



## Hospital consolidation creates new opportunities for affordable housing

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

Healthcare strategists shared how counties can partner with health systems to build affordable and supportive housing July 18 at NACo's Large Urban County Caucus meeting.

The consolidation of hospital systems, restructuring, and closures create new questions about what to do with their real estate assets, noted Richard Cho, managing director at Manatt Health.

**'Hospitals are looking at how to repurpose space and create housing.'**

– *Richard Cho, Manatt Health*

"I think potential opportunity here is how they can proactively leverage their real estate properties before they have to undergo these restructuring decisions," Cho said. "As a way to help improve their bottom lines, as well as address some of the pressures that they're facing, whether that's freeing up hospital beds or addressing their workforce challenges."

Health system real estate



provides a ripe opportunity for permanent supportive housing, which pairs affordable housing with wraparound support services and has been proven to better serve people who are homeless with complex needs and lower health-care costs, Cho noted.

"Hospitals are now looking at how to repurpose their inpatient facility space and create housing, both for the workforce, as well as for the surrounding community, and I think both are needed," Cho said.

In Colorado, Denver Health partnered with the Denver Housing Authority to repurpose a former administrative building on the health system's campus into affordable housing for seniors and high utilizers of healthcare services, Cho said. In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, MetroHealth is also working in the housing space, funding affordable housing adjacent to its main campus that also features an "opportunity center," that offers job training, and financial and digital literacy training.

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NACo's new leadership team for 2026-2027 pauses for a photo July 20 at the Annual Business Meeting in New Orleans. (L-r): Immediate Past President J.D. Clark; President George Dunlap; First Vice President Alisha Bell and Second Vice President Sarah Benatar. Photo by Denny Henry

## NACo President Dunlap challenges counties to improve lives of children

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Calling his Mecklenburg County, N.C. home a microcosm of America, Commissioner George Dunlap started his term as NACo president at the 2026 Annual Conference in Orleans Parish, La. by recounting the homework he'd done to represent all of America's 3,069 counties.



He visited counties, learned about public lands issues and participated in fly-ins and peer exchanges that broadened his horizons beyond the Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee, which he previously chaired.

"I know firsthand that from our largest county to our smallest places, each carries priorities that others may not. And yet, all counties deserve a champion, a voice," he said July 20 at the Annual Business Meeting.

"I'm listening, and I've advocated alongside you for your cherished priorities," he said,

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## Astronaut brings out-of-this-world perspective to leadership challenges

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Like one-third of the world, Chris Hadfield was inspired by watching the Apollo 11 crew walk on the moon. He was nine years old.

Unlike most of the world, he rode that inspiration, and



a few rockets, into space as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

While flying two Space Shuttle missions and commanding

the International Space Station, he reflected on what it took for humanity to reach the moon.

"They had to learn and become skilled at doing things that they couldn't even ask anybody about, that nobody

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# NACo President Dunlap to focus on ‘Building Better Futures’

From DUNLAP page 1

before listing some of those priorities: “Testifying before Congress on the importance of federal disaster aid, pounding the halls of Congress touting the importance of PILT (Payments in Lieu of Taxes) and SRS (Secure Rural Schools) for public lands counties, urging the White House to reform federal behavioral health policy and sharing county innovations in public health, housing and infrastructure and broadband.”

Informed by his work as a Charlotte, N.C. police officer and years on the county school board, Dunlap’s presidency will focus on improving conditions for young people — Building Better Futures. The Youth Housing and Homelessness Task Force, led by Los Angeles County, Calif. Supervisor



NACo President George Dunlap addresses county officials July 20 at the Annual Business Meeting. Photo by Denny Henry

Holly Mitchell and Warren County, Ohio Commissioner Shannon Jones will tackle housing insecurity.

“Building a better future is about getting ahead of these problems, not just reacting to [them],” he said. “I’ve seen what’s at stake when we get it

right, and I see what it costs when we don’t.”

Dunlap called on every county to pass a resolution to review its investments in young people and take at least one

concrete action to improve the lives of young people.

“Let me be clear about one thing, government is not the whole answer. It never has been — it takes a community: parents, teachers, coaches, churches and neighbors,” he said. “All of us, pulling in the same direction.”

Joining Dunlap on the executive committee to pull counties in the same direction, Wayne County, Mich. Commissioner Alisha Bell became first vice president and Wise County, Texas Judge J.D. Clark became the immediate past president. NACo members elected Coconino County, Ariz. Treasurer Sarah Benatar second vice president over Kendall County, Ill. Clerk Matthew Prochaska

and Loudoun County, Va. Supervisor Michael Turner, becoming the first NACo officer occupying a row office in their county since 1935-1938, shortly after Milwaukee County, Wis. Clerk George Breitbach formed the National County Officers Association, the precursor to NACo.

Hillsborough County, N.H. Commissioner Toni Pappas and Marathon County, Wis. Supervisor Kurt Gibbs were each reelected representatives of the Northeast and Central regions, rounding out the executive committee with South Region representative Ron Berry, a Roane County, Tenn. commissioner and Bill Novotny, a Johnson County, Wyo. commissioner. **CN**

## SNAP/STATS

### Rural Counties See 65+ Age Group Increase

|       |        |
|-------|--------|
| 2000: | 14.5%  |
| 2010: | 16.5%  |
| 2020: | 20%    |
| 2026: | 22-23% |

Primary drivers: Aging Baby Boomers, lower birth rates, migration of younger adults.

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

## Committee Leadership Appointments

### Policy Steering Committees

- Agriculture and Rural Affairs:** Audrain County, Mo. Commissioner Leslie Meyer
- Community, Economic and Workforce Development:** Pasco County, Fla. Commissioner Kathryn Starkey
- Energy Environment and Land Use:** Loudoun County, Va. Supervisor Michael Turner
- Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs:** Lac qui Parle County, Minn. Commissioner Todd Patzer
- Health:** Lake County, Calif. Supervisor Bruno Sabatier
- Human Services and Education:** Scott County, Minn. Commissioner Barbara Weckman Brekke
- Justice and Public Safety:** Henry County, Ga. Commissioner Carlotta Harrell
- Public Lands:** Garfield County, Utah Commissioner Jerry Taylor

**Telecommunications and Technology:** Wake County, N.C. Commissioner Shinica Thomas

**Transportation:** Larimer County, Colo. Commissioner Kristin Stephens

### Caucuses

- Large Urban County Caucus:** Harris County, Texas Commissioner Adrian Garcia
- Midsize County Caucus:** Guilford County, N.C. Commissioner Carly Cooke
- Rural Action Caucus:** Oswego County, N.Y. Clerk Terry Wilbur

### Standing Committees

- Information Technology:** Gwinnett County, Ga. Commissioner Ben Ku
- Membership:** Comal County, Texas Treasurer Renee Couch
- Programs and Services:** Stearns County, Minn. Commissioner Tarryl Clark

### Innovation Councils

- Arts and Culture:** Mecklenburg County, N.C. Commissioner Susan Rodriguez-McDowell
- Healthy Counties:** Hennepin County, Minn. Commissioner Angela Conley
- International Economic Development:** Onondaga County, N.Y. Executive Ryan McMahon
- Resilient Counties:** Napa County, Calif. Supervisor Anne Cottrell

### Advisory Councils

- Immigration and Intergovernmental Affairs:** Monterey County, Calif. Supervisor Luis Alejo
- Technology:** Franklin County, Ohio Chief Information Officer Adam Frumkin
- Retirement Readiness:** Baltimore City, Md. Councilmember Sharon Green Middleton
- Veterans and Military Service:** Chatham County, Ga. Commissioner Aaron Whitely



## CEO INSIGHTS | BY MATTHEW D. CHASE

# Our Plate Is Full — Don't Believe the Noise

A to Z. That's how we describe NACo's federal policy agenda these days — AI to zoning, and everything in between. Counties touch it all.

Nearly 4,000 county officials and partners proved that at our Annual Conference, where members shaped the American County Platform — NACo's policy playbook, built from the ground up through ten steering committees and more than 1,200 county officials.

While the national media and pundits focus on the election horse race, we're fighting for the policies that matter to America's county governments. And we're operating in a landscape where status quo isn't an option. Every program is under review. Every regulation is subject to change.

Here's what's on the front burner:

**Medicaid and SNAP:** H.R. 1, now law, pushes over \$1 trillion in potential costs to states and counties over the next decade. County hospitals, jails, and indigent care systems will feel it first, along with the ten states where counties administer SNAP nutrition benefits.

**Elections:** The SAVE America Act would impose substantial, immediate unfunded mandates — and real legal exposure — onto county election officials.

**FEMA reform:** We already secured a new transparency dashboard for Public Assistance reimbursements. Now we're pushing for faster, streamlined and predictable disaster assistance.

**Housing:** The biggest housing package in decades is now law. We're educating county officials on implementation and talking with administration officials about our priorities and perspectives on implementation.

**Transportation:** The bipartisan BUILD America 250



Act would nearly double the federal bridge formula program to \$9 billion a year, with an increased set-aside for locally owned bridges.

**Permitting reform:** As AI drives immense energy and natural resource demand, we're pushing for counties to be granted "cooperating agency" status in federal environmental reviews — fighting aggressive attempts at federal and state preemption.

Nearly 40 congressional staffers recently joined a NACo tour in Loudoun County, Va. — ground zero for America's data center boom — to see firsthand what these large-scale computing facilities mean for a host county: the benefits, burdens and everything in between.

The list goes on: the farm bill, behavioral health reforms, federal payments to public lands counties, closeout compliance for American Rescue Plan as-

sistance and cybersecurity funding reauthorization.

**But one issue demands every county's attention right now: OMB's rewrite of the Uniform Guidance, 2 CFR Part 200.** It touches \$1.1 trillion in federal grant funding a year. It hands federal agencies sweeping new termination power. It mandates extensive new subrecipient monitoring duties for states and counties. It adds viewpoint-neutrality rules that would extend to all county property — even county assets with no federal investment at all.

We filed extensive comments by the July 13 deadline. That was step one. Thanks to county advocacy, the Senate's funding bill includes language pausing the rule until Dec. 11 — a win, but not a fix. We still need county leaders pressing for a permanent solution. Our next steps: more insights from county attorneys, and continued work with the administration and Congress to secure significant revisions, through real in-

tergovernmental consultation or a postponement of this government-wide rule.

None of this happens without county leaders and our state association partners in the fight.

In recent months alone, we've held more than a half-dozen member fly-ins — not just meeting with federal counterparts, but drafting bills and amendments, hosting briefings with frontline county perspectives, and building intergovernmental relationships that outlast any single bill.

States are moving just as fast, often hitting counties harder. That's why we launched our State Policy Tracker, analyzing preemption bills and revenue restrictions statehouse by statehouse.

Federal and state decisions are intertwined and cascade up and down — so when the same policy proposals show up in Washington and across the country, we treat it as one national trend, not separate fights. That's why our partnership with state associations is

so embedded in our culture.

Our advocacy plate is full because counties' plates are full. Every disaster, every bridge, every data center starts at the county level. NACo's job is making sure our intergovernmental counterparts understand that — respectfully, persistently, and backed by real stories and data.

From A to Z, don't believe the noise that says nothing is happening in Washington. It couldn't be further from the truth. Scan the QR code for the NACo OMB Proposed Rule page. 

*Matthew D. Chase is CEO and executive director of the National Association of Counties (NACo), the only national organization serving America's 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs.*



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# Dunlap dives in as the face of America's counties

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Without a 10-gallon hat, George Dunlap stuck out like a sore thumb at the PILT Fly-In.

But the details on his badge were more telling — he was a commissioner from Mecklenburg County, N.C. It's no public lands hotspot, but as NACo's first vice president, Dunlap was looking ahead to who he would be representing as NACo's president, the same way he'd be representing his own urban counties and rural farming counties. And for him, there was no better way to learn than surrounding himself in issues like Payments in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural Schools.

"Counties are so vastly different," he said. "In North Carolina, counties are not responsible for roads, and then you go to another county where roads are a large part of their budget. I had no clue some of these things were important, but they're important to me now, because I made a commitment to represent all of NACo."

"If I can get in there and see it happen, put my hands on it, I can figure it out; I can understand why they fight so hard for the things that they fight for. I can try to understand what it's like to not have the resources to match a grant or to try the programs that other counties take for granted."

Dunlap's county government service — 18 years and counting — follows 13 years on the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board, along with 27 years as a Charlotte police



**NACo President George Dunlap served as chair of the Justice and Public Safety Policy Steering Committee prior to pursuing a role on the executive committee.** Photo by Hugh Clarke

officer after he served as a sergeant in the Marines. He took office as NACo president in July.

North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Executive Director Kevin Leonard encouraged Dunlap to run for second vice president in 2024 after working with him for several years on the state association's Board of Directors. His rigor and perspective forced Leonard to be on the top of his game when presenting to Dunlap, and he saw that as a potential asset for NACo leadership.

"He's always the person I can count on, on the Board of Directors, to ask questions that were thought-provoking and relevant," Leonard said. "He would ask questions that others may not think about because he thinks about things in a different way, which is good. You want to have everything thoroughly vetted, especially as you're trying to make poli-

cy or talk about policy, and he helps us approach issues from different angles."

Now, Leonard said, Dunlap can bring his perspective to bear as NACo moves forward at a time when counties are facing shifting costs and revenues and dramatic changes to the intergovernmental relationship.

Sonoma County, Calif. Supervisor James Gore got to know Dunlap when the pair participated in the 2021 County Leadership Institute, and Dunlap gave a nominating speech for Gore during the 2022 election. What they learned about each other during the County Leadership Institute convinced Gore that Dunlap, too, had what it took.

"He doesn't just know — he believes deeply that his job is to represent everyone," Gore said. "He's never buckled in his resolve when it was time to walk the path in the right way,

rather than just do what people wanted."

What stood out to Gore was that despite having served on the school board, Dunlap's vote wasn't a foregone conclusion when it came time for the county commission to fund the schools, which is part of North Carolinian county governance.

"If they didn't give him substantial reasons, not just because of political pressure, he wasn't buckling." It's hard to say no to school boards and not just give them everything.

Raised by his grandmother in Pineville, N.C., after serving four years in the Marine Corps, Dunlap joined the Charlotte Police Department and spent much of his career as a school resource officer, which put him in contact with students who often faced adverse circumstances at home.

"I had a bad experience with police officers — I hated cops," Dunlap said. "But I asked my-

self, 'Who could do it better?' he said of his law enforcement career. "It gave me the opportunity to engage with a bunch of young people, some who had a much tougher life than I did."

That, and the generosity shown by a UNC-Charlotte faculty member who offered him a chance to prove himself in college, has motivated him to create his presidential spotlight, Building Better Futures, which asks counties to commit to improving the lives of young people.

"How many times do you go home and watch the news where some 17-year-old has killed another 17-year-old? Or where some young girl has been kidnapped off the street?" he said. "They shouldn't have to deal with these issues."

"Maybe it's a program to have them envision having a career in something that they never even considered. Maybe it's a program that will teach them fitness and get them off the couch," that will make a difference for youth, he noted.

Over the next year, Dunlap hopes his presidency offers the same as what he strives to offer children — memorable experiences that will help him understand the challenges counties face so he can best represent them.

"It's dizzying stuff to take ownership of other counties' issues, talking to the staff for the speaker of the House or the Senate minority leader, but the more I put myself in their shoes, the better I can speak for county leaders," he said. **CN**



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# General Session | SPEAKERS

## Cedric King opens NACo Annual Conference with lessons in resilience and leadership

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cedric King was on a reconnaissance mission in Afghanistan when he stepped on an improvised explosive device or IED. The next thing he remembers is waking up in the hospital — where he would spend the next three years of his life — with both of his legs amputated. In a moment, his life changed forever. But he didn't let that limit how he decided to live it. Twenty-six months and three days after losing his legs, King ran 70.3 miles.

King shared his experience with finding resilience and “peace in the storm” with county officials July 17 at NACo's Annual Conference Opening General Session.

“I'm realizing my injury doesn't define me,” he said. “Because I know that what does define me is what I do after the injury.”

In the wake of his injury, King had a lightning-rod per-



**U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cedric King shares his perspective shift following a double amputation with county leaders at NACo's General Session on July 17.** Photo by Denny Henry

spective shift.

