

2022 NACo
**LEGISLATIVE
CONFERENCE**

PRESIDENT TO ADDRESS NACo MEMBERS

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

With the backdrop of the two-year pandemic and its ongoing challenges, President Joe Biden will address county officials Tuesday, Feb. 15 at NACo's 2022 Legislative Conference.

Nearly 2,000 county officials from around the country are in Washington, D.C. this week focusing on federal policy issues at the conference, which kicked off Saturday, Feb. 12 and continues through Wednesday, Feb. 16.

County officials will meet with their counterparts and hear from the administration and others on topics important to their counties — from affordable housing to broadband to elections and immigration.

The 2022 Legislative Conference comes on the heels of major victories for counties in past months, including passage of the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill in November and the American Rescue Plan Act last winter.

Among the featured speak-

ers at this year's conference are House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Transportation Sec. Pete Buttigieg, Agriculture Sec. Tom Vilsack, EPA Administrator Michael Regan and others including Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas).

At a Capitol Hill press briefing Feb. 15, county leaders are set to discuss local government priorities with members of Congress including Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.), Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) and Rep. Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.).

They will discuss topics near and dear to counties including:

- strengthening the intergovernmental partnership
- implementation of the historic American Rescue Plan Act's Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund
- critical need for full mandatory funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program
- impacts of the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy
- and the county role in addressing intergenerational poverty. **CN**



BIDEN



Odessa Pride sits at the dais in the Prince Edward County, Va. Board of Supervisors chambers. Photo by Charlie Ban

Supervisor's career keeps county past in perspective

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Odessa Pride didn't love her high school experience, being one of 15 Black students in recently integrated Charlotte County, Va. But despite the intimidation and overt acts of racism she experienced, she knew she had it better than her peers

across the border.

In neighboring Prince Edward County, nearly 1,700 Black students spent five years fending for themselves for an education after the Board of Supervisors closed the public school system by eliminating its budget, the extreme end of Virginia's "massive resistance" to the U.S. Supreme Court's

Brown v. Board of Education ruling. From 1959-1964, they lived with relatives near and far where they could go to school, traveled to a junior college in North Carolina or stayed home and worked, all of which begat long-term social, educational and economic consequences

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Former NACo president Javier Gonzales dies at 56

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Javier Gonzales, NACo's youngest president, died Feb. 9 at age 56 in Santa Fe County, N.M., where he served as both a county commissioner and mayor of the city. He is the only NACo president from New Mexico and the only NACo

president of Hispanic descent.

Bound by New Mexico law to a two-term limit, he ran for the NACo presidency soon after taking office and was inaugurated in July 2001 at age 35.

"It was almost unfathomable that he was elected president because most NACo presidents spend years and years getting to know people, developing

relationships, networking and he had no time to do that," said Steve Kopelman, executive director of the New Mexico Association of Counties and former Santa Fe County attorney during Gonzales' tenure.

Though Gonzales planned to focus on rural issues — includ-

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One county official's journey: Moving forward after segregation

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for a generation.

All of that was on the top of Pride's mind throughout a career teaching English in Prince Edward County schools before serving as principal of the middle and high school she wouldn't have been able to attend. She's now in her second term as a county supervisor and is the vice-chair of the Virginia Association of Counties' Education Steering Committee. And while she wants to help the county continue to move beyond its segregationist past, she doesn't want those years to be forgotten.

"We thought about it all the time," she said.

"People say we're still using [the closure] as an excuse, but the effects from segregation and the closure last for a long time. People's families broke up so the children could go to school somewhere else, and some families are still suffering because of opportunities their parents and

grandparents didn't have."

She compared the stunted educational development to the learning loss students have experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that has motivated her to advocate for broadband expansion in her rural county of 23,000 to ensure educational resources are available to more people in their homes.

While she didn't experience Prince Edward County's school closures firsthand, she saw what it meant to people close to her. Her late husband, Roger, did not go to school for a year, and graduated late because of the closure, while his sisters moved away to different states.

Her longtime assistant when she was principal, Rita Odom Moseley, lost two years of school before moving, by herself, to Blacksburg, Va. to attend school. In her 60s, Moseley earned a bachelor's and a master's and has since published several books, including one about the county school closure.

Those reminders motivated Pride not just to keep in mind the consequences of closure decades later on some of her students, but to forge ahead without holding grudges against the Board on which she now sits.

"My philosophy has always been 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,'" she said. "We have a lot of problems we are trying to solve with student achievement that we won't help with bitterness."

In 2008, while returning home from a Prince Edward County basketball game, she and Roger were struck head-on in a crash that killed him and severely injured her. After recuperating for a year, she returned to school administration and defended her doctoral dissertation.

"Even when I was a kid, my

father stressed the importance of education," she said. "He only went to school until sixth grade, but he knew there was something about me that I would love learning."

As she neared retirement, friends extolled her to stay active, and she began attending county Board of Supervisors meetings, and saw a new calling. With the encouragement from parents of students she had taught over the years, she ran and won in 2015.

Though the schools integrated 50 years prior to her taking office, she made it a point during her campaign to declare that the Board of Supervisors would not allow the schools to close again.

As assistant principal of the middle school in the early 2000s, she worked with a program at neighboring Hampden-Sydney College to bring undergraduates into the school system to talk about the closure's lasting legacy, which for many outsiders, was the first time they had learned in detail about the measures the county Board took to oppose integration.

In the county seat of Farm-

ville, a museum preserves the Robert R. Moton School, which supported 400 Black students in a building designed for half that many. There, in 1951, students organized a walkout to protest the underfunded school's conditions, which included tar paper shack outbuilding classrooms with no insulation that leaked during the rain.

