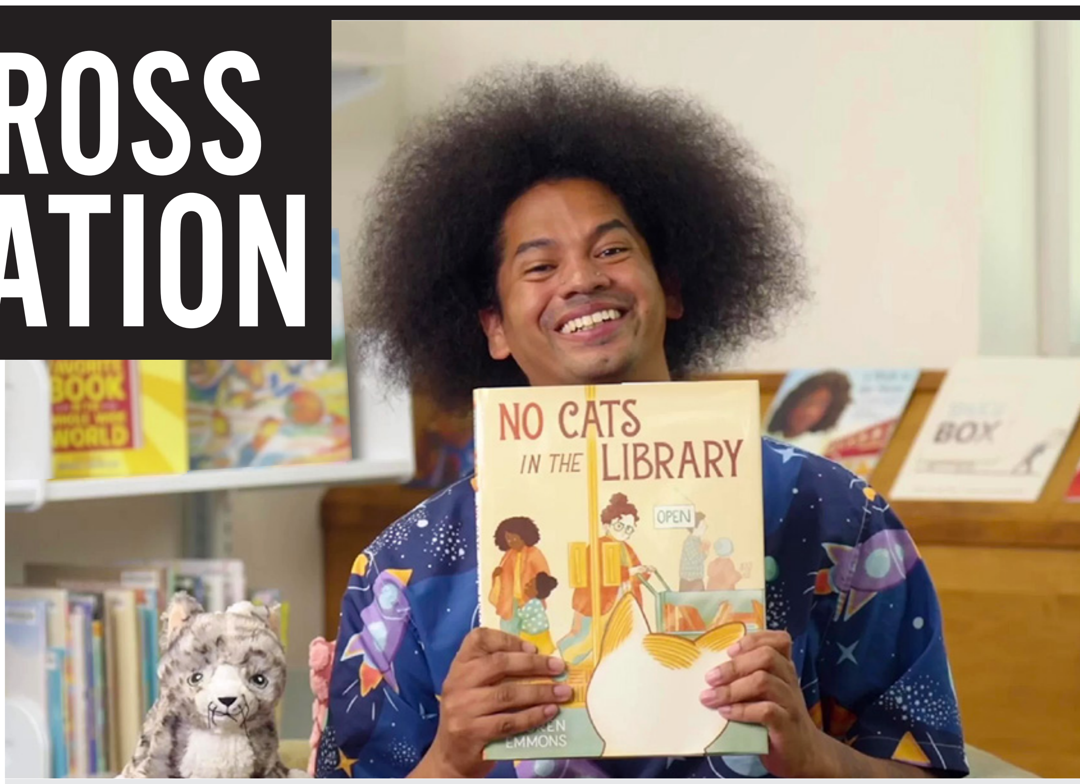
- The **Mobilize Montgomery Federal Workforce Career Center** recently held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark its official opening. Funded by **MONTGOMERY COUNTY**, the center is the first-of-its-kind physical location in the United States dedicated to supporting displaced federal workers through personalized services and programs, the county said.

"The Mobilize Montgomery Federal Workforce Career Center is the first facility of its kind in the nation, and it was made possible because we had the foresight to include an additional $700,000 in the FY26 budget for WorkSource Montgomery to expand its operations and prepare for the job losses we feared were coming," said County Executive Marc Elrich.

MICHIGAN

- The Michigan Community & Worker Economic Transition Office has selected 10 organizations for the inaugural **Community Growth Academy**, an 18-month program designed to help communities affected by transitions in the

See NEWS FROM page 11



CALIFORNIA

- **After nearly two decades, the classic kids' show** *Reading Rainbow* is back — with a new host and a new digital format on YouTube, but with the same mission of encouraging children to "take a look, it's in a book."

The original show, which ran for 26 years on PBS with host LeVar Burton, won more than 250 awards, including 26 Emmys and a Peabody Award. It spurred a love of reading for generations of kids.

The new host is library evangelist Mychal Threets, who became a social media star while working as a **librarian** in **SOLANO COUNTY**.

CALIFORNIA

- **CONTRA COSTA COUNTY** has released a new video series highlighting the impact of its **Innovation Fund Round 1** grantees, *Contra Costa News* reported. Funded through Measure X, the videos spotlight local programs that are testing new ways to deliver services and improve outcomes for residents. The innovations include everything from ideas on how to better deliver fresh food to families to refurbishing and distributing computers.

MICHIGAN

- Young people at the **MIDLAND COUNTY** Juvenile Justice Center are taking part in the **PAWSitive Helpers Program**, which pairs them with dogs from the Humane Society of Midland County. The program, founded in 2014 by Angela DuBois of Behavioral Medicine Associates of Mid-Michigan, teaches juvenile participants patience, empathy and responsibility, while providing rescue dogs with much-needed socialization and basic training.

WASHINGTON

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs recently recognized **SPOKANE COUNTY** for purchasing 200 suicide prevention license plate emblems to raise awareness and fund community-based **suicide prevention** programs, supporting service members and their families. The emblems increase public awareness for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The emblems will be placed on county police cars, maintenance trucks and other vehicle license plates.

From NEWS FROM page 10

auto and utility sectors plan for long-term growth and resilience.

- The **HURON COUNTY** Economic Development Corporation is among those chosen, joining a diverse statewide cohort.