“As I am sitting in that [hospital] bed, worst moments of my life, I hear a voice say, ‘You are the pencil,’” King said. “A phrase so weird and so wild, so remotely different than anything I could ever understand, is said to me. ‘You are the pencil.’ And today, years later, I understand that not

only am I the pencil, you are the pencil too.”

On the outside of a brand-new pencil, it's sharp with an untouched coat of paint and eraser. It hasn't been chewed up yet; it hasn't done homework or taxes, King said. But everything that makes a pencil a pencil is what's on its inside, not the outside, he noted.

“This pencil has got everything going for it,” King said. “But along comes tragedy.

“I am getting ready to apply pressure to this pencil, and it's going to look like all is lost,” he told the audience.

King held up a brand-new pencil and broke it.

“Most people would throw this pencil away, but this is

what God allowed me to see. With beauty, tragedy. No, it is not nice, and no, you don't want to have the worst day of your life happening, but this is the beauty of it,” King said, before taking the broken pencil and sharpening it. “This sharpener is a device that is used to take that pencil from where it is right now back to a pristine state.”

The sharpener symbolizes the opportunity to grow during life's most difficult moments, King said.

“Those days that make you cry, those days that make you pray,” King said. “Days that makes you yell, and nobody's around ... Life is challenging for you, maybe right now. Not because something wrong is done, but because something really right is about to happen. And you know it's not going to be easy, but it will be worth it.” **EN**



## *Astronaut tells county officials to challenge and inspire constituents to ‘rise above’*

From **ASTRONAUT** page 1

had ever done,” he told the NACo Annual Conference General Session audience July 19. “They had to change how they worked together and try as a group of three to do things that no individual ever could.”

What county leaders could take away from that was that the driving force behind the effort was President John F. Kennedy's rhetoric, which set the tone with his 1962 Moon-shot speech.

“He didn't do it as a boastful thing, he did it because he recognized that if you want people to rise above, you need to give them a challenge,” Hadfield said. “You need to inspire them.”



**Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield discusses leadership lessons July 19 with county officials at a General Session.** Photo by Denny Henry

But words aren't enough, he said. You need a clear vision of what you want to do and the courage to grow.

“If you truly want to change your county, if you want to change your role within

the country, if you want to change the opportunity for the people that you're responsible for, that doesn't just take a vision of leadership, it takes actual change. And the thing that you, as an

individual, have the greatest control over, of course, is changing yourself.”

Although Hadfield changed from an elementary school student into a test pilot and later an astronaut and focused his career on science, he retained an appreciation of the arts that he brought into space with him. Before hearing his story, most audience members would have been familiar with him from his viral 2013 video playing David Bowie's “Space Oddity” on the guitar that he brought with him to the International Space Station.

Now as an academic and an advisor to businesses in the spaceflight industry, he focuses on the strategic aspects

of outer space travel and its potential to remake the geopolitical order and how those changes will be reflected on Earth.

“The moon is just part of a new economic system, but the real point of all this is how do we improve the quality of life for as many people as possible in a sustainable way? That is the great challenge of our generation. How can we improve the quality of life for as many people as possible in a sustainable way?”

Some of those people may be part of a permanent human habitation on the moon someday, but the skills needed to navigate that new world won't be all that different from what it takes to live on earth. **EN**



# Caucuses & Summits

## Midsize counties confront fiscal pressures, federal shifts

by Mary Ann Barton  
editor

Members of the NACo Midsize County Caucus gathered July 18 for a two-hour session on the fiscal and regulatory challenges reshaping local government at the NACo Annual Conference. Leaders moved through panels on state and federal policy, federal funding programs, emergency services and the 2030 Census.

### Navigating state and federal policy impacts

Kevin Leonard, executive director of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, set a sober tone, telling attendees that counties “are being tested in ways that we haven’t seen in a very long time.” He pointed to the compounding strain in his state: recovery from Hurricane Helene, the shift of Health and Human Services costs to counties under the federal reconciliation law in one of the 10 county-administered states and property-tax constitutional amendments headed to North Carolina’s November ballot.

Panelists described similar squeezes. Converse County, Wyo. Commissioner Jim Willox noted while assessed property valuations have grown tenfold in his oil and gas-rich county, bringing revenue to county coffers, a proposed ballot initiative to cut primary-residence property taxes by 50 percent would devastate neighboring counties that lean on residential taxes — and the special districts funded solely

by mill levies. His prescription was targeted relief and blunt public education: “If people want to pay less taxes, they have to expect less in return.”

Shawnee County, Kan. Commissioner Aaron Mays recounted a spending-cap bill that “wouldn’t die,” which would have let a small number of voters petition to roll a county budget back to the prior year’s total. The governor vetoed it twice, but Mays expects it to return, calling it part of a pattern in which “local control in the state house means controlling the locals in the courthouse.”

Danny de Hoog, deputy director of government relations for Maricopa County, Ariz., described more than a dozen bills seeking to preempt local zoning for data centers, solar and small modular nuclear reactors — none of which cleared a divided state government.

Data centers dominated the audience discussion. Officials from Georgia, Arkansas, Oregon, Nebraska, California and elsewhere traded notes on moratoriums, infrastructure cost-shifting and misinformation spreading on social media. Several panelists framed the projects as a possible offset to shrinking residential revenue, if paired with local zoning control. The recurring challenge, Leonard said, was messaging: “Ninety seconds is about all you get” to explain something complex.

### Federal programs for midsize counties

Sallie Clark — a former El Paso County, Colo., commis-

sioner, 2015 NACo president and now USDA Rural Development state director for Colorado — walked members through the agency’s roughly 70 programs, which she organized as “ABC:” affordable housing, business and economic development and community infrastructure.

On housing, Clark highlighted loans, guarantees and grants tied to area median income. On business, she pointed to the Business and Industry guaranteed loan program and Rural Business Development Grants that seed incubators and revolving loan funds. On infrastructure, she emphasized the Community Facilities program and the Water and Environmental Programs that finance drinking-water and wastewater systems — the backbone, she said, for any housing or commercial growth.

She illustrated each with real cases: a 72-year-old Pennsylvania homeowner who repaired a crumbling basement wall through the Single Family Housing 504 program; the fire-ravaged city of Carbon, Texas, which rebuilt its water system with an Emergency Community Water Assistance Grant; a replacement hospital in Colby, Kansas; and an \$85,000 SEARCH grant that let Green Mountain Falls, Colo., study a new wastewater system. With 47 state directors nationwide, Clark urged members to find their own and carry the message home: “It’s kind of like the lottery — to win, you gotta buy a ticket.”



Danny DeHoog, deputy director of Government Relations, Maricopa County, Ariz., discusses state and federal policy impacts with fellow panelists Shawnee County, Kan. Commissioner Aaron Mays (to her immediate right) and Converse County, Wyo. Commissioner Jim Willox. Photo by Denny Henry



### Fire, EMS and emergency communications

A three-member panel tackled a service model under strain. Jim Albright, emergency services director for Guilford County, N. C., described “five or six crises” compounding at once. His county’s volunteer ranks have fallen from 1,200 in 1989 to fewer than 350 today, with only about 150 cleared for interior firefighting — mirroring a national volunteer count the National Volunteer Fire Council says is the lowest since it began measuring in 1984. Apparatus costs have doubled in five to seven years, Albright said, while NFPA standards, municipal annexations and a possible state property-tax cap could squeeze budgets built for a by-gone era.

Kevin Jones, EMS division chief in Olathe, Kan., and EMS section chair for the International Association of Fire Chiefs, pressed two federal priorities: reimbursement for whole blood carried in the field — offered by only about 300 of the nation’s 13,000-plus fire departments at \$1,300 to \$1,800 a unit — and “treatment in place,” since EMS agencies are generally paid only when they transport a patient. He also touted mobile integrated health programs that pair paramedics with nurse

practitioners, noting that 80 percent of fire-service calls are now medical. Rachael Bonlarron of Comcast, the caucus sponsor, stressed coordination with emergency operations centers and sheriffs to restore connectivity after disasters, noting that “Wi-Fi follows power” and citing an \$80 billion, decade-long infrastructure investment.

### 2030 Census

Mo Salem, project manager for the Census Bureau’s Local Update of Census Addresses (LUCA) program, closed the session by previewing the once-a-decade effort that lets counties correct the address list underpinning federal funding. This cycle introduces a “coverage-based, data-driven” approach, digital-only materials, a Census matching service and web-based GUPS (Geographic Update Partnership Software) mapping software and extends the review window from four to six months.

Salem laid out the timeline: LUCA opens with a preparation and training phase in May 2027, the six-month review begins that October and edits are due by the end of March 2028, with the program closing out in September 2029. He encouraged counties to ready their address files now — including latitude and longitude for non-standard rural locations — and to coordinate with state demographers, reminding members that “addresses are the backbone of the census.” **CN**



# Investing early: Missoula County's strategy for at-risk youth

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

She grew up in the foster system. He had a felony conviction for a violent offense. They had been living in a van. When the Missoula County, Mont. Community Justice Department housed the couple in its four-unit apartment building, "The Cube," the county ran the risk that something would go wrong.

It turned out, Justice Initiatives Coordinator Chelsea Wittmann said, that they were so overwhelmed by their newfound stability that they adopted a dog. In a pet-free building.

"Boy, did we have a learning curve ahead of us on that one," she told the Rural Action Caucus July 18. "The good news is that the people and the puppy are still housed."

As lease violations go, that was on the lighter side, and it served as a teachable moment for exactly the population that the program aims to help, including by offering credit counseling classes, financial skill building classes and one-on-one counseling.

"Along with providing housing, [the contractor] wanted to include in-house property management to teach these



**Missoula County, Mont. Justice Initiatives Coordinator Chelsea Wittmann speaks to the Rural Action Caucus July 18.** Photo by Charlie Ban

kids how to be tenants, because when we're 18, we all make good decisions, right?" Wittman said.

Looking for targeted populations where a little investment could go a long way, Missoula County identified young adults, a group that is hard to find and coordinate. The gap between juvenile and adult services was considered very hard to navigate, but the county is trying to offer a housing option for teens who are about to age out of the foster care system.



Most of the available housing in the county is concentrated in the city of Missoula, and outside of those boundaries, the county remains very rural, Wittmann said.

"We took this approach because we know that there's a really high likelihood that if we've got a kid who's involved with one system, they're going

to end up involved in other systems," she said. "So we may as well identify them and meet them where we're at and serve them."

Youth-oriented programming is a relatively new effort for Missoula County. That includes a restorative justice program, inspired by nearby Flathead County, Mont., a justice system alternative that manages interactions between teens who have committed offenses and the victims of those offenses.

"My argument is that the

Youth transitioning to adulthood are hard to find, and coordinate and the leap is challenging for them to make without help

restorative justice program is the much tougher route to take" than incarceration, Wittmann said. "And it's also the route that's actually going to encourage growth and change. And that's what we're after, especially with this population."

Prior to introducing restorative justice in the 1990s, Flathead County had the highest teen recidivism rate in the state and now has the lowest.

Missoula County has used a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Youth System of Care grant to evaluate, expand and sustain its new crisis care system for residents up to age 21 by funding behavioral health and shelter care resources, including a youth diversion program to engage and follow up with families and an emergency bed and care coordinator. **CN**

## Hospital consolidation creates new opportunities for affordable housing

From **LUCC page 1**

Counties can support healthcare system roles in housing by helping them evaluate real estate assets and properties to determine best uses; providing legal and technical assistance in navigating property tax exemptions, zoning and partnership structures; brokering partnerships between developers and healthcare systems and providing formal support for funding and financing applications, zoning changes and community approvals, Cho said.

People experiencing homelessness have a mortality rate 3.5 times higher than those who are housed, acknowledged John Vu, vice

president of strategy for Community Health at Kaiser Permanente. While housing isn't healthcare, good health is impossible without housing, and counties play a vital role, Vu said.

"County governments need to be sort of the connective tissue in a way between the healthcare system, behavioral health, social services, community development and all these other parts of housing and homelessness work," Vu said. The housing crisis "can feel very overwhelming. It's so great and vast across the country, but we can really rely on counties to help stitch this together and bring partners together, listen to community needs and focus on what works." **CN**



**Richard Cho, managing director, Manatt Health, discusses affordable housing opportunities at NACO's LUCC meeting on July 18.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III



## Summits

# Counties find their roles in data center development

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

With data center sitings and regulation happening at a rapid pace, Frederick County, Md. Executive Jessica Fitzwater was unequivocal when advising hundreds of county officials during an educational summit on the developments.

Offer no local incentives or tax breaks.

“They don’t need them, don’t give them to them,” she said. “Really, they don’t [need them]. They will pay whatever you assess them.”

She inherited a hyperscale data center, but soon after taking office formed a data center working group, which came back with recommendations that, once passed by her County Council, formed strict limits on noise vibration, expanded setbacks and clear zoning roles to ensure facilities are placed only where impacts can be minimized. That leaves, she said, roughly 1% of the total county land eligible for data center development.

“As county executive, I’m not anti-data center or pro-data center,” she said. “Our priority has been and always will be to rein in this industry to protect our community’s way of life while maximizing the benefits that this development can provide.”

In neighboring West Virginia, Mason County Commis-



**Mason County, W.Va. Commissioner Rick Handley describes the extent to which his state’s Legislature preempted local control on data centers during an educational summit July 18. Heather Coil, of the Data Center Coalition, is to his left. Photo by Charlie Ban**

sioner Rick Handley and his counterparts can only wish for that kind of authority after the Legislature preempted all local control of data center sites, including exempting them from code enforcement.

“The legislature explicitly states its intent to occupy the entire field of regulations for these entities, displacing local authority,” he said. “My opinion, that is wrong. We have to have input from the county.”

He noted that his county’s data center development funded \$250,000 for some new sheriff’s department vehicles and \$300,000 to the local EMS



company, but the in the fog of misinformation, he worries that he and his colleagues will take the heat for something over which they have no control.

“As a county commissioner, we get blamed for bringing data centers to our county,” he said. “I have no problem with the data centers, but we get the blame.”

Fitzwater noted: ‘It would be an understatement to

say that public engagement on this issue has drastically changed, resulting in a lot of frustration from our community, legal challenges, local zoning decisions, and truly more misinformation than on any other topic that I have seen in my years in public service.”

Heather Coil, senior state policy and partnerships manager at the Data Center Coalition, acknowledged the concerns local officials have regarding data center proliferation and said its members are trying to be more visible to the public.

“We’re working to develop a forum where we can have the industry available to officials like yourselves in a place where we can meet at a regular cadence and folks can answer questions,” she said. “I think that that is something that is going to make a big difference to these communities, because a lot of folks really are either interested in bringing that into their investment to their community, or they have that as their investment coming in but they don’t necessarily have the right venues to answer all of their questions.” **CN**

## Counties urged to make election safety, security and readiness shared work

by **Mary Ann Barton**  
editor

County officials heard a consistent message July 18 at a NACo Annual Conference session on ensuring counties are election-ready for the 2026 midterms: safety, security and disaster readiness can no longer be siloed in separate departments.

Whitney May, chief program officer at the Center for

Tech and Civic Life, framed three national trends. On safety, she cited a Brennan Center survey finding that roughly one in three local election officials have faced threats or harassment, and that the 2024 general election drew more than 200 bomb threats.

On security, she warned that foreign adversaries are again expected to probe election systems, with stolen us-

ernames and passwords as the leading entry point and artificial intelligence accelerating attacks.

On readiness, she noted the United States has averaged 23 \$1 billion weather disasters a year over the past five years — more than double the historical norm — increasingly striking during election season.

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**Corinne Duncan, elections director in Buncombe County, N.C., recounts running the 2024 presidential election through Hurricane Helene. Photo by Denny Henry**



## Summits

# New toolkit aims to strengthen county-public health collaboration

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

To build healthier communities and better respond to public health needs, county officials and public health leaders must work together before crisis hits, panelists said July 18 at a County Strategies for Advancing Public Health session during NACo's Annual Conference.

The National Commission on Local Public Health Leadership, which was formed last year to help identify gaps in relationships between policy, policymakers and public health, recently launched a "Good Health is Good Governance" toolkit to support building partnerships in the public health field. Two county leaders — Athens County, Ohio Commissioner Lenny Eliason and Loudoun County, Va. Chair Phyllis J. Randall — are members of the public health commission and helped inform the toolkit.