A lawsuit challenging segregation in the county resulting from the walkout, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, was one of five cases combined into *Brown v. Board of Education*. That began a long-term planning process to assemble private schools for White students, in a process detailed by journalist Kristen Green's *Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County* and Bob Smith's *They Closed Their Schools*.

The schools were reopened after the Supreme Court case *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* found that the county's defunding of the public school system violated the Constitution's Equal Protection Clause because the county's private school vouch-

ers were useless when private schools did not accept Black students.

Fifty years to the date after the county supervisors voted to defund the public school system, the 2009 Board dedicated a Light of Reconciliation marker on the courthouse lawn.

It commemorates the role the Moton school children, led by Barbara Rose Johns, had in ending legalized segregation and apologizing for the consequences that segregation and the closure had on the county's Black children.

For nearly 20 years, a state-funded scholarship program has funded educational pursuits by those affected students, like Pride's assistant Moseley, who is pursuing a doctorate.

"She's a living example of what a Black lady can do even when she'd been wronged the way she was," Pride said.

And she inspires Pride a little, maybe enough to tip the scales as she considers going back to graduate school.

"I just love learning," Pride said. "It's what I want to do for the rest of my life." **CN**

SNAP/STATS

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- 1..... Tortilla chips
- 2Potato chips
- 3Nacho chips
- 4BBQ chips
- 5.. Hot and spicy chips

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RON HOUSEMAN CELEBRATES 42 YEARS OF NACo CONFERENCES

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

There was trouble in Taney Town.

Taney County, in south central Missouri, was facing financial troubles in the winter of 1980. The presiding commissioner had a request to make of second-year County Clerk Ron Houseman. He was to go on a fact-finding mission to NACo's Legislative Conference, the county's first participation with the organization since joining.

"We'd like you to go and bring back whatever ideas, whatever thoughts, whatever solutions there might be for what we're facing," Houseman recalled being told. "I went and I was just blown away. I attended all the different meetings I could, I met dozens and dozens of people and brought back a suitcase of pamphlets and folders and anything I could get ahold of. I was overwhelmed."

He was hooked. And he kept coming back, year after year. This year's Legislative Conference is his 42nd, a streak built on the back of years as the Taney County clerk, presiding commissioner and economic development director, following by stints as an intergovernmental liaison of neighboring Stone County, Mo. and now Cape Girardeau County.

That tenure has included membership on NACo's Board of Directors, Environment, Energy and Land Use and Transportation steering committees and currently the Rural Action Caucus.



Houseman

"I've just wanted to stay active," he said. "It's an organization that I've wanted to stay involved with for almost the entire length of my career in county government."

Most immediately, what he brought back to Taney County was quick action to access grant funding, which allowed the county to get help funding its cash-strapped programs.

"We didn't even know how to apply for grants," he said. "With NACo's help, we were able to catch up and take advantage of the opportunities that were out there for counties."

And what he learned made him a better partner with state and federal governments.

"NACo taught me how to talk to my member of Congress," he said. "I thought I knew how to talk, but then I was really able to make actionable points. I learned how much time I'd have to talk and get my message across, pare what I had to say down to salient points and paint the picture of how help for my county could help the congressional district. That's incredibly

valuable."

What kept him coming back to four decades of conferences, in addition to the technical know-how, has been the relationships with other county officials.

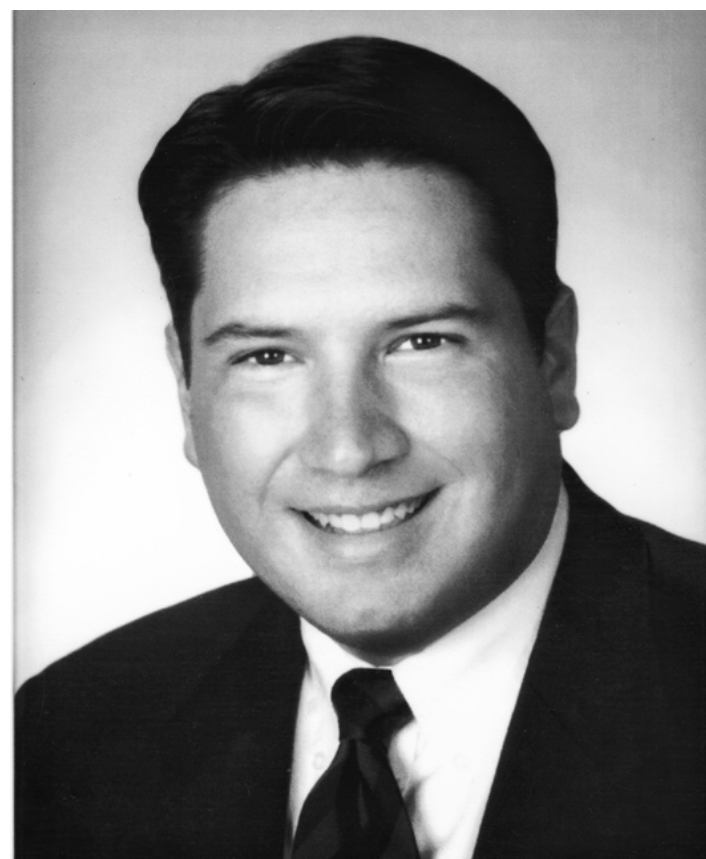
"The friends I met from Hawaii to New York became a family for me," he said. "It's truly been a blessing for me to come to conferences so I could take something home to better serve my constituents, but also find kindred spirits in counties across the country who can relate to each other."