"The Huron County EDC is honored to lead our community into the Community Growth Academy," said Samantha Schnettler, executive eirector of the Huron County Economic Development Corporation. "This opportunity strengthens our ability to diversify our economy, build resilience, and engage residents in shaping a sustainable future. We are eager to put these tools to work not only for Huron County, but also to serve as a model for other rural communities navigating similar transitions."

TEXAS

TRAVIS COUNTY is launching a new **childcare** program called "Raising Travis County." Commissioners approved $21 million to create another 1,000 childcare scholarships for families. The money comes from a childcare initiative voters approved last year.

"Today, Raising Travis County takes a huge step forward for children in our community," said Travis County Judge Andy Brown. "Every dollar we invest in childcare today will lead to better outcomes and brighter futures for kids tomorrow."

VIRGINIA

- **The HENRICO COUNTY** Department of Public Utilities is drawing a lot of interest for being able to borrow money at low interest. It is the first public utility in the nation to earn a **"quadruple AAA" rating** for water and sewer revenue bonds.

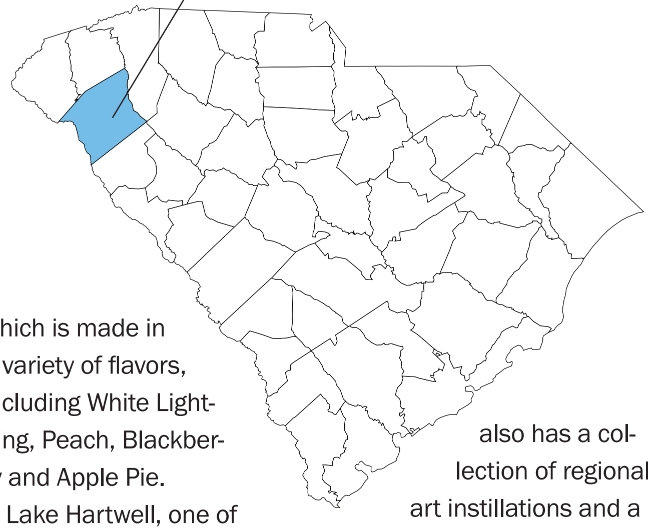
The county earned the top endorsement from each of the four main rating agencies: S&P Global Ratings, Moody's Investors Service, Fitch Ratings and Kroll Bond Rating Agency.

- **STAFFORD COUNTY** Economic Development recently introduced the **Legacy Business Recognition Program**, an initiative created at the request of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors to honor and celebrate businesses that have invested their time, talent and resources in Stafford. To date, more than 250 businesses have joined the program. Participating businesses receive a custom window decal, a digital badge, social media recognition, and acknowledgment at the annual Business Appreciation Reception.

Send your news and photos to Editor Mary Ann Barton at mbarton@naco.org.

GET TO KNOW… Anderson County, South Carolina

by Meredith Moran
staff writer



Anderson County, S.C., which was established in 1826 and named for Revolutionary War Gen. Robert Anderson, is home to the first cotton gin in the world to be operated by electricity. Its county seat, Anderson, is nicknamed "Electric City" and was the first city in the south to have an unlimited supply of electric power.

The city is the birthplace of the late actor Chadwick Boseman, best known for his starring role in "Black Panther." Larry Nance, a three-time NBA All-Star and winner of the league's first dunk contest and Jim Rice, a Baseball Hall of Famer largely considered to be one of the greatest hitters in MLB history, are also notable Anderson County natives.

Anderson County lies in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is part of the Upstate Heritage Quilt Trail. The trail features hundreds of giant quilt squares — each detailing the intended meaning behind the art and its origin story — and spans four South Carolina counties.

Split Creek Farm, which is home to more than 350 goats and known nationally for its award-winning goat cheeses, fudge and yogurt, is located in Anderson County, as is Palmetto Distillery, the first legal moonshine distillery in South Carolina. The distillery is run by two brothers, descendants of moonshiners, who use original family recipes passed down through generations to make their moonshine, which is made in a variety of flavors, including White Lightning, Peach, Blackberry and Apple Pie.

Lake Hartwell, one of the largest and most visited public recreation lakes in the Southeast, is located in the county. The 56,000-acre reservoir, which was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood control and hydroelectric power, is known for its prime bass fishing and activities such as boating and camping. Lake Hartwell has more than 960 miles of shoreline, which is more than the state of California.

The area was once home to the Cherokee, who referred to a spot near the lake as "Ah-Ye-Li A-Lo-Hee," which means "the center of the world." The location was their community hub, and where they would gather for celebrations, tribal council and trading.

Carolina Wren Park, a popular outdoor venue off of Main Street in the county, hosts concerts, block parties, movie nights, workout classes, Shakespeare performances and transforms into an ice-skating rink in the winter. The park is home to one of 24 Carolina wren bronze sculptures scattered across the city's downtown, which is part of a scavenger hunt. Its downtown also has a collection of regional art instillations and a rotating sculpture exhibit.

The county's town of Belton is home to the Palmetto Tennis Championships and the South Carolina Tennis Hall of Fame, of which Althea Gibson — the first Black player to win a Grand Slam event — is a notable inductee. Gibson was a world's No. 1 ranked tennis player in 1957 and 1958 and a five-time Grand Slam singles champion. She also played golf professionally.

Also located in the county is Honea Path, home to fewer than 4,000 people and the smallest town in South Carolina with a Carnegie Library. Another small town located in the county, Williamston, is home to the annual Spring Water Festival in Mineral Spring Park. The sparkling-clear spring water that burbles up from the town park was once rumored to make people who drank it appear younger.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.