"My vision for the work was to make sure that it was usable at all levels, all sizes of governments," Eliason said. "A lot of times, when you put a national commission together, they tend to silo things."

"I want to make sure that you can use this, no matter what level of government you're at, and that you can adapt it to what your needs are. It's not a prescription, but



**Athens County, Ohio Commissioner Lenny Eliason and Loudoun County, Va. Chair Phyllis J. Randall discuss the Good Governance Is Good Health toolkit July 18.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III

a map to get things better."

The toolkit acts as a guide for elected officials and public health leaders to build a relationship, including a step-by-step framework for using data to move shared priorities to tangible progress and tips to clarify and streamline response in the event of a public health emergency or routine surge.

"I thought if we could do something to put in place some skeleton of information of what to do when the next crisis happens, it actually may save lives," Randall said. "So,



whatever we can do to get ahead of the curve ... because it's never a question of 'Will something else happen?' as far as a medical issue or public health issue, but 'What will happen'? So, to put the toolkit together was vitally important to me."

In Montgomery County, Md. and Rolette County, N.D., elected officials and public health leaders already have

an established relationship, which improves community health response and outcomes.

In the internet age when misinformation can spread widely and quickly, ensuring that sources are heavily vetted and verifiable is paramount, and working closely with public health leaders is the way to do that, said Montgomery County Councilmember-At-Large Laurie-Anne Sayles. And bringing everyone to the table — state partners, faith institutions — before crises happen helps establish

broader community trust for when they do hit, she noted.

"You have to speak from data-informed perspectives," Sayles said. "... Our analysts and staff are some of the most important people behind these elected officials. We could not do the work that we do without [them] to ensure that the information that we're giving to the public is verifiable."

In Rolette County, it took time to build a sense of trust with local officials, but simply showing up is the best way to start, said Rolette County Public Health Administrator Barbara Frydenlund.

"Public health was not understood in the county, nor was it really welcomed because it cost money," Frydenlund said. "But I found that going to county commission meetings, going to city councils without an ask — finding out, 'What do you see as the most pressing issues with your constituents or within your community?' — and then going back and trying to work on those touch points that they made, being fiscally responsible with the small amount of resources that I had, looking for alternative funding sources that were going to address the needs that they had identified, that was that trust-building and that follow-through that was just so important." 

### From ELECTIONS page 8

"Disaster planning and election planning can no longer be treated as separate conversations," May said, pointing officials to nonpartisan resources including the Committee for Safe and Secure Elections, the Election Security Exchange and a new CORE Playbook for election continuity launching this month.

Brevard County, Fla., Supervisor of Elections Tim Bobanic described building cybersecurity from the ground up. After communication

gaps with county IT, his office pulled its network infrastructure out in 2018 and became one of the first to hire full-time certified cybersecurity staff; it now keeps two on hand. Florida, he noted, was the first state to enroll all 67 county election offices in the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center with monitoring sensors, turning isolated incidents into shared intelligence.

Human error, he said, remains the biggest risk, countered with multifactor authentication and phishing simulations.

Corinne Duncan, elections director in Buncombe County, N.C., recounted running the 2024 presidential election through Hurricane Helene, a 500-year flood that made Buncombe the hardest-hit county. Landslides blocked roads, communications failed and her team had to replace 21 polling places while a third of early-voting workers were unavailable.

Her office became a supply hub and, informally, a place of comfort. Duncan urged colleagues to prepare through tabletop exercises, build psychological resili-

ence, meet basic needs first and lean on partners outside the disaster zone — in her case the State Board of Elections under then-Executive Director Karen Brinson Bell and state emergency management, which delivered generators, water and mobile facilities. She also advised keeping messages simple and going low-tech, relying on radio, word of mouth and paper. Despite the devastation, she said, turnout in the region held strong.

Moderator Christine Walker, the Jackson County, Ore., clerk, opened the session

with her own cautionary tale: a suspicious device left near her elections building the day after 2020 certification, initially written off as graffiti, which sharpened her focus on staff safety and partnerships with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and local law enforcement. Rounding out the panel, Russell County, Ala., Sheriff Heath Taylor offered a law enforcement perspective on helping voters feel secure at the polls.

The bottom line, speakers agreed: no county has to face these challenges alone. 



# Counties turn to universities, hard data to gauge opioid settlement impact



Jason Berry (center), director of planning and community engagement in Monroe County, Mich., advises on how to evaluate the impact of opioid settlement investments with Marcus Boyd (right), opioid settlement program manager, Mecklenburg County, N.C., in a discussion moderated by Amy Dolinky, director of opioid services, Michigan Association of Counties. Photo by Mary Ann Barton

by Mary Ann Barton  
editor

Because opioid settlement funds can often be paid out over roughly 18 years, most counties have time to test what works, measure it and change course. The catch, panelists said July 16 during the Opioid Settlement Summit, a pre-conference workshop, is that the measuring itself — formal evaluation — is often the hardest and most neglected piece of that cycle.

**‘There are departments and professors that live for this kind of stuff.’**

— Jason Berry,  
Monroe County, Mich.

Evaluation is the final step that restarts the loop, and frequently the most complicated one, said Amy Dolinky, director of opioid services for the Michigan Association of Counties, who moderated a session on evaluating the impact of settlement investments. She pointed to two



counties that have wired data collection into their programs rather than bolting it on afterward.

For Jason Berry, director of planning and community engagement in Monroe County, Mich., evaluation started with a question some counties might skip: What is the community trying to accomplish? The county of roughly 150,000 partnered with Michigan State University on a community needs assessment and Wayne State University to analyze the results, mapping gaps in services and barriers to treatment through focus groups, surveys and interviews with residents in recovery and their families.

The data gave Berry standing with county leadership. “My ideas, I didn’t believe were good enough,” he said. “I wanted to bring hard data.” When state grant funding ran out, Monroe County used settlement dollars to keep the Wayne State analyst on staff to help providers build quarterly reports and benchmark



Courtney Biere of the Iowa State Association of Counties, Mills County, Iowa Supervisor Richard Crouch and Wake County, N.C. Deputy County Manager Duane Holder discuss opioid settlements. Photo by Cameron Leonard

similar services against one another.

Settlement money should supplement existing services, never supplant them, Berry stressed, and should go directly to programs and the people affected. “While we can’t change the past, we can look forward and make a difference,” he said. He credited that approach with a sharp drop in overdose deaths since the programs began — a decline he attributed largely to peer recovery coaches who help people navigate insurance, medication and housing.

In Mecklenburg County, N.C., Opioid Settlement Pro-

gram Manager Marcus Boyd described a similar evolution. Providers initially reported whatever metrics mattered most to them, making programs impossible to compare. The county shifted to the North Carolina Measures Model — strategy-specific process, quality and outcome measures that let treatment, housing and employment programs be benchmarked while still tracking custom metrics.

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte serves as its formal evaluator, tying front-end assessments to outcomes ahead of a fall request for proposals.

The numbers are moving in the right direction, Boyd said: fewer overdose events and more people entering care. But he was candid about the gaps — a jail-based medication program served just 54 people this year, too few for the county’s size, prompting a contract review. Mecklenburg pairs its quantitative measures with private community surveys and resident feedback. “Sometimes the data doesn’t tell the full story,” Boyd said.

Asked what single practice every local government should adopt regardless of budget, Berry urged counties to start with people, not money: stand up a task force at little cost, then call local colleges. “There are departments and professors that live for this kind of stuff,” he said, noting university extension offices and community mental health agencies can often help protect sensitive data.

Boyd’s prescription was simpler — core metrics and a willingness to listen. “You have to listen to the community,” he said, not only people in recovery, but the families and children affected alongside them. **CN**



# Mobile Tours

## Pest control department meets tall order controlling small disease vectors

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

During the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the New Orleans Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board had a crucial routine — feeding the rats of the French Quarter.

While the shutdown of restaurants and bars had the rat population on the ropes, the personnel in charge of controlling pests knew that a failure to keep the rats' routine intact could mean a massive migration into residential areas throughout Orleans Parish, La. and opening a whole new can of worms.

NACo Annual Conference attendees had a chance to see how the department handles pests that could easily spread disease, particularly in a hospitality and port city that brings in visitors, and sometimes stowaways, from



**Aviation Supervisor Jeff Fletcher shows Wayne County, Mich. Commissioner Melissa Daub how the New Orleans Mosquito, Termite and Rodent Control Board's helicopter sprays for both adult mosquito and larvae.** Photo by Charlie Ban

all over the world.

Paid for by the city and parish's general fund, the department has made substantial investments that allow it to better fight the spread of disease. While accepting free genetic analysis at Louisiana State University might seem like a no-brainer, doing in-house testing of mosquitoes has a distinct advantage

when looking for West Nile, Eastern Equine Encephalitis and St. Louis Encephalitis.

"If we set traps Monday, pick them up Tuesday, we have our answers by lunchtime Wednesday," said Assistant Director Carrie Cottone. "If we sent them away, we'd get our results on Friday. That's 72 additional hours when infected mosquitoes



are potentially biting and infecting people."

It also saves overtime costs if results on a Friday require a heavy spraying response.

A helicopter allows for precision spraying for adult mosquitos and larvae, and a GIS mapping program allows the department to track its chemical usage.

"Our inspectors have tablets in their vehicles and every one of these dots, red and green, that's where we've seen a water issue — whether it's construction, waste tires, abandoned pools, fountains, natural divots in the ground that hold water," said entomologist Alexandros Pavlakis. "The important part isn't that we track it and know it, but we also

report this to other agencies — water board, sanitation, code enforcement — so we can get that information and get those priority issues dealt with rather than just going back and using chemicals."

The department's annual NOLA Bugfest offers fun and educational activities for children and a chance to have serious conversations with parents.

"It's a chance to ask if they have a termite contact on their house, why that's important and if they've looked through their yard to see if they have any standing water collecting in their kids' toys," Cottone said.

As for the rats of the French Quarter, once business resumed as the pandemic receded, so did their population. But when the rest of the world was dealing with plenty, a rat invasion wasn't part of it. **CN**

## New Orleans Real-Time Crime Center saves thousands of police hours

by **Meredith Moran**  
staff writer

When a 911 call is made in New Orleans, the city's Real-Time Crime Center pulls footage from cameras near the incident and sends it to law enforcement, making personnel better informed en route and cutting response times. The 24/7 centralized intelligence hub has access to more than 2,000 cameras across the city, according to Ross Bourgeois, director of Public Safety Support for the City of New Orleans, who manages the Real-Time Crime Center. County officials toured the facility July 16 ahead of the NACo Annual Conference.

The Real-Time Crime Center estimates that every time it provides video to officers, it saves 90 minutes in response time. Since opening in 2017, it's given back "well



**NACo members listen to the director of Real-Time Crime Center as he speaks July 16, about the City of New Orleans' monitoring system.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III

over 60,000 man hours," Bourgeois noted, adding that that's a conservative estimate, and the number could be closer to double that. The center handles roughly 1,500 cases a month, he said.

"The sum of the parts is greater than the whole," Bourgeois said. "What's an hour to a homicide? What's 20 minutes if you're looking for a lost kid? What's 90 seconds if you

can get an ambulance to a cardiac arrest patient during a major special event?"

"So, I would submit to you that it's when seconds count and moments matter that you really can't quantify [the benefit]."

The center is part of a \$40 million citywide public safety initiative, funded through the city and Ernest N. Morial New Orleans Exhibition Hall

Authority, that was rolled out following two high-profile shootings in November and December of 2016 around the French Quarter.

"The tourism industry told the administration at the time 'enough was enough,'" Bourgeois said.

It cost just under \$10 million to build the Real-Time Crime Center and implement its technology to open by the one-year anniversary of the incidents, and the yearly operational budget is roughly \$6 million, according to Bourgeois.

A locality looking to adopt a similar model wouldn't need to operate on that quick of a timeline or have as many resources to see results, he noted.

"I'm very proud of what we built here, but you don't have to have a facility this size or this luxurious, if you will, for a government facility to do

good work," Bourgeois said. "You can do the basic tenets of a Real-Time Crime Center with one person, a laptop, a portable radio and one piece of technology ... You can crawl before you walk and walk before you run."

Despite significant backlash to local governments using cameras to monitor crime — from residents and privacy advocacy groups across the country — the Real-Time Crime Center's "open book" approach has helped quell skepticism, according to Bourgeois.

"I believe that a lot of our success and a lot of our acceptance has come from the fact that we'll answer your questions and we'll sit here and we'll talk about it and we bring community groups through," Bourgeois said. "And we have not seen that vitriolic pushback that other cities are having." **CN**



# Steering Committees

## County election officials have allies in county attorneys

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

As tensions around election administration climb ahead of the midterms, the estimated two-thirds of county elections staff who have not consulted with their county attorneys have an easy first step to making life easier.

But while the legal support is there, Forsyth County, N.C. Attorney Gordon Watkins told the Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee July 17 that those elections personnel should help make the process easier for their colleagues, too.

"I don't know everything the election officials know because I cover 30 different departments, and that's true of many, many counsel," Watkins said. "It's good to always inform counsel to say, 'This is the statute that applies, this is the regulation.' I never take offense at that."

Former Maricopa County, Ariz. Supervisor Bill Gates,



**Forsyth County, N.C. County Attorney Gordon Watkins describes how to build a relationship between a county elections office and the county attorney while addressing the Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Steering Committee.** Photo by Charlie Ban

now executive director of the Arizona State University Mechanics of Democracy Laboratory, shared his county's experience preparing for election strife.

"We had a county attorney who believed in 2020 that the battle for the U.S. Senate might come down to Maricopa County," he said. "She decided to create an in-house election law team. Most counties are not going to have that luxury, but nonetheless, if you can't

develop that expertise from within house, start reaching out to those experts in the legal community who can provide that assistance to the team at the county attorney's office."

The Brennan Center's Liz Howard cited campaign finance academics in identifying a recent change in the campaign finance law that allows donors to exceed contribution limits of that money is earmarked for legal support.



"No surprise, more money for lawyers means more litigation," she said.

Hence the increased legal scrutiny on elections officials.

Howard noted that although support for elections officials in their individual capacity typically falls outside of a county attorney's responsibility, several organizations offer pro bono counsel.

Watkins advised elections officials to clearly mark transitions between public spaces and office areas where confidential information is kept, and to ensure that confidential information is not visible through windows.

Former U.S. Attorney for Arizona Gary Restaino outlined the various requests and demands elections officials could receive:

- A request for a voluntary interview

- A letter request for documents
- Administrative subpoenas, issued by agents without oversight from prosecutors
- Grand jury subpoenas, which have a little more presumption of regularity,
- Search warrants, authorized by a court.

Watkins said planning with staff could help offset some problems if issues do arise.

"You should familiarize your staff with what a judicial warrant looks like, and designate staff members who will interact with law enforcement," he said.

Gates noted that there's often strategy behind the filings.

"It's not always documents that they want. Sometimes they want to subpoena you to come and testify. And after a while, we said, 'You know what? We're just going to send our lawyer down there to testify in front of the committee.' And guess what? They didn't want to hear from our lawyer." **CN**

## State ag director illustrates challenges in fighting pests

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

As Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry commissioner, Michael Strain is acutely aware of when his state's signature products are under threat. Whether that threat is biological or legal.

Right now, he's facing down the Australian pasture mealybug, which is already in 25% of Texas and moving into Louisiana, where its fondness for cane sugar threatens to light up the invasive insect's population like a phone bank at a telethon.

"When you talk about cane sugar, for many parishes, this is the, THE economy," he said. "We found out we had nothing under the law to treat it. Nothing."

But an exemption from the Environmental Protection

Agency allowed the use of a new insecticide, which has thus far shown signs of success.

"We are three days into this battle," he said. "What is this one little monster mean? \$1.6 billion.

"These rules and these regulations, they are not suggestions. We're telling our farmers, 'You can use these products, but you better follow the label to the T.'"

Strain told the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee July 17 that the next farm bill must restate the preeminence of the EPA to deal with restricted use chemicals.

"The law of the land is the labels on the containers," he said. "As administrators, you follow it."