"There are friends I've had for years and I don't know if they're Republican or Democrat," he noted. "I don't care, and they don't seem to care. We don't talk politics, we don't argue philosophies, we come together at NACo meetings to find solutions to the problems we're facing."

Houseman is taking a victory lap in what he expects to be his last year working for counties, heading to both the Legislative and Annual Conference July 21-24 in Adams County, Colo., where he will help new NACo Board of Directors member Robert Dixon, a Greene County, Mo. commissioner, learn the ropes.

"I'll introduce him to who he needs to know," he said, "the people who made my 42 years coming to conferences so memorable and helped the counties I've represented learn so much." **CN**

Gonzales led NACo after 9/11



Javier Gonzales served as president of NACo from 2001 to 2002.

From GONZALES page 1

ing health care, internet access and infrastructure — the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks forced a quick pivot to counties' role in domestic security.

"We got him a place to speak in front of the National Press Club that December and he did a great job presenting where counties were in terms of protecting the country," said former NACo Legislative Director Ed Rosado.

Gonzales served as Rosado's best man at his wedding, and the two maintained a long friendship after beginning their involvement with NACo in the same year.

Gonzales served as chairman of NACo's Homeland Security Task Force and testified before the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee, Dec. 11, 2001, demanding better coordination from federal agencies and increased assistance to counties for preparedness and security and calling for a \$3 billion local anti-terrorism block grant to help finance emergency preparedness investments, and for adequate funding of local public health infrastructure under the Public Health Threats and Emergencies Act.

"Counties have a significant role to play in our new national strategy for homeland security," he told the committee. "We are the public's first de-

fense, but we do have limited resources and will need additional support and cooperation from the federal government in order to succeed."

Kopelman saw Gonzales' career flourish in the private sector before he returned to public office in 2014, when he was the first openly gay man elected mayor of Santa Fe. After his term as mayor and following his 2020 cancer diagnosis, he worked as the chief development officer for Santa Fe's St. Vincent Hospital foundation.

"He really moved things forward dramatically," Kopelman said. "He was a visionary, he never let the grass grow under his feet. His mind was always full of ideas. He was always concerned about the underdog, the less privileged."

"He was the best of both worlds because he had one foot in traditional Santa Fe life and one foot trying to move the community forward."

Gonzales remained close with NACo leaders and staff from his time in office, gathering for reunions and golf trips.

"He enjoyed it, big time, and everyone loved him," Rosado said.

He was survived by his daughters, Cameron and Cadence.

"They were the love of his life and the center of his world," Kopelman said. **CN**



Mike Gillespie speaks no evil, Riki Hokama sees no evil and Ron Houseman hears no evil during the 2018 NACo Annual Conference. Photo courtesy of Ron Houseman



County officials learn George Washington's leadership lessons

Peter Cressy (right) addresses the NCCAE executive directors, presidents and past presidents at Mount Vernon on Jan. 13. Photo by Hugh Clarke

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Progress isn't linear and Kathy Ackerman knew that, but she needed to hear it from a different perspective. Maybe a historical perspective.

Ackerman, the Idaho County, Idaho clerk and immediate past president of the Idaho Association of Counties, was in the audience Jan. 13 at George Washington's Mount Vernon in Fairfax County, Va., during the meeting of the National Council of County Association Executives (NCCAE) Presidents and Executive Directors.

There, Rear Adm. Peter Cressy, director of Executive Leadership Programs at Mount Vernon's Leadership Institute, spun the concept in a way that took root in Ackerman's mind.

"Sometimes, retreating has its place," she said. "Time and space can have great strategic advantage. I've always thought of retreating as admitting defeat."

Washington's retreat follow-

ing a series of Revolutionary War defeats in New York, with the benefit of hindsight, lends a context that is often missing in the moment when leaders face resistance, opposition or a challenge. But Ackerman interpreted that lesson favorably.

"Leaders sometimes get into a position where they have something they want to accomplish, and they get stuck pushing forward with that and maybe not even listening to valid concerns or thoughts for feedback that people can present to fine-tune the effort," she said.

She considers herself a "leadership geek," who reads a lot on the topic, but often finds a lot of books rehashing the same lessons. Cressy's notes on retreat went against the grain.

"Maybe taking a deep breath and backing up a little bit doesn't have to be taken personally," Ackerman said.

Cressy's lecture drew parallels among the crises faced by Washington, Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roo-

sevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during their tenures. Cressy tied those impasses to the contemporary challenges county leaders are facing.

He pointed out that the current COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated that government can't always do everything and that the crisis requires buy-in from individuals and contributions from the private sector.

"Everything you guys represent in terms of executing policy and getting things done is right up Washington's alley," Cressy said.

"There's so much [about Cressy's lecture] that resonates in our current political atmosphere," said Jeremiah Rieman, executive director of the Wyoming County Commissioners Association, who tries to fit 15 minutes of reading on leadership into each day.

"It was a reminder of how



Ackerman



Rieman



McKinlay

fragile our democracy can be in particular when it comes to the transition of power and how deeply enduring our republic can be," he noted. "We saw that in his presidency, we saw that in the Civil War and the world wars."

Rieman said the importance of projecting calm amid chaos is paramount to maintaining county officials' position of authority, letting citizens know that their leaders are focused on the issues that matter.

"Keeping our national interest above personal interest," he said.

Cressy stressed that early efforts to control anxiety and fear, coupled with frank but positive communication was

a hallmark of all four leaders' styles. So, too was forging collaboration and teamwork through personal credibility.

"It's got to be thought of as a new component of leadership," Rieman said. "Advisors make the difference, you need important dialogs, tough conversations."