But advancing the farm bill



**Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry commissioner Michael Strain addresses the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee.** Photo by Charlie Ban

meant removing that restatement.

"Without this, what would have happened, that each individual state commissioner, as in I, would have had the responsibility and the ability to set the rules for every restricted use chemical. Now, that's not good. What do we have to have across the United States

of agriculture and industry? Uniformity. That's the battle, right? That's what the commerce clause of the constitution means."

He's also worried about screw worms, which showed up in Louisiana on June 3 and numbered 35 cases on July 16. The overpopulation of feral swine are also a concern,

though an injectable sterilization solution shows some promise.

For an audience largely composed of out-of-staters, he illustrated his state's recent agricultural challenges with an example they'd understand.

Work permit authorization challenges, caused in part by the federal government shutdown, left the crawfish industry roughly 2,000 workers short before those permits could be processed.

"You know what that cost us? \$100 million," he said. "Crawfish is an integral part of our economy. We raise 400,000 acres of rice, 360,000 acres of crawfish."

Thought the crawfish etouffée isn't close to running out for Annual Conference attendees, they learned one way it could, someday. **CN**



## Steering Committees

# Louisiana broadband chief shares ‘GUMBO Path’ lessons with county officials

by Mary Ann Barton  
editor

Louisiana has driven broadband coverage to 94% of the state from 60% in five years and expects to eliminate its digital divide by 2028 — years ahead of the federal schedule — the state’s broadband director told county officials July 17.

Veneeth Iyengar, executive director of ConnectLA, spoke during a Q&A session titled “BEAD in Motion: Louisiana’s GUMBO Path and Beyond” before members of NACo’s Telecommunications and Technology Policy Steering Committee. He was interviewed by committee Chair Shinica Thomas, a Wake County, N.C., commissioner.

The session title is a nod to the state’s Granting Unserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities (GUMBO) grant program, the vehicle Louisiana has used to distribute broadband funding since 2021.

Iyengar attributed the state’s speed to a small mission-driven team and direct access to the governor. ConnectLA operates with just four people and is legislatively capped, he said, but the office removed state procurement from its



**Veneeth Iyengar, executive director of ConnectLA, spoke about the Granting Unserved Municipalities Broadband Opportunities (GUMBO) program.** Photo by Denny Henry

grant process and hires staff “significantly smarter, much more nimble, much more entrepreneurial than I am,” Iyengar noted.

Broadband is “an A-plus-plus priority” for Gov. Jeff Landry, who Iyengar said he meets or speaks with most weeks. The governor’s guiding directive: “Focus on outcomes, not activities.”

Louisiana received \$1.35 billion through the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program. A competitive bidding process drove estimated construction

costs down to roughly \$400 million, with about 86 percent of locations slated for fiber and the remainder covered by fixed wireless and satellite.

That efficiency leaves the state with close to \$900 million in unspent BEAD funds — money Iyengar wants to direct toward next-generation 911, infrastructure resilience, workforce development and a first-in-the-nation underground utility map.

But federal guidance on using excess funds has yet to arrive, he said, leaving states waiting.

Iyengar urged counties to press for speed, warning that rising equipment costs and fiber scarcity threaten timelines. Data center construction — including major Amazon, Meta and Anthropic-affiliated projects in Louisiana — is competing with small internet service providers for the same fiber and skilled labor. If permitting stalls, he cautioned, providers may default and hand back locations, forcing expensive rebids.

Resilience is central to Louisiana’s approach. After Category 4 Hurricane Ida crippled the

state’s telecommunications, ConnectLA is burying roughly 90 percent of new infrastructure. That raises a problem that counties everywhere will face, Iyengar said: no one knows where existing underground utilities lie. A dispute over broken infrastructure has already halted BEAD work in a few parishes, which is why the state is pursuing the utility-mapping effort.

On affordability, Iyengar said he now frames the goal as “consumer value,” arguing federal policymakers respond better to language about skills and earnings than subsidies. Competition, he noted, has already pushed some household bills from around \$130 a month to roughly \$50.

Asked what counties can do, Iyengar offered a checklist: get to know your state broadband director, learn exactly which areas are served and by which federal program, over-communicate timelines to constituents and hold providers accountable for their own outreach. “I don’t work for an ISP. I work for the people of Louisiana,” he said, adding that ISPs too often push stakeholder engagement onto local officials.

Iyengar said he welcomes working himself out of a job as the office’s role shifts from policy to compliance — a transition, he said, that one or two staffers could manage. **CN**

## King County uses voter-approved levy to boost child care worker pay

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

King County, Wash. is using a voter-approved property tax, the Best Starts for Kids levy, to better fund its childcare workforce and childcare subsidies. Kalayaan Domingo, program manager for King County’s Department of Community and Human Services, shared the successes of the pilot program with county officials July 17 at NACo’s Human Services and Education Policy Steering Committee.

In King County, the estimated living wage is \$30.82 for a single adult; add a child



**Kalayaan Domingo, program manager, King County Department of Community and Human Services, shares successes of the pilot program July 17.** Photo by Leon Lawrence III

in the mix and it jumps to \$56.33. When the county surveyed more than 1,000 of its childcare workers, not a sin-

gle worker identified that they were meeting that living wage, according to Domingo.

“Our county is not able to

sustain childcare workers in the workforce,” Domingo said. “Our providers are leaving the field, closing their centers and families are unable to go to work, and children are unable to get the care that they need and that they deserve.”

King County isn’t alone. According to the National Early Care and Education Workforce Center, early educators’ wages (a median of \$13.07 per hour) are significantly less than the national median wage of \$22.92 per hour.

The \$0.19 per \$1,000 property tax levy is helping to address that gap. King County engaged

the childcare workforce to help design a program that would bring the most direct benefit, according to Domingo.

As a result, the Best Starts for Kids Wage Boost Pilot was created. It provides quarterly direct payments to childcare workers that translate to a \$4 increase in hourly wages, according to Domingo. AidKit, the county’s technology partner in the program, administers the payments directly to workers through its platform.

“Childcare is economic infrastructure,” said Cassie Man-

**See *CHILDCARE* page 14**



## Steering Committees

# Counties get creative to recruit and retain public safety workers

by Mary Ann Barton  
editor

Recruiting and keeping good people has become one of the defining challenges of county government, and nowhere is the pressure sharper than in criminal justice and public safety. That was the topic discussed by a panel before the Justice and Public Safety Policy Steering Committee Friday at NACo's Annual Conference, where three county leaders and a private-sector adviser shared what is actually working on the ground.

Moderator Rowan Miranda, managing director and industry lead at Workday, framed the stakes. Public safety, he noted, is a workforce apart — more distributed, burdened by overtime and burnout, high-risk by nature and now drawing record-low applications, with wages for corrections and 911 roles that consistently lag. Previously, Miranda served as chief financial officer for the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, Pa. and teaches public finance at Pepperdine University.

In Boone County, Mo., Commissioner Janet Thompson described a public safety campus that houses the sheriff's office, jail, juvenile center



Tracy Peters (center) discusses recruitment and retention strategies with Janet Thompson (right) and Kathy Burrows (left) at NACo's Justice and Public Safety Policy Steering Committee meeting.

Photo by Denny Henry

and 911 operations — all roles marked by shift work, high stress and difficult conditions. After struggling to staff the 911 center and detention facility, the county drilled into why. For a workforce heavy with younger employees of child-bearing age, the answer often came down to childcare for overnight shifts.

Boone County's response was to break ground on a public safety childcare center offering partially subsidized tuition to first-responder families, set to open this fall, alongside a regional law enforcement training center next door and CIT training across its 911, jail and road-deputy staff.

"Public safety has to be key to what we do," Thompson said, tying the investment directly to retention.

Tracy Peters, HR director and assistant county administrator in Cass County, N. D., focused on correctional officers, the county's hardest-to-fill roles. The county stood up a monthly recruitment and retention committee including frontline jail staff, adopted a recruitment platform to widen its reach and rebuilt job postings as marketing tools rather than dry descriptions — running three rotating versions refreshed every 45 to 60 days, including one pitched as a way to "jump-

start your law enforcement career."

Paid sponsorships on boards like Indeed and LinkedIn delivered outsized returns; Peters said a single \$100-a-day weekend push brought in 25 applicants instead of the usual handful. Exit data, she added, revealed the top reasons people left were not pay but poor communication and weak relationships with supervisors — pointing the county toward investing in frontline leadership.

Kathy Burrows, HR director for Tulsa County, Okla., walked through a modernization built on the county's Workday system, which sped

onboarding so new hires start ready to work. The county leaned into short, TikTok-style how-to videos, a dedicated jointTCSO.org recruiting site, QR codes on patrol vehicles and roughly 65 recruiting events a year.

Burrows also pushed to change a state statute, so tuition assistance kicks in at 90 days rather than five years and built a pipeline that certifies detention officers in high school and helps fund their path to becoming deputies by 21. Still, she was candid about the juvenile detention center, where the county lost more staff than it kept this year.

The shared message: the workforce challenge is a lasting condition, and meeting it takes fresh thinking on every front. **EN**

*For a deeper dive, NACo is launching the County Law Enforcement Advancing Recruitment & Retention Cohort to support county law enforcement agencies in implementing and evaluating these strategies. Stay tuned for more information coming soon.*

## Investing in childcare worker wages improves retention in King County

From **CHILDCARE** page 13

ning, AidKit's partner success manager. "It is not a social service. It is not a side note. It is incredibly important, and I think that is the preventative piece in the puzzle of [child welfare]."

Over the past year and a half, King County has distributed more than \$9 million through the program to childcare workers; part-time workers receive \$1,040 a quarter and full-time workers receive \$2,080, Domingo noted. There was

more interest in the program than the county has funding for, so it set up a lottery system to ensure that workers across the county's childcare facilities — and across all types of licensed childcare — are enrolled, Domingo said.

One childcare worker enrolled in the program shared: "The wage boost keeps us with less stress, and we do our jobs happier. We are in a workplace where it's required to leave your problems outside. You have to enter your classroom

as if nothing is happening and turn into another person literally, because one's emotional state impacts children greatly."

Early data is showing that the investment is improving retention in the field, according to Domingo. When workers are well compensated, they're able to show up more fully to their jobs without the added stress of how they're going to pay the bills, she noted.

"Our investment is in direct compensation, but we also are investing in evidence,

and we're investing in narrative change," Domingo said. "We aren't certain that this will continue, so we want to ensure that we have the data and learnings that we can inform and influence, and that we also are looking at how do you develop more public will? And really create a shared idea in our county, but also, more broadly, that childcare is public infrastructure."

Counties that don't have the resources to directly adopt this plan or that have a population

that might not be as eager to approve a property tax increase can still adapt the work at a smaller scale and build community partnerships to improve the childcare landscape, Domingo noted.

"Start where you can," Domingo said. "Start with something that's reasonable and meaningful. Work alongside your community. Work alongside the childcare workforce; they're very eager to advocate and organize on behalf of themselves." **EN**



2026 NACo CONFERENCE IN

ALL PHOTOS BY DENNY HENRY

Pictures



Members of the Knockaz Brass Band perform as they parade through the hall July 17 at the opening General Session in Orleans Parish.



Beaverhead County, Mont. Commissioner Mike McGinley presents a guitar to outgoing President J.D. Clark as George Dunlap looks on.



An attendee makes a new friend at the Clear-Gov booth, where adoptable pets received attention from conference-goers.



Rachel Kucera (center), project manager for the Texas Association of Counties, speaks with Haley Click (right), director of Education & Member Services, of Texas Association of Counties and Gina Roberts (left), County Board Member of Lake County, Ill., during the first time attendees breakfast, which attracted 450 county officials.



General Session speaker Retired U.S. Army Master Sgt. Cedric King banters with Commissioner Sheila Pounds of Jasper County, Ga. July 17.



# 2026 NACo Conference In Pictures

Attendees visit with 164 organizations at the exposition at the Annual Conference.



NACo members (l-r) Deborah Tuff, Carolyn Marinar, Lisa De La Rionda and Connie Odom pause for a photo at their information booth.



Cedric King (center) meets with NACo members July 18 after leading them in a fitness class.



First Vice President Alisha Bell, chair of the Wayne County, Mich., Board of Commissioners, addresses the crowd at a General Session.



Coconino County, Ariz. Treasurer Sarah Benatar makes her way to the stage at the Annual Business Meeting after winning the three-way race for second vice-president.



Catrena Carter (left), constituent liaison for Rockdale County, Ga., and Commissioner Shanita Howell, of Peach County, Ga. take a selfie.





The Chatham County, Ga. and Savannah State University Drum Line rev up the crowd July 19 at a General Session. Chatham County will host the 2027 Annual Conference.



NACo President George Dunlap presents a copy of County News to Immediate Past President J.D. Clark.



Women of NACo members present awards to (l-r) Mary Jo McGuire, Mary Ann Borgeson and Denise Winfrey.



Orange County, Fla. Mayor Jerry Demings accepts the 2026 National Award for County Arts Leadership from Americans for the Arts and NACo, surrounded by (l-r) Jay Dick, Mary Jo McGuire and Toni Carter.



NACo President J.D. Clark presents a scholarship check July 20 to Isabelle Tidwell during the NACo Annual Business Meeting.



# 2026 NACo Conference In Pictures



A color guard enters the theater July 20 at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center to kick off the Annual Business Meeting.



Reading Clerk Curtis Parrish, judge for Lubbock County, Texas, introduces each state.

Council Vice Chair KipuKai Kuali'i, of Kaua'i County, Hawai'i, and Council Member Tamara Paltin, of Maui County, Hawai'i speak July 20 during the NACo Annual Business Meeting.



Annual Business Meeting attendees from North Carolina recite the Pledge of Allegiance.



Attendees arrive at Mardi Gras World for the All-Conference Closing Reception July 20.



Wade Weiss, engineer for Greene County, Iowa and wife Janie take a spin on the dance floor during the All-Conference Closing Reception.



# Resolutions

## New Resolutions Set County Priorities

At the Annual Business Meeting July 20 in Orleans Parish, La., the NACo Board of Directors passed more than 100 policy resolutions that were introduced for the first time through 10 policy steering committees. The following is a summary of the resolutions.

### AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

#### Personal Transitional Yields in Federal Crop Insurance

NACo urges Congress and the United States Department of Agriculture Risk Management Agency to establish uniform national policies requiring the availability of both personal transitional yields (T-yields) and county-wide T-yields in all states. These policies should ensure that eligible agricultural producers have the option to use their own verified production history when setting crop insurance coverage levels, while maintaining county-wide options where appropriate.

#### Increased Reimbursement for Rural Emergency Medical Services

NACo supports an increase in reimbursement rates for rural EMS providers from Medicare, Medicaid and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to offset inflation and increasing medical costs, and the permanent implementation of COVID-19 era reimbursement to rural EMS providers for delivering Treatment in Place and Transport to Alternative Provider services.

#### Rising Input Costs for Production Agriculture

NACo urges Congress to enact policies that strengthen domestic fertilizer and agricultural chemical supply chains, expand U.S. production capacity and improve long-term affordability for American farmers. NACo fur-



Western Interstate Region President Dwayne McFall, a Fremont County, Colo. commissioner, addresses fellow NACo Board members. Photo by Denny Henry

ther urges federal policymakers to modernize and streamline permitting and regulatory processes that delay responsible domestic mining, manufacturing, and processing of these essential inputs. NACo also urges the administration to review tariffs and trade actions affecting fertilizer and chemical imports and to pursue relief where appropriate to reduce unnecessary cost burdens on U.S. farmers during periods of market volatility.

### RURAL HOSPITAL FUNDING

#### NACo urges Congress and the administration to:

Expand critical access hospital eligibility by reducing mileage requirements so that rural hospitals may qualify for higher Medicaid and Medicare reimbursement rates;

Increase reimbursement rates for rural PPS hospitals to parity with critical access hospital rates;

Ensure timely and adequate Medicaid reimbursements to rural hospitals; and

Establish grant pathways for rural hospitals to better access federal funding without needing to compete against larger

hospital systems.