Cressy hammered home that controlling any misinformation is necessary, fundamental work to maintain credibility, but throughout, a leader's tone is also important, as is a visible effort at taking responsibility and leadership roles.

"Over-communicating is often required," Cressy said.

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JOINT TRACKING PROGRAM ILLUMINATES ARPA INVESTMENTS

In the 10 months since the passage of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), cities and counties have been working to prioritize and execute investments of their portion of the act's \$350 billion in flexible State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) dollars.

And as recent Treasury Department guidance made clear, local leaders have myriad options to use these resources to address the direct health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to confront the underlying challenges that exacerbated the pandemic's negative effects on vulnerable individuals, businesses and communities.

To illuminate the many options at a community's disposal, NACo is introducing the Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker, a joint project of NACo, Brookings Metro and the National League of Cities (NLC).

This tool adds to other efforts to understand local ARPA implementation, including Results for America's ARP Data and Evidence Dashboard and the Treasury Department's analysis of highlights from initial SLFRF reports.

Communities have until 2024 to fully plan for and commit their funds and until 2026 to spend them. Local governments' initial SLFRF expenditure reports contain useful roadmaps on where they are heading with ARPA funds; large cities and counties (those with populations of at least 250,000) have also delivered the first in a series of annual plans that outline their intended and actual uses of SLFRF dollars.

Together, these reports detail thousands of projects across dozens of eligible expenditure categories and form the data behind the Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker.

The tracker currently captures recovery plan data from 41 large cities, 104 large counties and seven consolidated city-counties that listed at least

one specific project and associated dollar allocation in their first performance reports.

Another 32 large cities and 124 large counties submitted reports but did not list any planned projects in the "Project Inventory" section of those reports.

An additional nine large cities and 20 large counties did not submit reports.

While the number of cities and counties reflected in the tracker will grow over time as more information becomes available, those places already included reveal an important baseline for understanding and tracking local ARPA efforts moving forward.

Large county projects

Together, the 152 large cities and counties in the tracker have set aside funds for more than 2,300 named projects. Those projects collectively represent \$18.4 billion in planned spending — a little less than half of the total SLFRF allocation for these cities and counties. Large cities have planned and budgeted a greater share of their funds (\$9.5 billion, or

60 percent of their total allocation) than large counties (\$5.7 billion, or roughly 32 percent of their total allocation).

The tracker "codes" each project listed in a city or county's annual Recovery Plan Performance Report at two levels:

1.) in one of seven overall spending groups (community aid, economic and workforce development, government operations, housing, infrastructure, public health and public safety), and

2.) in more than 40 spending sub-groups that provide further detail on intended use of funds. For instance, Buffalo, N.Y. listed 26 specific projects in its report. We identified six of these as furthering economic and workforce development; among these are projects to support small businesses, promote workforce readiness and provide summer employment opportunities to young people.

Replacing lost revenue

While large cities and counties are planning investments across a host of critical services, supports and projects,

they are dedicating the largest share of their funds to government operations.

This category includes government employee wages or hiring, fiscal health recovery, and investment in city facilities, equipment, and IT.

This commitment indicates that in the early stages of the recovery, many cities and counties are first stabilizing operations, balancing budgets and restoring service levels.

We anticipate that as time goes on, the share of SLFRF dollars dedicated to government operations will decline, as stabilization priorities give way to larger-scale, longer-term efforts.

Within the government operations category, large cities and counties are deploying the largest share of their funds toward replacing revenues they were expecting but that were reduced or eliminated because of the pandemic.

So far, cities have classified more of their funds for revenue replacement (\$4.5 billion) than counties (\$1.4 billion). This eligible use provides broad latitude to governments to use

funds to provide government services affected by revenue reductions.

Some governments, such as Long Beach, Calif., Philadelphia, San Francisco and San Diego have decided to use their full SLFRF allocation for revenue replacement.

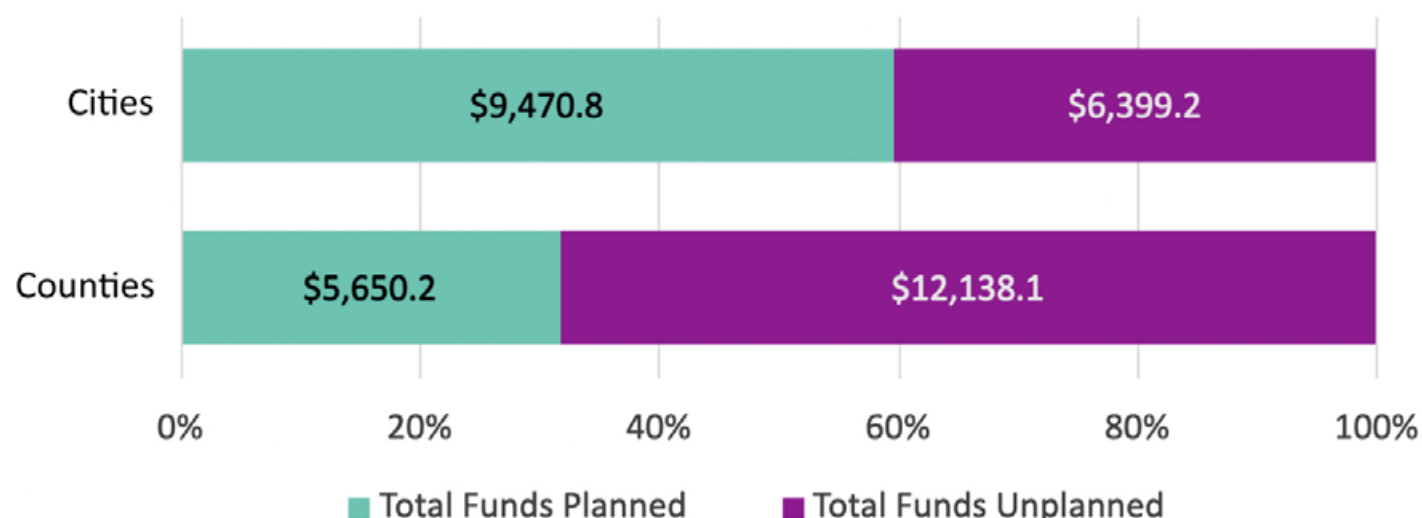
For communities such as Philadelphia, where budgets were hit hard and subject to significant cuts during the pandemic, funds are needed to restore basic city services.