### THE 2026 FARM BILL NACo supports the following priorities for the 2026 Farm bill:

- Improve ease of access and flexibility of farm bill Programs
- Maintain and expand support for farmers
- Provide stronger support for small and mid-sized
- Maintain and expand farm bill conservation
- Invest in the governing capacity of rural counties
- Invest in high-speed internet access
- Expand Opportunities for the rural economy
- Elevate the County role in federal land management

#### Multi-County "Good Food For All" Initiatives

NACo urges county-led, regional "Good Food For All" initiatives to attract financial resources needed to (1) make locally produced, nutritious food more widely available; (2) promote community revitalization and; (3) create jobs that can't be outsourced.

Additionally, NACo urges Congress to (1) allocate in-

creased federal funding to support new, beginning and underserved producers interested in growing and selling food to markets in local communities and; (2) enact policies that can leverage non-federal funding sources to support local production of healthy foods. Congress can achieve (1) through legislation aligning with the Local Agriculture Market Program—including numerous provisions in the April 2026-approved House farm bill.

#### Resolution to Address Sustained Low Grain Prices and Strengthen U.S. Agriculture

NACo urges Congress to enact policies that expand and strengthen domestic and international markets for agricultural products, while also investing in research that supports innovative uses for grain and oilseed commodities, including biodiesel, ethanol, soybean meal, and other value-added products. NACo further urges the federal government to prioritize the purchase and use of domestically produced agricultural products whenever practicable.



### COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

#### Section 8 and Local Residency Prioritization

NACo supports federal legislation and/or HUD guidance authorizing Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to implement enhanced local residency preferences within the Section 8 HCV program. The policy would allow PHAs to prioritize up to 80% of vouchers or waiting list placements for applicants who have resided or worked within the jurisdiction for at least one continuous year. The remaining 20% may be prioritized for applicants who have immediate family residing within the jurisdiction or who possess a documented employment offer within the jurisdiction. When implemented, all residency preferences would remain fully compliant with Fair Housing Act and Civil Rights Act requirements.

#### Community Development Block Grant– Disaster Recovery Program

NACo strongly supports permanent reauthorization of the Community Block Development Grant for Disaster Recovery to ensure collaboration between federal, state and local entities to streamline the process of accessing and distributing disaster recovery funds, increasing efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilization.

#### Community Development Block Grant Program Reauthorization

NACo urges Congress to pass CDBG reauthorization legislation to allow increased

See RESOLUTIONS page 20



# Resolutions | NACo ENCOURAGES INCREASED FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN WILDFIRE MITIGATION

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 19

federal support for county community development initiatives, affordable housing and economic revitalization efforts.

## Accessory Dwelling Units and Missing-Middle Housing

NACo supports federal policies that expand housing supply and affordability by incentivizing voluntary accessory dwelling units and missing-middle housing development through flexible funding, financing tools, tax incentives and technical assistance that strengthen locally driven housing strategies while preserving full county land use authority.

## Consistent Section 8 Administrative Plan provisions

NACo urges Congress and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to support efforts to promote consistent adoption of Section 8 Administrative Plan provisions that enable housing authorities to support developments serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## Modernize Section 504 regulations

NACo urges Congress and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to modernize Section 504 regulations to clarify that disability-specific housing is permissible when such housing is voluntarily chosen by residents and designed to promote independence, safety, and community engagement.

## ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND LAND USE

### Protect of local authority over data centers, data processing facilities, and cryptocurrency mining operations

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation that would protect the authority of local governments to regulate, restrict, or ban data centers, data processing facilities, crypto-



**Commissioner Shinica Thomas, of Wake County, N.C., addresses fellow Board members at the NACo Board of Directors meeting.** Photo by Denny Henry

currency mining operations and any uses associated with data processing facilities within their jurisdictions.

### Create a federal program supporting water for fire infrastructure in rural and frontier communities

NACo encourages the development and implementation of a pilot program for the purposes of providing funding and technical assistance for fire suppression water infrastructure in rural and frontier communities. This pilot program would be under the purview of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's suite of Preparedness Grants, with water quality standards coordinated with the Environmental Protection Agency.

### Create a permanent federally funded water affordability program to ensure access to safe and affordable water

NACo supports the creation of a permanent, federally funded water affordability program to ensure that households nationwide can maintain access to safe and affordable drinking water and wastewater services.

### Resolution for Treasury Department Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Rulemaking for Deepwater Horizon RESTORE Act Direct Component Implementation

NACo urges the Department of the Treasury to undertake a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement process

to improve the project funding delivery of the RESTORE Act Direct Component. This action is an appropriate response to the Title I directive of the fiscal year 2026 Financial Services and General Government appropriations bill that passed Congress Jan. 14, 2026. A SEIS involves a new public comment solicitation and adoption of a new Final Rule.

### DOE: Develop an infrastructure program for host and neighboring communities

NACo requests the Department of Energy develop an infrastructure investment program. The investments would be made through a grant program or direct funding from the DOE that would provide funding to alleviate the stressors affecting counties and other local government infrastructure that surround DOE facilities. Eligible activities under the program would include transportation, housing, education, emergency response, water, telecommunication and utility projects that benefit the operations and workforce of the DOE facility and the surrounding local government.

### Nuclear energy innovation

NACo urges federal government agencies to support and fund nuclear energy innovation for existing and new nuclear deployment, including the development of nuclear microgrids, particularly related to the installation of small modular reactors within microgrids, research on fusion

technology and research on adopting reprocessing methods throughout the nuclear industry.

### Increase federal investment in wildfire mitigation, forest health and watershed resilience

NACo urges Congress and the administration to:

1. Substantially increase federal investment in wildfire mitigation, forest health and watershed resilience programs.
2. Expand support for Community Wildfire Defense Grants, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Firewise programs and other locally driven wildfire preparedness initiatives.
3. Prioritize collaborative forest management efforts involving counties, Tribal governments, states, local communities and other stakeholders and to accelerate treatment projects in areas where federal lands are adjacent to communities, municipal watersheds, transportation corridors, critical infrastructure and national security facilities.

### Federal water infrastructure resilience and financing

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to expand and strengthen federal financing, grant, and technical assistance programs, such as WIFIA, that support county and local water infrastructure investments.

### RESTORE Act Bucket 2 grantmaking

NACo urges the six Trump

administration Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council members to seek majority support from among the five Gulf State Governors or their Council representatives for Council adoption of a two-year cycle instead of the current four year cycle and expedite a Funding Priorities List 5 of RESTORE Bucket 2 grantmaking to occur in 2028.

### Update the biomass definition

NACo urges Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency to support the inclusion of woody biomass from federal lands in the Renewable Fuels Standards program's definition of renewable biomass in 40 CFR 80.1401. NACo also urges Congress and the EPA to reinstate Renewable Electricity to the RFS program as a qualifying renewable fuel.

Low-carbon fuel standards and renewable diesel for hard-to-electrify fleets

NACo urges Congress to establish carbon intensity reduction targets for on-road transportation fuels, including a goal of reducing transportation fuel carbon intensity by 20% by 2034 through the expanded use of renewable diesel and other low-carbon fuel alternatives.

### PFAS liability protections for passive receivers

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation that recognizes local governments and other publicly owned utilities including but not limited to water treatment plants, wastewater treatment plants and landfills as passive receivers of PFAS and provides liability protections for local governments from the 2024 CERCLA rule.

NACo supports a liability framework that protects passive receivers and holds polluters accountable through the "polluter pays" principle as well as consistent federal funding for PFAS mitigation efforts to remove PFAS and other degradation substances from the environment.

**See RESOLUTIONS page 21**



# Resolutions | COUNTIES URGE CONGRESS TO FUND HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 20

## Clear cooperating agency roles and responsibilities in federal NEPA reviews

NACo urges congress and federal land management and permitting agencies to preserve and memorialize cooperating agency roles and responsibilities in NEPA or agency-specific NEPA regulations following the rescission of CEQ's NEPA implementing regulations. NACo supports the creation of federal agency procedures, regulations, and guidance to encourage eligible county participation at the earliest practicable time and give them a significant role in shaping plans and environmental analyses. NACo opposes agency procedures or practices that diminish counties with cooperating agency status to ordinary commenters or exclude cooperating counties from interdisciplinary coordination necessary to complete timely, locally informed NEPA reviews.

## Responsible development and permitting certainty

NACo urges federal land management and permitting agencies to develop, maintain, and implement clear, consistent, and predictable policies and regulations that incentivize responsible development, efficient permitting, and durable land management decisions. NACo supports policies that establish objective review criteria, clear definitions, transparent timelines, consistent application requirements, single points of contact, coordinated interagency reviews, public-facing guidance, early and meaningful county engagement, and written explanations when agency interpretations differ from existing plans, regulations, or prior decisions.

## Amend the Federal Power Act

NACo urges the United States Congress to amend 16 U.S. Code § 803 (a)(2)(B) as follows: (B) The recommendations of Federal, State, and Local agencies exercising administration over flood con-

trol, navigation, irrigation, recreation, cultural and other relevant resources of the State in which the project is located, and the recommendations (including fish and wildlife recommendations) of Indian tribes affected by the project.

## Water control infrastructure drawdowns

NACo urges the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to revise federal guidelines in coordination with local governing authorities that operate water control projects to reduce downstream stormwater events.

## DOE National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors

NACo opposes the Department of Energy's NIETC program and urges the Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to comply with existing federal and state and Tribal laws requiring assessment of potential impacts, consultation, cooperation and coordination with state and local governments.

NACo urges federal, state and county agencies to withhold all approvals, permits, funding or other permissions that may be required for the Department of Energy and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to acquire or manage fee-title lands, or an interest in lands such as a utility easement, or Right-of-Way within the areas impacted until such time as the National Interest Electric Transmission Corridors have been coordinated with the state, tribal and county governments.

## Consumer protection, local authority and grid reliability in data center development

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to support policies ensuring large-load customers, including data centers, and artificial intelligence computing facilities, pay their fair share of the electric generation, transmission, distribution, interconnection, water usage and related infrastructure costs directly attributable to serve their projects,

so those costs are not passed on to existing consumers.

Mining and production of rare earth minerals, critical minerals and coal

NACo urges Congress to pass bipartisan legislation that will reduce our dependence on hostile foreign nations for critical minerals and to look for innovative ways to strengthen the critical mineral supply chain in order to strengthen our nation's energy security



Stearns County, Minn. Commissioner Tarryl Clark, NACo Rural Action Caucus chair, addresses the Board. Photo by Denny Henry

## Safeguard water quality and improving contamination management

NACo urges Congress to significantly increase federal appropriations for the Clean Water SRF and Drinking Water SRF programs to help counties comply with federal water quality mandates, and mitigate contaminants such as PFAS, microplastics, pharmaceuticals, surfactants and microorganisms.

## Clarify and modernize NEPA

NACo urges Congress to amend the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq.) to clarify that when an infrastructure project undergoing an active NEPA review experiences a change in scope, design, alignment, length, or configuration, the lead federal agency may address such changes through a targeted modification or supplemental environmental analysis rather than requiring preparation of a new Environmental Assessment or Envi-

ronmental Impact Statement. The amended statute should establish a presumption that previously completed portions of the NEPA review remain valid and may be incorporated by reference, provided the change does not materially alter the purpose and need of the project or introduce significant environmental impacts that cannot reasonably be evaluated through supplementation.

Resolution Supporting Revisions to Clean Water Act such

## Oppose federal government nonpayment of special district fees

NACo supports federal regulatory and legislative efforts to ensure the federal government pays its fair share of special district fees.

## Fund HAVA

NACo urges Congress and the administration to preserve, protect and fund the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and related federal election security assistance programs at adequate levels that meet the growing threats election administrators face in ensuring safe and secure elections. NACo opposes efforts to eliminate or reduce HAVA funding in ways that undermine the ability of counties to administer elections.

## Modernize Voting Rights Act criteria

NACo urges the United States Congress to modernize VRA criteria that ensures equal access to voters and provides adequate, flexible federal funding and technical assistance to county election officials for election infrastructure, accessibility, security and compliance modernization, including reasonable implementation timelines to avoid unfunded mandates.

## Election worker recruitment, training, retention and protection

NACo urges Congress to provide dedicated federal workforce funding to counties and local election offices for the recruitment, training, retention and protection of election workers, including temporary poll workers, temporary election workers and permanent election office staff. Eligible uses should include recruitment programs, training, professional development, de-escalation training, cybersecurity awareness, physical security training, worker protection, retention strategies and long-term staffing pipelines.

## FINANCE, PENSIONS AND INTER-GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

### Fund awarded projects

NACo supports the stability and continued funding of critical projects and programs that have been properly approved, allocated and distributed. NACo urges Congress to enact legislation that prohibits the executive branch and federal agencies from cancelling or freezing funds for previously awarded projects and programs, even in the case of a new congress or administration, and that ensures Congress includes funding for awarded projects when passing a budget or continued resolution.

See **RESOLUTIONS** page 22



# Resolutions | STRENGTHEN CDCP'S PUBLIC HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE GRANTS PROGRAM

From RESOLUTIONS page 21

## Enforce collection of state and local taxes on short and long-term rentals

NACo supports federal efforts that support the authority for all counties to enforce laws that provide for the collection of taxes on short and long-term rentals.

## Support federalism, state authority and county administration in elections

NACo urges Congress, the administration and federal agencies to preserve the federalist structure of American election administration by respecting the primary role of states in establishing election law and the essential role of counties in administering secure, accurate and accessible elections.

NACo opposes federal legislation, regulations, executive actions or agency directives that impose unfunded or under-funded mandates, insufficient implementation deadlines, prescriptive technology or procedural requirements or other one-size-fits-all obligations on county election offices without meaningful state and local consultation and full federal funding for implementation. NACo further urges Congress and federal agencies to refrain from prohibiting states and local governments from adopting election systems or reforms authorized under state law.

## Standards for election mail

NACo urges the United States Postal Service to establish national election-mail tracking standards for counties using Intelligent Mail Barcodes, including verifiable physical hard scans at defined custody points, complete scan logs available to authorized election officials, clear distinction between predictive tracking and physical scans, final-delivery scans to county election offices, county-level service reporting and timely escalation procedures during election periods.

## Voter lists and ballot eligibility

NACo opposes any United States Postal Service (USPS) rule, policy or procedure that requires states or counties to provide bulk voter registration data, ballot recipient lists, ballot barcode data, citizenship data or other sensitive voter information as a condition of accepting, processing, prioritizing, tracking or delivering election mail. NACo further opposes any policy that authorizes USPS to screen, reject, delay or condition election mail based on voter eligibility, registration status, ballot



**Harris County, Texas Commissioner Adrian Garcia serves as NACo's Large Urban County Caucus chair.** Photo by Denny Henry

entitlement, citizenship status or state or local voter-list data. Determinations regarding voter registration, ballot issuance, ballot acceptance and ballot counting should remain with state and local election officials under applicable law.

## Election and time-sensitive county mail

NACo urges the United States Postal Service (USPS) to preserve reliable, accessible and no-cost methods for voters and county residents to document when USPS accepted custody of election mail and other legally time-sensitive mail. NACo further urges USPS to consult with counties about official postmark, acceptance, collection, transportation or processing practices that may affect ballot validity, tax deadlines, court deadlines, jury responses, probate filings, recorded documents or other county-administered statutory timelines.

## Modernize the Capital Gains Tax Exclusion

NACo urges Congress to at minimum double the capital gains tax exclusion limits for home sales to \$500,000 for single filers and \$1,000,000 for joint filers. This is meant to account for 30 years of inflation and to address the "lock-in" effect that has taken hold in the American housing market. To ensure this policy reflects future cost inflation, the exclusion limit should be automatically adjusted for inflation on an annual basis. Moreover, NACo endorses the *More Homes on the Market Act (H.R.*

*1340) and the No Tax on Home Sales Act (H.R. 4327)*, both of which have received bipartisan support during the 119th Congress. This policy also respects local authority – modernizing the Capital Gains Tax Exclusion is one way the federal government can support local housing goals without preempting local land-use or zoning authority.

## HEALTH

### TRICARE finance reform

NACo urges finance reform for TRICARE as a critical step in protecting access to care for military families and veterans and to protect our healthcare systems vulnerable to inadequate funding. Particularly in rural communities that support our military bases, the threats to our rural healthcare systems is significant. We ask that Congress recognizes that impact and address inadequate rates in TRICARE to better serve those who serve and

to protect vulnerable health-care systems.

## Public Health Infrastructure Grant funding

NACo urges Congress and the administration to preserve and strengthen the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Infrastructure Grant program through sustained, flexible, and long-term federal investment in local public health infrastructure. NACo also supports continued federal investment in foundational public health capabilities that allow counties to respond to emerging threats, address chronic public health challenges and improve health outcomes at the local level. NACo further supports legislative and administrative actions that prevent lapses or disruptions in public health infrastructure funding and ensure direct, reliable support for local health departments to maintain workforce capacity, modernize technology and data systems, improve emergency preparedness, strengthen organizational accountability and enhance partnerships with community-based organizations. NACo urges continued investment in the Public Health Infrastructure and Capacity program by providing \$1 billion in Fiscal Year 2027.

## Comprehensive Behavioral Health Crisis Care and the 988 Lifeline

NACo supports federal legislation that directs the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure a standard set of behavioral health crisis services are universally available, including: 24/7 crisis hotlines and call centers; mobile crisis services, that is, crisis first responders with specialized skills and training, including social workers, mental health professionals, and peer support specialists, to minimize the involvement of law enforcement in incidents that do not pose a risk to public safety; behavioral health urgent care facilities; 23-hour crisis stabilization and observation beds; and short-term crisis residential options.

## Reduce HCBS reevaluation frequency

NACo urges Congress and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to adopt a reevaluation framework for Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services that extends reassessment intervals when participant stability is demonstrated from the current 12-month requirement to a 36-month reevaluation cycle, upon request.

## Direct support professionals

NACo supports federal efforts to develop a discrete occupational category for DSPs to help states and the federal government better interpret the shortage of these professionals in the labor market and collect data on the high turnover rate of DSPs.

## Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Parity

NACo supports federal actions that:

1. Strengthen oversight, enforcement, and accountability measures to ensure health plans provide mental health and substance use disorder benefits that are no more restrictive than medical and surgical benefits;
2. Improve network adequacy standards to ensure timely access to culturally responsive, geographically accessible behavioral health services across the continuum of care, particularly in rural, underserved, and historically marginalized communities;
3. Increase transparency related to parity compliance, provider network composition, reimbursement practices, prior authorization requirements, claim denials, and other non-quantitative treatment limitations;
4. Expand access to evidence-based and evidence-informed behavioral health services, including prevention, early intervention, crisis stabilization, recovery supports, peer support services, and supportive housing interventions for individuals with se-

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# Resolutions | SUPPORT THE HEALTH WORKFORCE

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 22

rious mental illness and substance use disorders;

5. Reduce administrative barriers that delay, limit, or deny access to medically necessary behavioral health treatment, including prior authorization requirements, excessive utilization review, restrictive medical necessity criteria, and burdensome claims and appeals processes; and

6. Recognize and support county investments in behavioral health systems by promoting policies that improve access to care before individuals require costly emergency, justice-system, housing, or crisis-based interventions.

## Self-reporting in nursing homes

NACo urges the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services and Congress to revise enforcement and oversight procedures to reduce or eliminate penalties for those who appropriately self-report and respond to allegations or adverse events in nursing homes, in order to promote greater transparency and align with Quality Improvement Best Practices.

## Replace the Federal Enhanced Barrier Precautions Mandate

NACo urges the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to rescind the mandatory Enhanced Barrier Precautions requirement embedded in F880 Infection Prevention and Control and continue with currently established regulations embedded in 42 CFR 483 infection control standards.

## COVID-19 guidance for long-term care facilities

NACo urges the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to modernize federal long-term care guidance by transitioning COVID-19 policies from pandemic-specific protocols to standard endemic respiratory virus management.



**Schleicher County, Texas Treasurer Jennifer Henderson takes the microphone.** Photo by Denny Henry

## Modernize Medicare skilled nursing facility eligibility requirements

NACo urges Congress and CMS to modernize Medicare skilled nursing facility eligibility requirements by recognizing all medically necessary hospital days, including observation stays, toward qualifying coverage requirements. NACo supports eliminating outdated barriers that delay access to post-acute care, increase costs, and hinder timely care transitions, while promoting equitable access and aligning Medicare policy with current healthcare practices.

## Substance use disorder prevention, treatment, recovery and overdose response

NACo supports federal, state and local collaboration to ensure counties have the resources, flexibility and tools necessary to implement evidence-based and data-informed public health approaches to substance use prevention, overdose response, drug treatment and recovery services.

## Emerging drug threats

NACo supports federal, state and local collaboration to ensure counties have the resources, information and flexibility necessary to respond to emerging synthetic drugs and the associated, evolving threats to public health.

## County-affiliated health systems

NACo urges strengthening of financial support for county-affiliated health systems.

## Necessary post-acute care for Medicare Advantage beneficiaries

NACo urges Congress and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to ensure Medicare Advantage beneficiaries have timely access to medically necessary post-acute care services.

CTE and its impact on students' mental health

NACo urges Congress and the administration to fund comprehensive research on Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy progression and its link to mental health and suicide.

## 340B program

NACo supports legislation, the *340B Pharmaceutical Access to Invest in Essential, Needed Treatments & Supports (340B PATIENTS) Act of 2025* (S. 2372/H.R. 4581), which would protect the 340B drug pricing program by clarifying that manufacturers are required to offer 340B discount prices to hospitals and other covered entities regardless of the manner or location in which a drug is dispensed, including if they use a contract pharmacy to dispense 340B drugs to the entity's patients; ensuring that manufacturers cannot place conditions on the ability of a hospital or covered entity to purchase and use 340B drugs, regardless of the manner or location in which the drug is dispensed, including through contract pharmacies; and imposing civil monetary penalties on manufacturers that violate these statutory requirements and prohibition.

Lift the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion prior to reentry

NACo urges passage of legislation that would allow Medicaid payment for medical services furnished to an incarcerated individual during a specified period preceding the individual's release. NACo also supports advancing such provisions via the earliest available legislative vehicle.

## Support the health workforce

NACo supports the inclusion of health care post-baccalaureate professional degree programs, such as nursing, nurse practitioner, certified registered nurse anesthetists, social work, physician assistants, physical therapists and occupational therapists, among others in the definition of a professional degree program. NACo also supports exempting health care workers serving in county hospitals and other county health providers from the newly proposed \$100,000 H-1B visa application fee.

## Maternal health and rural healthcare stabilization

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to strengthen county-led maternal health and emergency preparedness efforts through flexible funding, workforce development and data-driven innovation. Specifically, NACo supports:

- Expanding Maternal Health Workforce Capacity
- Strengthening Emergency Preparedness and Rural Healthcare Infrastructure
- Promoting County-Led Data Integration and Innovation

## Federal data and enhanced county access

NACo urges the federal government, particularly agencies such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, all privatized health entities and Census Bureau, to issue clear, uniform guidance to support and expand the standardized release of de-identified, granular health data at local levels (such as ZIP code, ZIP Code

Tabulation Areas and census tract levels) with local public health agencies.

## Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Settings rule

NACo urges Congress and the Department of Health and Human Services to rescind or substantially amend the HCBS Settings Rule to ensure that federal policy does not unnecessarily restrict community-based service models that are chosen by individuals and their families and that meet legitimate health, safety, and support needs.

## H.R. 1 Medicaid and SNAP provisions

NACo requests that departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture and Congress provide states and counties with maximum flexibility to exempt medically frail populations from the Medicaid community engagement requirements; exempt vulnerable populations from the Medicaid eligibility redeterminations; restore previous exemptions for vulnerable populations from the SNAP work requirements; align SNAP work requirement and Medicaid community engagement reporting; allow cross-program reporting for SNAP and Medicaid eligibility redeterminations; and to delay SNAP administrative and benefit costs shifts.

NACo further urges Congress to provide supplemental appropriations to directly assist counties with the added administrative costs caused by H.R. 1, because counties will require supplemental funding to ensure the continued and timely delivery of services.

## HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION

### Humanitarian Parole Programs

NACo urges the federal government to reinstate humanitarian parole programs until the conditions within these nations improve and for Congress to enact legislation that prohibits the federal

*See RESOLUTIONS page 24*



# Resolutions | NACo URGES CONGRESS TO RESTORE GREEN CARD APPLICATION PROCESS

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 23

government from ending a humanitarian parole program before the initial ending date of a program.

## Continuation of asylum

NACo urges the federal government to continue to accept individuals with valid asylum claims.

## Clear and fair vetting process for migrants

NACo urges federal agencies that handle immigration to create a fair vetting process that is individual-based. NACo calls on Congress to enact legislation that sets guidelines to develop a transparent and fair vetting process for migrants on an individual basis and prohibits the federal government from discriminating against migrants for their race, nationality, ethnicity or religion.

## Veteran benefit eligibility

NACo urges the current Congress to recognize those naturalized under Section 2 (1)(B) of the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 who served under the direction of the CIA in a documented special guerrilla unit, as Veterans of the United States of America, granting them full access to Veterans benefits and acknowledging their service and sacrifice for the Nation.

NACo similarly urges the current administration to allow CIA contracted groups to apply for eligibility for consideration under P.L. 95-202 and 32 C.F.R. for a determination of Active-Duty service. 32 C.F.R. § 47.4(b) should be amended.

## Restore the Annual Food Security Report

NACo urges Congress to reinstate the Annual Household Food Security Report prepared by the USDA's Economic Research Service. We ask Congress to reinstate the funding for the estimated \$1 million a year required to produce the report.

Delay implementation of SNAP administrative and benefit cost shifts and payment er-

ror rate liability changes

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation that supports and protects SNAP, rolls back harmful cuts and policy changes that reduce access to SNAP and extends the benefit and administrative cost shift to Fiscal Year 2030.

## Restore green card application process

NACo urges Congress to request the president to rescind Policy Memorandum 602-0199 that was adopted on May 21, 2026 and require U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services publish clarifying language and guidance on green card applications.

## Major Richard Star Act

NACo urges Congress to ensure that veterans whose military careers were cut short due to combat-related injuries are no longer subject to an offset reducing their VA disability compensation and DOD retirement pay are no longer subject to the offset.

Values Regarding Federal Immigration Detention Facilities

NACo supports meaningful local government involvement in decisions regarding federal immigration detention facilities to ensure communities have a voice in whether such facilities are appropriate for their area.

## Reauthorize FirstNet Authority

NACo urges Congress to pass legislation to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority.

## REACT Act

NACo supports the key provisions of the *Resilient Emergency Alert Communications and Training (REACT) Act*.

## Assess a natural catastrophe insurance program

NACo urges Congress to create a commission tasked with evaluating public policy options to address natural catastrophe risks and insurance.



Comal County, Texas Treasurer Renee Couch, chair, Membership Standing Committee, addresses the Board. Photo by Denny Henry

## JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY POLICY STEERING COMMITTEE

### Natural disaster mitigation activities

NACo encourages the administration to increase the minimum level for a 1099-MISC/1099-NEC form to be filed to \$5,000 from \$600 or create an exemption of any natural disaster mitigation reimbursement funded by a federal grant.

Resolution on Transparency and Respect for County

This commission should consist of cross-sector stakeholders with expertise in insurance, reinsurance, regulation, risk management, financial markets, actuarial analysis and additional aptitudes and should study the feasibility and perform benefit-cost analyses of various federal policy options.

### Risk Rating 2.0

NACo sets forth county-level NFIP reauthorization priorities that will improve NFIP's participation, flood protection and transparent and affordable insurance premiums:

- Affordability
- Mitigation
- Mapping
- Solvency
- Consumer Protection
- Privatization

## Safer communities through local solutions

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to prioritize direct county funding, technical assistance and data-sharing partnerships that strengthen local capacity to address youth violence, behavioral health challenges, substance use and emerging public safety threats.

## Federal investments should support:

- County Courts and Justice Systems
- Behavioral Health and Youth Services
- Public Health and Community Safety Initiatives
- Data Collection and Accountability

Federal agencies should share available data and technical assistance with counties and support locally driven evaluation efforts to identify effective practices.

## PUBLIC LANDS

### Revenue for commercial development

NACo requests that all Commercial Development on Public Lands be subject to the same revenue sharing requirements set out in H.R. 1, Sec. 50302 and Sec. 50303.

### Delisting the gray wolf

NACo supports Congress taking action to remove federal protections for gray wolves in the lower 48 states and returning management to the states, counties, and tribes for population control and livestock protection.

### Reforming the ESA

NACo supports congressional efforts to reform the ESA to ensure biased science and costly weaponized regulations (without congressional authorization) are eliminated/mitigated from the ESA, which have restricted land use and projects essential to county economies, and reform the act

to give counties a seat at the table.

## Update national park fee allocation

NACo urges the Secretary of the Interior to clearly define an allocation formula for the distribution of all National Park Service visitor fees collected either physically on-site or via online portals including all versions of the America the Beautiful pass and all newly established nonresident fees to maximize fee return directly to Park units as intended by the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, the EXPLORE Act, and the executive order Making America Beautiful Again by Improving our National Parks.

## Long-Term federal investment following the Dragon Bravo Fire

NACo urges Congress and the administration to dedicate and prioritize funding through the Great American Outdoors Act Legacy Restoration Fund to support long-term restoration and rebuilding efforts in Grand Canyon National Park and the Kaibab National Forest following the 2025 Dragon Bravo Fire.

## Physical and public land survey system monuments

NACo advocates that Congress re-emphasizes federal agencies including National Geodetic Survey, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service with the importance of maintaining the Public Land Survey System and other physical monumentation to support reliable and consistent accuracy of the Global Navigation Satellite System. NACo further urges Congress to provide funding to federal agencies and counties for maintenance and restoration of physical monumentation.

## Delist the Mexican wolf

NACo expects the Congress to de-list the Mexican wolf as an endangered or threatened species, to de-link recovery of the Mexican wolf in the United States from recovery in Mexi-

See **RESOLUTIONS** page 25



# Resolutions | COUNTIES ASK CONGRESS TO HELP SUPPORT LOCAL JOURNALISM

From **RESOLUTIONS** page 24

co (if it is not de-listed) and to provide financial resources to counties and livestock producers in recovery areas to compensate them for their costs to protect their citizens from Mexican wolves and for their direct and indirect damages from Mexican wolves.

## Establish the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area

NACo supports enactment of the Lone Star Coastal National Recreation Area Act (H.R. 9325), and urges the House Natural Resources Federal Lands Subcommittee, the full House of Representatives, and the Senate to enact H.R. 9325 in the 119th Congress.

## Resolution for the Recognition of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism as Critical Economic Drivers for Counties

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to recognize the economic and social value of outdoor recreation and tourism—especially for rural, public-land counties—and to integrate these sectors into federal planning for economic development, land management, transportation, and public health.

## Federal land management agencies amending plans locally at the field office and forest unit level

NACo opposes federal land management agencies developing amendments to local resource management plans by conducting a national, multi-state, amendment process.

## TELECOM-MUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

### Digital literacy, broadband affordability and digital adoption

NACo urges Congress and relevant federal agencies to expand funding and support for county-led and community-based digital literacy and broadband adoption initiatives. These efforts should include digital skills training for workforce development, edu-

cation, telehealth access, and technology confidence-building, as well as policies that encourage affordable broadband service offerings for low-income households and residents experiencing financial barriers to internet access.

### Support local news

NACo urges Congress to enact and fund federal legislation that strengthens the availability, sustainability, and accessibility of local journalism and civic information.

NACo supports provisions that:

1. Provide federal funding to states for distribution to eligible local news organizations serving local communities;
2. Prioritize support for communities with limited access to local news and information;
3. Protect the editorial independence of local news organizations and prohibit government interference in journalistic decision-making;
4. Promote transparency and accountability in the administration of grant funding;
5. Support hiring and retention of local journalists and expansion of local reporting capacity; and
6. Ensure rural, underserved, Tribal, and historically under-covered communities have access to reliable local news and civic information.