Differing economic circumstances

We use data and descriptions from cities' and counties' Recovery Performance Plan Reports to look one level deeper at specific uses of SLFRF funds. For example, within the "community aid" spending group, cities and counties are providing a range of different supports, including nutrition and food assistance, services for youth and families, direct payments to low-income households, aid to veterans, and grants to nonprofit organi-

See **INVESTMENTS** page 6

Figure 1: SLFRF planned for project use and total (\$millions)
Large cities and counties



Note: "Tracked" cities and counties are those whose Recovery Plan Performance Report's Project Inventory includes at least one project. 41 cities and 104 counties are tracked.
Source: Analysis of SLFRF Recovery Plan Performance Reports to Treasury

New tracker highlights how counties are using American Rescue Plan dollars

From *INVESTMENTS* page 5

zations.

Many counties are using their funds to strengthen local health departments and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the country, counties support over 900 hospitals and promote public health through 1,943 local health departments; in total, counties invest around \$83 billion in community health and hospitals annually.

The COVID-19 pandemic has strained these health departments and resources.

ARPA has made it possible for counties to strengthen their public health response and address urgent needs of residents throughout the community.

In Pierce County, Wash., Council Chair Derek Young stated, “Since the start of the pandemic, Pierce County has prioritized federal and local funds to support emergent public health needs.” The county has allocated more

than \$10 million in SLFRF allocations toward expenditures such as COVID-19 mobile and mass testing sites, services for COVID-19 isolation and quarantine, and stockpiling and distribution of personal protective equipment.

Many cities are using the funds to augment services and supports for young people negatively impacted by the pandemic.

The city of St. Louis, for example, has set aside \$2.5 million of its nearly \$500 million allocation for a year-round youth jobs program for 300 high-risk, low-income public high school students, building on the success of its STL Youth Jobs summer program.

It committed another \$1 million to its Department of Health to create safe spaces, drop-in centers, and community projects for young people.

Documenting implementation

In the coming weeks and months, we will learn even

more about how large cities and counties are putting their SLFRF dollars to work.

In early January, the Treasury Department published final guidance for the program, which should answer questions some places may still have had about permissible uses of the funds.

The Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker provides a window into a crucial experiment in shared U.S. governance.

On Jan. 31, large cities and counties were required to submit the first of their quarterly Project and Expenditure Reports.

These reports will detail cities’ and counties’ actual uses of the SLFRF dollars, and we will incorporate data from those reports into the Tracker to monitor the size and character of local government spending over time.

Lastly, cities, counties and states are due to receive their

second and final round of SLFRF dollars in May 2022, which should accelerate local decision-making processes around how to deploy the balance of their allocation.

Along the way, we will periodically issue analyses of the latest data in the tracker, taking special note of innovative, evi-

dence-based and well-targeted local uses of ARPA dollars.

We hope that a range of users find valuable information in the tracker.


For example, city or county leaders may benefit from seeing which other local governments have committed dollars to a specific priority (e.g., youth workforce development) in which they are also interested.

National organizations advocating for localities to undertake particular responses

(e.g., premium pay or expanded support for public health) may benefit from tracking their prevalence and impacts over time.

And federal officials will undoubtedly pay attention to the rate at which cities and counties are deploying the dollars, and the mix they pursue between near-term recovery efforts and longer-term rebuilding strategies.

With such a significant and flexible pool of resources available to city and county officials around the country — as well as urgent needs the pandemic has created or exposed — many people will be watching local decisions with great interest.

The Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker provides a window into a crucial, generational experiment in shared U.S. governance. 

View the Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker at <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/arpa-investment-tracker>.



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2022 NACo Second Vice Presidential Election

MEET THE CANDIDATES



GORE

James Gore

County Supervisor
Sonoma County, Calif.

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

My interest in serving as a NACo officer is rooted in my work as an Officer and Immediate Past President of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and leadership positions within NACo and organizations with a broader, national focus, including service as:

- Chair, NACo Programs and Services Committee
- Former Chair, NACo Resilient Counties Advisory Board
- Member, NACo Board, LUCC and RAC
- Appointee, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Advisory Council
- Former Member, Resilient America Roundtable for the National Academies of

Science, Engineering & Medicine

While my experience in these positions provides the foundation to serve the full county membership on a broader platform as NACo 2nd Vice President, the bigger reason guiding my interest to run is rooted in collaboration, service and my belief that the future of NACo, and our contributions to it, must be led through each of our engagement and ground truth, and by bringing urban, rural and suburban counties together.

What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

It has been my honor to serve in a variety of capacities with NACo: Chairing NACo's Program and Services Committee, serving as a member of NACo's Board, LUCC and RAC, and, as an extension of my work with NACo, as an appointee to FEMA's National Advisory Council. When I reflect on the one contribution I feel is most important to-date, one particular service experience comes to mind: I leveraged my experience locally as a County Supervisor in a fire-scarred district to serve as the Chair of NACo's Resilient Counties Advisory Board. While learning from many of you, this role brought me the perspective, drive and determination to bring communities together to confront a myriad of challenges wrought by an increasing number of natural disasters in recent years: drought and wildfires in the West, tornadoes in the Midwest, and hurricanes in the South. In the wake of the 2017 Sonoma County fire siege in my home district located in rural/suburban Northern California, I engaged and empowered residents to lead historic recovery and rebuilding efforts through real-time information sharing and collaborative problem solving. That approach, hand-in-hand with those impacted, helped forge progress and facilitate recovery as efficiently and effectively as possible.

In my interactions with my fellow NACo Board and Committee Members, these experiences proved to be powerful models in an era where natural disasters and unforeseen circumstances play a greater role in disaster recovery and

response. But stepping back and reflecting on this work, it brought something bigger to light: cohesion and collaboration — by bringing leaders together and forging past geopolitical divides to work for the common good and helping the constituents we serve. These models moved beyond resiliency to include work on broadband, homelessness, mental health and housing. This led to my most important contributions to my role statewide as President of my state association.

While serving as President of the California State Association of Counties, we led a cross-sector coalition representing statewide associations, policymakers, community groups, private sector and many other stakeholders to secure an historic \$6 billion investment in broadband infrastructure. The coalition worked for months to support the package, the most significant investment in public broadband infrastructure in the country. This investment benefits rural and urban residents across the state by connecting millions of families and businesses and prioritizing unserved and underserved residents. With tenacious leadership, and a drive for forward progress, we leaned into the issue and worked successfully with stakeholders to reach this remarkable achievement.

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/Executive Committee/Board of Directors should focus? Why?

How to best leverage once-in-a-generation ARPA funds in our communities and enhance future NACo advocacy, and the need for resources and support to inform local investments. It's also imperative to capture successful local investments that drive community recovery. NACo is critically

positioned to do both and to reset the federal landscape to reduce overly regulated and restrictive federal programs such as rental assistance and disaster mitigation in exchange for greater flexibility with proven outcomes.

This pandemic response has brought direct funding to Counties from the Federal Government (ARPA, CARES, etc.). This kind of direct assistance, along with local control and program flexibility, is the support counties need to be prepared and enhance the safety net to care for our communities during these tumultuous times. It is essential that NACo — through its Officers and Membership — lead the way to advocate for additional federal resources and support to care for the most vulnerable residents; promote our communities; and, just as important, establish a path to economic recovery to rebuild from the impacts of the pandemic, fires, disasters and other major challenges we continue to face every single day. Vital funding from the Federal Government like Rental Assistance and Disaster Mitigation, will yield greater results and faster response if we work to streamline and improve existing processes which have proven to be ineffective and inadequate to address today's challenging environment. Too often, federal funding becomes mired in bureaucracy, impeding our ability to effectively meet the needs of our communities. ARPA and CARES are a departure in providing substantially more flexibility, recognizing the uniqueness among the nation's 3,069 counties. This is a huge opportunity to show the federal government the incredible work each of us is doing to rebuild and transform our communities, the value of having flexibility to leverage funding to make a bigger impact.

Second, as the adage goes, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." FEMA validates this in their studies

showing \$6 in value for every \$1 spent on disaster mitigation. As a former Chair of NACo's Resilient Counties Advisory Board and coming from a county that has experienced eight major disasters in four years, I know this to be true. A pre-pandemic NACo report showed that a full one-third of all the counties nationwide had experienced at least one Presidentially Declared Disaster in the past three years. NACo must lead the way with a proactive and preemptive approach to make sure that we establish strong collaboration and partnerships to help galvanize the Federal, State, and Local investments into disaster preparedness and mitigation. I commit to using our experience, our relationships and my role as a member of FEMA's National Advisory Council to relentlessly champion the required funding, technical assistance, regulatory streamlining and other vital resources to address these chaotic times.

Counties are at the forefront of the Mental Health and Substance Abuse crisis. Our responsibility of Health and Human Services, and our role as the safety net provider for our most vulnerable populations, compels us to take action when no one else can or will. These issues exacerbate our stewardship of homeless services, jail populations, and hospitals, among others. I commit to continuing NACo's strong leadership in making sure that the County/Federal (and State when appropriate) nexus and partnership for health and human services programs is strengthened and leveraged to the highest extent possible with preventative and effective wraparound services to better serve residents coping with their illness to live better with the appropriate treatment and care. This includes taking on the complexities of mental health and addiction in our jails, on our streets, and among



MEET THE CANDIDATES




PUCKETT

Greg Puckett

County Commissioner
Mercer County, W.Va.

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

Since becoming a County Commissioner just over seven years ago, I have worked to find new and innovative ways to bring opportunities to my county, region and state. Coming from a small rural area in southern West Virginia, I know how hard it is to put aside the politics and try and accomplish things that have never been done before. As a community advocate for change, I knew that leadership in a public forum would be difficult, but with NACo, I was able to find my voice and develop the relationships needed to help my community and others. And, while I know that local partnerships are essential, relationships beyond an invisible border or boundary can lead to comprehensive change.

Over the years, I've served in varied capacities with the National Association of Counties. Currently, I'm Chair of the Rural Action Caucus, have a seat on NACo's Board of Directors, was one of 10 Commissioners on NACo's National Opioid Taskforce, currently invested on the Economic Mobility Leader-

ship Network, Vice Chair of the Arts and Culture Committee, Vice Chair on Healthy Counties Committee and previous Vice Chair on the Juvenile Justice Subcommittee. So, for me, service isn't something I'm interested in, it's something I'm committed to do.