### Expand remote services and digital credentials

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to provide funding, technical assistance, and regulatory support to counties seeking to implement and expand digital service offerings. NACo supports policies and initiatives that expand remote and electronic service options for county governments, including but not limited to remote identity verification, verifiable digital credentials, and online applications and approvals. NACo encourages federal, state, and local collaboration to develop secure, interoperable, and user-friendly remote service solutions that protect privacy, enhance security, and improve the citizen experience



Palm Beach County, Fla. Commissioner Gregg Weiss, co-chair of the AI Exploratory Committee, speaks at meeting. Photo by Denny Henry

## TRANSPORTATION

### Aeronautical revenue use

NACo urges Congress and the Federal Aviation administration to revise the current statutory and regulatory framework governing the use of airport-generated revenues to allow counties to allocate a portion of their aeronautical revenue toward non-aviation, community-driven priorities.

### Motor vehicle owner access to motor vehicle data

NACo strongly advocates for federal policy that secures motor vehicle owners'—including counties'—direct, secure access and control over vehicle data they own or lease, while upholding strict cybersecurity and national security standards. NACo's support centers on clear policies that:

Provide motor vehicle owners with access to vehicle data at no cost;

1. Provide access in real time;
2. Ban additional fees, licenses or manufacturer-only access tools as requirements for owner data access;
3. Mandate access through standard interface ports and wireless transmission where available;
4. Facilitate deletion of user data and restrict third-party access when ownership or control changes;
5. Require alignment with industry cybersecurity standards to protect vehicle systems and infrastructure

### Wheelchair-accessible vehicles and on-demand transportation

NACo urges Congress, the Department of Transportation,

the Federal Transit administration, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, and other relevant federal agencies to support policies, funding opportunities, and public-private partnerships that expand accessible transportation options for individuals with disabilities, with a specific emphasis on increasing the availability, reliability and sustainability of wheelchair-accessible vehicles.

### Rail safety

NACo urges Congress and the Federal Railroad administration, in collaboration with local and other relevant stakeholders, to take immediate action to address delays that result in idling freight trains, which have harmful environmental impacts in our local communities, and create blocked at-grade crossings, which adversely impact public safety and harm economic development.

### BUILD America 250 Act

NACo supports the BUILD America 250 Act and its proposed investments in county-owned infrastructure through increased bridge funding, growth in the Surface Transportation Block Grant program and the retention of key discretionary grant opportunities.

### Federal safety standards for lithium-ion batteries in micro-mobility devices

NACo urges the Senate to call up and pass Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-Ion Batteries Act (H.R. 973). This bill would require the Consumer Product Safety

Commission to promulgate safety standards for lithium-ion batteries in micromobility devices.

### Long-term disaster impacts on county roads

NACo urges Congress and the administration to treat post-fire, post-storm and post-flood road damage as a core component of disaster recovery.

### FERRIES Act

NACo supports H.R. 7774, *the Federal Enhancement and Revitalization of Reliable Infrastructure for Essential Seaways (FERRIES) Act*, which would sustain federal investments in ferry infrastructure in states across the country. NACo encourages Congress to include the legislation in any multi-year surface transportation reauthorization legislation passed during the 119th Congress

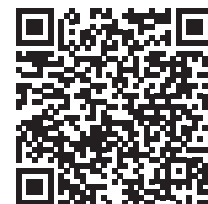
### Enhance access, safety and recreation on federal public lands

NACo urges Congress, the Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway administration to modernize federal transportation and recreational trails funding to reflect current local needs. NACo supports updating and modernizing the Recreational Trails Program, including revising the RTP apportionment formula to align with present-day demand and costs.

Project labor agreements

NACo urges all federal agencies that fund local construction to apply their existing, published criteria for evaluating proposed PLAs consistently and on a predictable timeline. <https://www.naco.org/page/american-county-platform-policy-briefs> or by scanning the QR code.

See the resolutions in full along with several platform changes here <https://www.naco.org/page/american-county-platform-policy-briefs> or by scanning the QR code.





## SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS:

## Gary Moore

Boone County, Ky. Judge/Executive Gary Moore rose to prominence among county leaders 10 years ago when he served as co-chair of the joint NACo-NLC Opioid Task Force. He took office as NACo president in 2020, and when the world pivoted online during the COVID-19 pandemic, he launched the NACo Broadband Task Force. Over 28 years as judge/executive, he focused on governing regionally, because the fates of Northern Kentucky, Southwestern Ohio and Southeastern Indiana are so deeply linked.

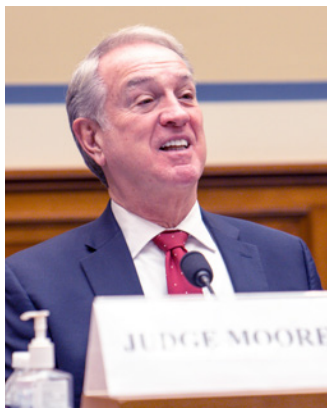
### How did you know that county government was your calling?

When I was a teenager, my father was the Pendleton County sheriff, so after school, I used to take to the courthouse and hang around until he was done with work. That time spent around him and the work he did made me want to be a county commissioner someday, even when I was working in the private sector. When I started to explore running, the county executive position became available so instead of running for county commission-

er, I ran for county executive.

### What were your proudest achievements in Boone County?

I merged law enforcement agencies into the county sheriff's department in my first term and that was a huge accomplishment. People said it couldn't be done and that it would be politically volatile for me, but the sheriff and I worked together. The transportation infrastructure has transformed in Boone County, going from traditional two-lane rural roads to highways with single-point urban interchanges, roads with round-



MOORE

abouts and we've turned our airport into a major cargo center.

### What did you learn from NACo that you brought home to Boone County?

The Broadband Task Force was really a win-win, because it was the work with NACo that made me aware of the opportunity [to add broadband to his county], and then we were one of the pilot regions that pulled it off; that then benefited other partners of NACo.

My work with the Opioid Task Force really catapulted us to file lawsuits against the distributors. That work helped all of our Kentucky counties and cities. When the settlements were being entered into, many

states grabbed the money that really was generated by the counties' work. I sat with the speaker of the House, the president of the Senate and our state attorney general, and they were trying to take the money. I was able to negotiate a 50-50 split for our cities and counties with the state. It was my knowledge of the NACo work that enabled me to hold the ground, hold our ground and get us a good deal.

### How did you change as a county leader over your tenure?

You've got to be listening and learning, and that never stops. But midway through my career, I started sharing more with others rather than just listening to others, and then by the end, becoming a mentor to others.

I think this will become more and more important as NACo goes forward. There is such turnover right now in the election process, and in many cases, individuals don't seek to hold the office as long as some of us did in the past. I think the longevity of county officials will be shorter, but that puts pressure on to train and retrain and deal with turnover.

### Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

I was elated at the number of first-time attendees at this conference (nearly 500). And the same thing back at the Legislative Conference. I was very worried about the future of our counties and NACo, but when I see the first-timers coming and engaging, that makes me feel much better, and I have hope. But we have to engage those first-timers, we have to help train those first-timers and make sure they have access to experienced elected officials to learn from them.

### What advice do you have for your successors?

We have to make sure that newly elected officials understand that you can't be as effective at home. If you're not part of your state association or NACo, you're not doing all you could do, because there's so much experience there, and there is the fact that whatever idea you have, somebody else has probably already done it and can help.

## Prepare for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month: How County Leaders Can Save Lives

As summer draws to a close, September brings with it a vital national observance — Suicide Prevention Awareness Month — and a timely call to action for county leaders across the United States. Before the month arrives, now is the moment to ensure your county has the tools, training and capacity in place to respond when it matters most.

### Understanding the stakes

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 48,824 people died by suicide in 2024. The number of people who seriously thought about suicide (14.3 million), planned (4.6 million) or attempted (2.2 million) suicide is even more staggering. Suicide touches every community.

Each year, one in five adults in the United States experi-

ence a mental health crisis. For county governments, which are often the first, and sometimes only, point of contact for individuals in crisis, the responsibility to respond with knowledge and compassion is both urgent and profound.

### Leading the way

America's county governments are frontline providers of mental health programs and services, investing more than \$130 billion annually in community health systems. From operating crisis lines and focusing on early intervention to providing care through county-owned hospitals and behavioral health authorities, counties are committed to supporting the long-term wellbeing of residents.

Counties across the country are taking a proactive approach to suicide awareness

and prevention, implementing innovative and supportive programming geared toward suicide prevention and destigmatizing mental health. From mobile crisis response teams to behavioral health authorities, counties are building the continuum of care their communities depend on.

### Support

County employees play a critical role in delivering these services — but they are not immune to the challenges they help address. 90% of police officers report stigma as a barrier to getting help, underscoring the critical need for education and open dialogue across all county departments. The data on first responders — including EMTs, firefighters and paramedics — is equally striking: 26% report significant symptoms of PTSD and

28% report moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety. Depression and suicide rates are up to five times more common in first responders than in the general public.

It's clear that suicide prevention is not only a community issue; it is a workforce issue.

County employees carry a heavy responsibility, and would also benefit from programs that offer resources, reduce stigma and reinforce a simple but powerful message: it is OK not to be OK.

Creating a culture where county employees feel safe seeking help is not just the right thing to do, it also strengthens the services counties deliver to their communities.

### Training

Suicide prevention begins with people who know what to look for and what to say. Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), administered by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing

and available through NACo, equips county employees with the skills to recognize and respond to a mental health or substance use challenge.

MHFA includes dedicated content on suicide awareness, helping employees learn to spot warning signs, reduce stigma and support prevention and intervention efforts. More than 1,700 U.S. counties have Mental Health First Aiders and Instructors, and 90% of learners feel more confident responding to a mental health crisis after completing MHFA.

### Become an instructor

The most sustainable path to county-wide suicide prevention readiness is building training capacity from within. This September, NACo and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing are co-hosting both Adult MHFA Instructor Training and Youth MHFA Instructor Training — giving county



-----ON THE MOVE----->

NACo MEMBERS

- President **George Dunlap**, Chief Government Affairs Officer **Eryn Hurley** and Member Engagement Director **Tammy Tincher** attended the South Carolina Association of Counties Annual Conference in Charleston County.

NACo STAFF

Ben Wills has joined NACo as managing director for digital and integrated media. He previously served as senior director of brand strategy for Development Counselors International and director of marketing and communications at the National Landing Business Improvement District. He earned a bachelor's degree in public relations and advertising, marketing and management from the University of Southern Indiana.



Wills

Managing Director **Jack Peterson** attended the United Counties Council of Illinois Annual Conference in Jo Daviess County and the Midwest State Association retreat in Franklin County, Ohio.

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professionals the credentials to train colleagues and community members on an ongoing basis.

Instructor certification means your county doesn't need to depend on outside resources to sustain mental health education.

Ways county leaders can act now

- Promote 988:** Ensure all county departments are familiar with and actively promoting the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — the national resource available to anyone in crisis, 24/7.
- Advocate for Change:** Engage in open dialogues about mental health within your departments and with elected officials. Champion policies that promote mental health resources and reduce stigma.
- Get Involved with MHFA:**
  - Become a Certified First Aider:** Equip yourself and your team with the skills necessary to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health and substance use challenges among peers and constituents.
  - Become an Instructor:** Expand your impact by certifying your staff to provide ongoing MHFA trainings in your county. Register for a September Instructor training for NACo members:

Adult MHFA Instructor Training - Sept. 14-16



Youth MHFA Instructor Training - Sept. 23-25



Suicide prevention is not a single-month initiative. But September is a powerful opportunity to lead.

Use it to equip your county — and your community — to intervene early, reduce stigma and save lives.

For more information on MHFA training for county employees, visit [MHFA.org/NACo](https://MHFA.org/NACo).

If you or someone you know is struggling, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

GET TO KNOW...

MOREHOUSE PARISH, LA.

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer



Morehouse Parish, La., established in 1844, is named for Abraham Morehouse, an early settler of the area, for his role in developing the Ouachita River Valley.

The parish is one of the largest duck-hunting destinations in the country and is bordered and irrigated by the longest bayou in the world. Chemin-A-Haut, a state park in the parish known for its cypress trees, sits on a bluff overlooking the winding Bayou Bartholomew, which stretches 364 miles through Arkansas and Louisiana.

Morehouse Parish is located in the “Sportsman’s Paradise” region of northern Louisiana. Bussey Brake Lake, a 2,600-acre reservoir and wildlife management area, is known for its crappie and bass fishing, and offers opportunities for kayaking, biking and horseback riding. Birdwatching and hunting are popular pastimes at the Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge, which sprawls across 42,500 acres in Morehouse Parish and neighboring Union Parish.

Morehouse Parish is known for its massive agricultural production, and more than 180,000 of its acres are dedicated to crops, primarily soybeans, corn, rice and cotton. Each fall, the parish hosts the North Louisiana Cotton Festival and Fair, which features carnival rides, live local entertainment, livestock shows and arts and crafts.

**The agricultural hub of the parish, a small village named Mer Rouge, was the home of Horace “Hoss” Logan. As the original announcer and talent scout for the live stage and radio broadcast “Louisiana Hayride,” Logan helped launch the careers of entertainers including Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash and Hank Williams. Presley made his radio debut on the Hayride and performed his final show there, after which Logan said the now iconic phrase, “Ladies and gentleman, Elvis has left the building.”** The first female artist signed to Motown Records, rhythm and blues singer Mable John, is another notable Morehouse Parish native.

The parish seat, Bastrop, is named after its founder, Felipe Enrique Neri. Although the Dutchman claimed to be a nobleman, the Baron de Bastrop, it's reported he was an embezzler who fled to Louisiana to escape prosecution. He later moved to Texas, where he befriended Stephen F. Austin, known as the “Father of Texas,” and became instrumental in colonizing Texas. The city of Bastrop, Texas is also named after him.

Get to Know features new NACo member counties.



(L-r): Morehouse Parish’s Horace Logan of “Hayride” chats with DJ Ed Hamilton and Elvis Presley.



## BRIGHT IDEAS | WARREN COUNTY, KY.

# AI-Powered Town Hall Gives Thousands a Voice in County Planning in Kentucky

**PROBLEM:** How does a fast-growing county plan for its future?

**SOLUTION:** Use AI to crowd-source ideas to create a blueprint.

by Meredith Moran  
staff writer

Warren County, Ky., the fastest growing county in the state, leveraged technology to receive input from thousands of its residents on what they want the future of the community to look like to build its comprehensive plan.

Just shy of 150,000 people live in Warren County, which is on track to reach a population of 240,000 by 2050 — more than doubling its residents over the course of 40 years. In response to its population influx, the county set out to create a 25-year comprehensive plan, a much more “ambitious” endeavor than its traditional 10-year structure, according to Warren County Judge Doug Gorman.

“That type of growth is an unbelievable amount of pressure,” Gorman said. “How are we going to handle that? The 25-year plan — the majority of people, especially myself, who are involved in it probably won’t be [in county government] in 2050, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t plan for the future of our children, grandchildren and other people that are coming here ... It gives us a road map for how we can be successful in the future.”

Looking to receive input from as many people as possible — of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds — the county partnered with a local innovation strategy firm, InnoEngine, and used Jigsaw, a Google artificial intelligence tool, to create a month-long,



Fast-growing Warren County, Ky. holds a town hall to allow residents to weigh in on its planning. The county used technology to receive input from thousands of residents. Photo courtesy of Warren County

online dialogue around ways the county could improve over the next 25 years.

“If you have a lot of growth coming, why don’t we try to find out what the community wants to do with that growth, rather than make these decisions in a vacuum?” Gorman said. “So, our whole intention was to get as many people as possible, to have as many diverse ideas as possible to find out what are the best things, and then also what kind of consensus we could build with that information.”

Through what Warren County is calling the “largest town hall in American history,” 7,890 residents shared 3,940 unique ideas for the community’s future and weighed in over one million times on other’s submitted ideas. All responses and votes were anonymous. Fewer than 200 people usually attend the county’s in-person public meetings and hearings, he noted.

“I feel like this is maybe the truest form of democracy,” Gorman said. “We had an open forum [where] people could share their opinions ... I didn’t know who said what, so I couldn’t make a decision based on who they were,

their party affiliation, all those things. I had to judge these opinions on the merit of their ideas, which I love more than anything. I think it’s how it should be.”

The county created a social media campaign, worked with local media outlets and schools and built grassroots efforts to spread the word about the “What Could BG Be?” initiative, according to a county representative.

‘I feel like this is maybe the truest form of democracy.’