What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

In addition to being a County Commissioner, I'm also the Executive Director of a statewide non-profit that works to strengthen communities in a variety of ways. This is everything from working with communities to establish community-based coalitions, to advocating for effective policy at all levels. I think that expertise that I've developed over the last 20 years has given me an opportunity to represent others at various levels and achieve a great deal of success. My knowledge in policy streams from my education with the strategic prevention framework developed and supported by the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), of which I proudly serve as a board member. This framework and subsequent environmental change strategies not only guides my work choices but is a guide for creative decision making within my daily life.

My breadth of expertise also extends to effective public health policy where I push for prevention-based outcomes to strengthen our communities.

In fact, over the last year, I've put over 60,000 miles on my car promoting public policy and directing additional attention to the needs of our communities; Advocating for local control of ARPA funds, public health & housing, and economic mobility. I understand where you are in your space because I have been in your back yards, and I see the common issues regardless of scale. You're dealing with substance abuse, you're dealing with blight, you're dealing with aging infrastructure. It just may be at a different scale. Your budget may be bigger, your population may be smaller, your tax base more or less diverse. The issues are the same but so is the commitment to change the narrative.

On a state level, I serve on the Board of Directors and as a Legislative Committee member for the County Commissioners Association of West Virginia (CCAWV). I also represent Mercer County as a member of the West Virginia Association of Counties. Together, we work to establish partnerships with local, state and federal leaders while proactively advocating for county issues including jail bill relief, tax collection reform, and local county authority. We also seek to encourage collaboration and better government for our citizens.

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/Executive Committee/Board of Directors should focus? Why?

Beyond COVID, I think we need to continue striving for collaboration amongst our counties on regional and state-

wide levels, to leverage how we increase upward economic mobility for these large-scale initiatives that may be too big for one county to do alone. In the coming years, knowing how to work collaboratively will give us an opportunity to expand our efforts to bring broadband and water/sewer projects to even the most rural community. Working with our federal partners through the ARP and infrastructure packages, we should challenge ourselves to face the daunting task of dealing with our dilapidated and blight so that we can promote positive, healthy, drug-free communities that are more resilient and opportunistic for other areas like tourism and eco-friendly businesses. And we should understand how to talk beyond opioids and focus on addiction as a whole as the key indicator to strengthen our communities. It's not just about one drug, but rather, a societal byproduct to a mental health crisis.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

Membership retention and expansion is essential to maintaining not only the education and opportunities we currently have for counties but being able to leverage the resources necessary to comprehensively advocate for effective policy and funding at all levels. The leadership and staff at NACo are

nothing short of exemplary and, with their support, the voices of many are much greater than the voice of a few. Being a part of the varied committees gives us all a voice and when we speak, we speak in unison. So, I would highly encourage active participation to a committee that appeals to the individualistic needs we see daily.

Simply, as public officials, we not only have an opportunity to lead, we have an obligation to do so. Collectively, our jobs should be dedicated to being public servants beyond our locally myopic visions. This is why I love NACo. I think that we should continually look for change that is driven by our communities, focused on the strengths of our physical and mental health systems, promoted through advocacy with an established narrative, and achieved in a given environment that is filled with the energy to accomplish the goals at hand.

We are strongest when we CHANGE. And that's why I want to be NACo's next 2nd VP.



MEET THE CANDIDATES




RANDALL

Phyllis Randall

Board of
Supervisors Chair
Loudoun County, Va.

Why are you interested in serving as a NACo officer?

As the COVID-19 pandemic becomes an ongoing endemic, my background makes me uniquely qualified to address the issues we will confront as a nation for many years in the wake of this historic challenge. A mental health/substance dependence crisis, or what I am referring to as the second pandemic, is likely to sweep our nation with immeasurable, long-term health impacts in the coming years. As a mental health/substance abuse therapist for over two decades, I have seen firsthand the lasting harm untreated mental health issues can have on individuals and families. National policy will be significantly shaped by this “invisible” health crisis over the next three to five years, and NACo will need to engage on this issue during that timeframe.

Secondly, as the Chair At-Large of a County with Urban, Suburban and Rural Policy Areas, I have in-depth, practical working knowledge of the diverse needs and challenges facing almost every county in the nation. For example, supply chain disruptions have clarified for us the importance of supporting the farming and agriculture economies in our rural counties. At the same time, as local elected governing bodies have worked to sustain service delivery, enduring, equitable distribution of services

to communities of color and poor communities has become a major issue for our Urban/Suburban counties.

What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to the National Association of Counties to date? What do you consider to have been your most important contribution to your state association of counties?

In just seven years as an elected official, I have become very involved in the National Association of Counties. To date, I would count my most important involvement as being a founding member of the NACo Economic Mobility Leadership Network (EMLN). In fact, the new Sister City relationship between Loudoun County, Virginia and Hometown County, Mississippi, and supported by NACo, has been key and very important as NACo has contended with economic and health equity throughout the nation.

In 2019, NACo asked me to testify before a Congressional Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives regarding how counties should conduct their 2020 census and how the Federal Government could support the efforts of the nation’s Urban, Suburban, Rural and Frontier counties in completing the most accurate census counts possible.

Finally, I have tried to incorporate my passion regarding the importance of treating mental health as we do every other health condition: de-stigmatizing the diseases of mental health and substance abuse. I have participated as an expert panelist or facilitator at numerous VACo and NACo conferences on the subject. In addition, in my state (commonwealth) organizations, I have been actively involved in writing legislation, serving and having leadership roles on various committee assignments.