– Judge Doug Gorman,  
Warren County

“To make sure participants were as representative as possible, volunteers canvassed local businesses, international grocery stores, soup kitchens, rural diners and flea markets,” they said. “They talked to bored people in the DMV line, farmers at the agricultural gala, Afghan Uber drivers, fans at a college basketball game and congregants at religious institutions. They reached longtime locals, recently arrived Burmese refugees and

Bosnian-American families who had arrived in the 1990s.”

Ensuring people not only knew about the digital town hall, but also had access to technology to participate was key, according to Gorman. Library technology such as iPads were brought into areas with less access, he noted.

“The most important thing was the ease of how to get people to do it,” Gorman said. “We removed the barriers for access, so that every person had an opportunity to have their voice heard, and I do think that’s an important thing in government.”

The feedback from “What Could BG Be?” was divided into categories that will be further explored by subject matter experts. The topics include arts and culture, infrastructure and transportation, economic development, community identity, environment and sustainability, housing, education, healthcare, public safety and services, food and agriculture and equity and inclusion.

“Those subject matter experts in this diverse group, they now are tackling that data,” Gorman said. “And making this game plan coming to the county of ‘How can we address this? How do we

do this? What investments do we have to make? Who needs to be involved? How do we accomplish these large goals that the community wants?”

The county doesn’t have the capacity or resources to implement every idea, but identifying its residents’ top priorities and then planning and building projects from there will benefit the whole community, Gorman noted.

The town hall also helped affirm and refine some of the concepts the county has already started working toward, including the revitalization of its Riverfront Park, he noted. Warren County had already held numerous planning sessions regarding re-invigorating the riverfront area, but now having the data that residents view it as a top opportunity to improve quality of life, it’s moving “full steam ahead” with planning. And as a result of the feedback, the county is now exploring building an amphitheater in the space for outdoor live music.

Counties across the country can leverage the same technology and create a similar initiative to best serve their residents’ needs, Gorman said.

“I think counties are the most important form of government out there, because it is where the rubber meets the road,” Gorman said. “Your quality of life can be determined by the type of government you have in your county. We sometimes get tied up in state and federal things, but when it comes to a county, it is the most important voice you can have, and I think most counties want to hear the voices of the people they represent.” **CN**

Warren County’s BG2050 initiative was the 2026 NACo Achievement Award “Best in Category” winner in the Planning category.



WORD SEARCH

CHARLESTON COUNTY, S.C.  
Created by Mary Ann Barton

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

**ASHLEY:** The Ashley River flows through Charleston County and has played a significant role in the region's settlement, commerce, and agricultural history.

**BOEING:** Boeing operates a major aircraft manufacturing facility in North Charleston, making aerospace an important part of the local economy.

**BOONE:** Boone Hall Plantation is one of America's oldest working plantations and a historical attraction featuring traditions of the Gullah people, descendants of enslaved West Africans.

**CHARLESTON:** The county seat of Charleston County, Charleston is a historic coastal city known for its preserved architecture, rich history and vibrant tourism industry.

**CITADEL:** The Citadel is a prestigious military college in Charleston recognized for its leadership education and long-standing traditions.

**COOPER:** The Cooper River borders Charleston and has long been essential for shipping, trade and access to the Port of Charleston.

**FOLLY:** Folly Beach is a beloved beach community in Charleston County known for surfing, fishing and its laid-back atmosphere.

**LOWCOUNTRY:** Lowcountry refers to the distinctive coastal region of South Carolina, with Charleston County serving as one of its cultural and historical centers.

**MAGNOLIAS:** Magnolias is a renowned Charleston restaurant celebrated for its upscale Southern cuisine and Lowcountry specialties.

**MIDDLETON:** Middleton Place is a National Historic Landmark known for its landscaped gardens, history and educational programs including a freedman house museum.

**PATRIOTS:** Patriots Point is a maritime museum in Mount Pleasant featuring the historic aircraft carrier USS Yorktown and other naval exhibits.

**POST:** *The Post and Courier* is Charleston County's major daily newspaper, providing local news and regional coverage.

**RAVENEL:** The Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge is an iconic cable-stayed bridge connecting downtown Charleston with Mount Pleasant across the Cooper River.

**SULLIVAN:** Sullivan's Island is a historic barrier island famous for its beaches, Revolutionary War history, and Fort Moultrie.

**SWEETGRASS:** Sweetgrass basket weaving is a celebrated Gullah Geechee tradition that remains an important cultural art form in Charleston County.

PROFILES IN SERVICE



DANIEL MONETTE  
NACo Board Member  
Socorro County, N.M.  
commissioner

MONETTE

**Number of years active in NACo:** 33 years

**Years in public service:** 40 years

**My first NACo event was:** NACo Legislative Conference

**NACo committees:** NACo Board Of Directors. WIR Board of Directors, Public Lands Policy Steering Committee

**Occupation:** Was in the automobile business for 30 years, was a county manager for nine-plus years, currently serving my 14th year as a county commissioner.

**Education:** BS in Agriculture Business Management

**The hardest thing I've ever done:** Having to fire an employee.

**Three people (living or dead) I'd invite to dinner:** My wife, my father and John Wayne.

**A dream I have is to:** I am living my dream.

**You'd be surprised to learn that I:** I am a team roper.

**The most adventurous thing I've ever done is:** Every day is an adventure.

**My favorite way to relax is:** Spending time with my family.

**I'm most proud of:** I am most proud of my children and grandchildren.

**My favorite meal is:** My favorite meal is steak and enchiladas (with homemade chile).

**My pet peeve is:** People that do not listen.

**My favorite music is:** Country

**My favorite U.S. president is:** Ronald Reagan

**My county is a NACo member:** because of the information NACo brings to counties, keeping us informed about issues facing counties through the United States and keeping us involved with issues that may affect each and every county.

My favorite movie is: "The Cowboys"



BEHIND THE SEAL

SAN MIGUEL COUNTY, COLO.

San Miguel County, named after the San Miguel River, is nestled in the San Juan mountains of southwest Colorado, and both geographic features are represented prominently on the county's seal, along with the pine trees of the Uncompahgre National Forest.







## NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

### CALIFORNIA

- The 2026 **SAN DIEGO COUNTY Fair** closed its 20-day run with 872,816 total attendees, averaging about 44,000 a day and a single-day record of 65,000 on July 3, according to figures released after the fair and reported by Fox 5 San Diego. Organizers put the fair's economic impact at \$328 million.

The details: 110 pet adoptions, 36,484 turkey legs sold, 70 full-time and 1,200 temporary employees and 111 food stands, all participating in the fair's Green Ribbon initiative by using compostable service ware. The 2026 theme, "Once Upon a Fair," combined staples such as carnival games with newer attractions, including a Scholastic Book Fair and corgi races. Dating to 1880, the fair remains the region's largest and longest-running community event.

### ALABAMA

- **WALKER COUNTY** commissioners accepted a \$650,000 bid from Murphee Bridge Corporation on July 20 to **replace the Gibson Hill Road bridge**, the *Daily Mountain Eagle* reported. County Engineer Glenn Peek said five bids came in, with construc-

tion expected to begin around Sept. 10. The new structure will be 67 feet, replacing an existing 45-foot bridge. Roughly \$400,000 of the cost is covered by a logging efficiency grant from the Alabama Forestry Commission, with the balance from Rebuild Alabama allocations.

### CALIFORNIA

- **SHASTA COUNTY** supervisors unanimously adopted a resolution July 21 supporting responsible use of **artificial intelligence** in county government, Action News Now reported. The resolution recognizes AI as a tool that can improve public service, support the workforce and strengthen long-term fiscal sustainability, while establishing guardrails around how it is deployed.

Its core principles hold that AI should assist rather than replace human judgment, that employees remain accountable for decisions made on the public's behalf and that privacy, security and confidential information must be protected. According to the county, the information technology department is now drafting a detailed employee policy governing approved tools and acceptable use. The two-step approach — board-level principles first, operational policy second — is becoming a common sequence as counties move from ad hoc AI use toward formal governance.

### ILLINOIS

- **MADISON COUNTY** Transit has implemented a service

change beginning July 12 that replaces a fixed bus route with **on-demand service**, the *Illinois Business Journal* reported. The change launches a new MCT Micro service area.

The agency held six public meetings before the changes were approved and took comments by email, phone and mail, with the final service plan

reflecting adjustments made in response to rider feedback. The swap of a low-performing fixed route for a microtransit zone mirrors what a number of suburban and exurban county transit systems have tried over the past two years as they weigh coverage against cost per rider.

### MARYLAND

**WASHINGTON COUNTY's 250th anniversary programming** continues past the Fourth of July: its drone show and fireworks display have been rescheduled to Sept. 26 at the Washington County Agricultural Education Center, according to the county's America 250 page. The county's July 4 celebration at the same venue featured historical and cultural vendors and the opening of a 1976 bicentennial time capsule hosted by the Antietam Exchange Club, alongside live music and a City of Hagerstown semi-quincentennial challenge coin.

The county is now collecting ideas and items for a new semi-quincentennial time capsule to be sealed for a future generation. Washington County is marking a double anniversary — the county and the nation both turn 250 this year — which is true of a number of counties chartered

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### ALABAMA

- The **JEFFERSON COUNTY** Commission moved quickly through a July committee meeting, teeing up items on the Northern Beltline, the Riverchase Galleria area and the new **Alabama Farm Center** for its formal session later that week, *BirminghamWatch* reported. The eight-minute committee session set the agenda rather than taking final action.

The Northern Beltline, a long-delayed interstate segment across the northern edge of the county, has consumed county attention for years as construction proceeds between Alabama 75 and Alabama 79. The Alabama Farm Center, a state agricultural exposition complex, represents the newer end of the county's development portfolio. Together the two items capture the balancing act facing large urban counties: sustaining decades-old highway commitments while positioning for projects meant to draw regional visitors.



### FLORIDA

**BREVARD COUNTY** officials and community leaders broke ground July 24 on a new **Animal Services shelter** intended to improve care for homeless and abandoned animals, WFTV-TV reported. Officials said the facility will offer a safer, more modern space and expand the county's capacity to care for pets awaiting adoption, reunification or other services.

Shelter construction has become a recurring county capital item as aging facilities designed for shorter stays struggle with longer average lengths of stay and higher intake — a pattern visible in county shelter projects from Florida to Washington state this year.



### From NEWS page 30

in 1776 and gives them a natural hook for programming that runs well past July.

### NEW YORK

**WAYNE COUNTY** supervisors were scheduled to vote July 21 on an agreement allowing **county EMS** to provide specialty care transfers from Newark-Wayne Community Hospital to other facilities, FingerLakes1.com reported. Such transfers are generally needed when critically ill patients require services unavailable locally. The county would buy two ventilators and additional cardiac monitoring equipment for the program at a combined cost of up to \$48,066.

The agenda also included an emergency vehicle purchase and rural health grant items, alongside a request from the county nursing home to write off 52 uncollectible accounts totaling \$245,444 dating from 2022 through 2026. The pairing is instructive: county-operated EMS is expanding into higher-acuity work at the same moment county-operated long-term care is absorbing bad debt, and both land in the same budget.

### NORTH CAROLINA

**NEW HANOVER COUNTY** commissioners unanimously created a \$4 million **workforce housing** investment fund on July 13, public radio station WHQR reported. The fund does not increase density or approve new development; instead, it offers developers an alternative to private lenders, capping each investment at \$2 million or 20% of development cost. In exchange, developers agree to keep units affordable at 60% to 90% of area median income for 10 years, repaying the county at 5% interest.

Interest collected returns to the fund automatically, creating a revolving pool, though commissioners retain the option to redirect the money in future budget cycles. The board approved the fund's first investment a 236-townhome project on 28 acres near I-140 whose developer approached the county directly. Officials said the remaining \$2 million



### FLORIDA

• **ST. JOHN'S COUNTY** has launched a **Young Professionals Program** aimed at keeping early-career workers from decamping to Jacksonville or out of state, *Action News Jax* reported last month. The inaugural gathering, held July 14 in Nocatee, drew more than 60 attendees for networking and discussion of ways to get more involved in the community. County officials said the effort connects directly to the Economic Prosperity goal in the county's strategic plan.

Staff described the program as more than a mixer, telling the station it is designed to support talent recruitment and retention while offering leadership training and career development pathways. A second session, an "Emerging Leaders Toolkit" panel, is set for Aug. 18 at the St. Augustine Airport, with registration through the county chamber of commerce. The approach reflects a growing recognition among fast-growing suburban counties that attracting residents and retaining workers are separate problems.

will be held until the right project comes along.

### OHIO

• The 109th **FRANKLIN COUNTY Fair** opened July 20 at the fairgrounds in Hilliard with 4-H competitions, rides and fair food, WOSU Public Media reported. Fair Board President Gary Fellure welcomed attendees and showed renderings for a new 4-H building and exposition center planned for the fairgrounds in coming years, telling the crowd that while faces change generation to generation, the fair itself stays much the same.

At the opening ceremony, organizers recognized several "Cream of the Crop" awardees and Franklin County Sheriff Dallas Baldwin swore in three crisis K9 officers — Koda, Legend and Maverick — joining a team of nearly 20 dogs working across the office's bomb squad, law enforcement and therapy units.

### SOUTH CAROLINA

The **CHARLESTON COUNTY Public Library** will close its main library on Aug. 1 for the final phase of a referendum-funded renovation, WCIV-TV reported July 27. The last day of operations at the downtown branch is July 31. The work will relocate children's and teen services onto a

single floor so families can use the library together, and includes refreshed public spaces and expanded programming areas.

Executive Director Angela Craig described the closure as the start of an important transformation for the building. The downtown peninsula will continue to be served from a temporary location during construction, with additional details on timing and new features to be released as the project progresses. Consolidating youth services onto one floor has become a common move in library renovations, driven less by collections than by how families actually move through a building.

### WASHINGTON

**JEFFERSON COUNTY** commissioners approved a resolution July 20 reclassifying a 27.54-acre parcel off U.S. Highway 101 in Brinnon from **designated forest land to open space**, the *Peninsula Daily News* reported. The Jefferson Land Trust submitted the application, which the county scored a 12 on a scale of 5 to 12 — a score that earns the applicant a full tax reduction.

Development Code Administrator Greg Ballard told commissioners the designation makes sense in part be-

cause an easement granted to the Navy in 2022 already precluded development on the property. Sarah Spaeth, the land trust's director of conservation, said the land will not be harvested for commercial forestry. Open space tax classifications remain one of the quieter tools counties hold for shaping land use, trading current-use assessment for

permanent limits on what a parcel can become.

### WEST VIRGINIA

The **HARRISON COUNTY Commission** buried a **time capsule** in front of the county courthouse in Clarksburg on July 15 to mark the nation's 250th anniversary, WDTV reported. The capsule was placed near the courthouse's Purple Heart monuments, and a commemorative plaque will be installed atop the burial site.

Residents and local organizations submitted items for the capsule. Dorian A. James, executive director of the Kelly Miller Community Center and vice chairman of the West Virginia Black Heritage Festival, contributed a flyer and a photograph of the community center, saying he hoped whoever opens the capsule would be encouraged to keep working for change in the community. Courthouse-lawn time capsules have been one of the most common county-level semi-quincentennial projects, in part because they cost little and outlast the anniversary.

Share your news! Email Editor Mary Ann Barton: [mbarton@naco.org](mailto:mbarton@naco.org).



### TEXAS

**UVALDE COUNTY** commissioners are still documenting damage from recent Hill Country **flooding** and have put off a countywide debris removal plan until state and federal requirements are locked in, Texas Public Radio reported July 27. The court unanimously tabled the proposed plan because the county has not yet secured state approval for a designated disaster debris disposal site at the City of Uvalde landfill, and is awaiting further guidance from FEMA and the Texas Division of Emergency Management, which require detailed documentation before removal can begin.

Commissioners also declined to immediately rehire the consulting firm that managed recovery after 2018 and 2025 floods, instead voting to seek proposals for grant administration services tied to the July disaster. County officials said documenting every eligible expense will be essential to maximizing federal reimbursement.





# Save the Dates

Upcoming Conferences/Events

## 2027 Legislative Conference

February 19-23  
Washington, D.C.

## 2027 Western Interstate Region Conference

May 25-28  
Douglas County, Nev.

## 2027 Annual Conference & Expo

July 23-26  
Chatham County/Savannah, Ga.