First Term in Office January 2016 - December 2019

- 2016-2019 National Association of Counties Health and Human Services, member
- Loudoun County joins NACo Heath County initiative
- Loudoun County joins NACo Stepping Up initiative
- Loudoun County joins NACo Women in Government
- Loudoun County joins NACo Women in Leadership
- 2018 Founding member NACo Economic Mobility Leadership Network
- 2016 Virginia Association of Counties Board of Directors
- 2016 Virginia Association of Counties Health and Human Services Committee, member
- 2017 Virginia Association of Counties Health and Human Services Committee, member
- 2019 Virginia Association of Counties Health and Human Services Committee, Vice Chair

Second Term in Office January 2020 - Present

- 2020 Virginia Association of Counties Board of Directors
- 2020 Virginia Association of Counties Health and Human Services Committee, Chair
- 2021 National Association of Counties Healthy Counties Committee, Chair
- 2021 Behavioral Health Subcommittee of the National Association of Counties Health Steering Committee, Chair
- 2021 National Association of Counties Health Steering Committee, member
- NACo appointee to the Bipartisan Policy Center Public Health Forward Task Force

What do you consider to be the two or three most important challenges facing NACo in the near future on which the Officers/Executive Committee/Board of Directors should focus? Why?

A. Counties are being inundated with unfunded mandates. Although I agree with some of these — increased funding for education, for example — federal and state governments need to ensure they can fully fund their own priorities without requiring counties

to “match” federal/state program mandates. Many counties, especially smaller or rural counties with limited budgets, have neither the population nor the inclination to incur the added expenses of such programs and often simply cannot afford these federal/state budget mandates.

B. Across the nation, many state legislatures are introducing legislation to usurp power from local governing bodies. These initiatives include critical curtailments in areas such as taxing authority, zoning/land use issues, election management and the voting process. Many state legislatures are now aggressively attempting to legislate items that have historically been the purview of local governments. I believe local elected bodies, comprising elected officials closest to those they represent, should retain control of local issues without interference from state bodies.

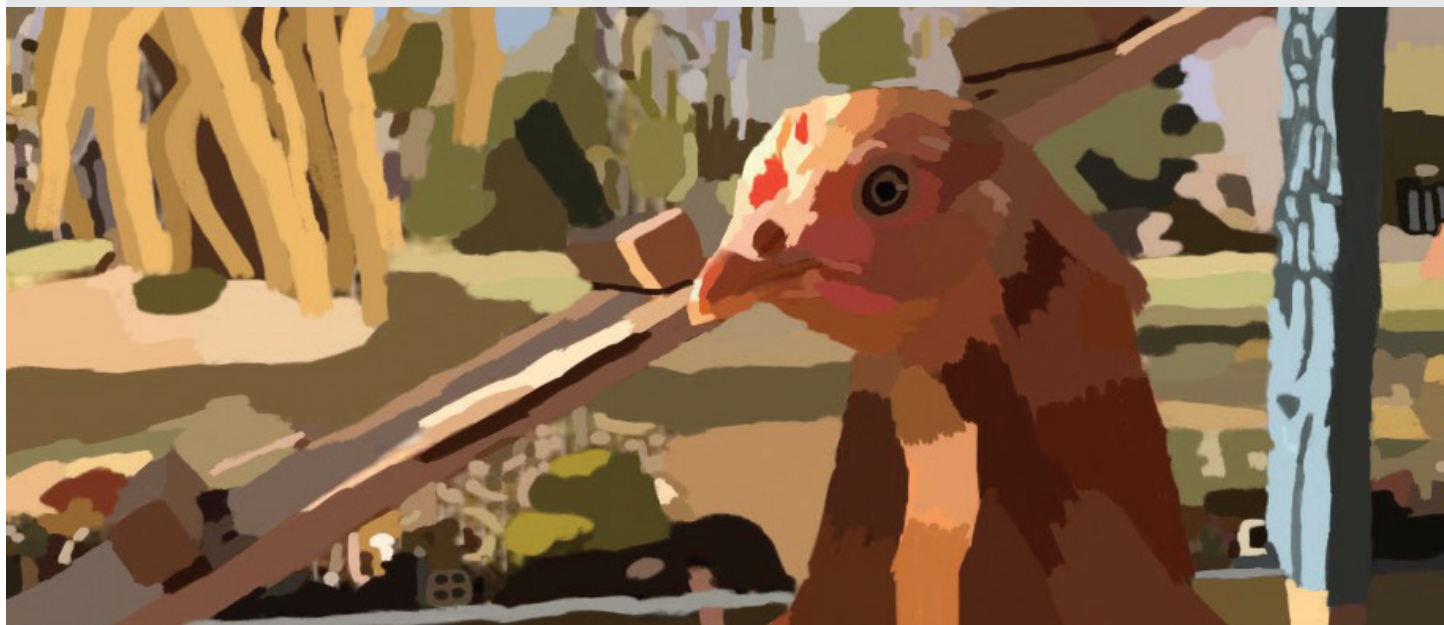
C. Over the past two years, local elected officials have been required to not only perform our many “regular duties,” but also to manage a 100-year pandemic and all its related community trauma. I never imagined a time when I would know the running count of my constituents who were hospitalized or died as a result of COVID-19. This, of course, touches on another aspect of our growing mental health crisis. Just as we have cared for our constituents, we must increasingly recognize the mental health toll these past two years have exacted on our local elected officials. Local elected officials cannot care for our constituents if we do not have the appropriate coping mechanisms, tools and resources to respond to our own mental health needs.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

Although Loudoun County has always been a member of NACo, our elected officials have largely not attended NACo conferences or been significantly involved in NACo activities. Shortly after taking office, I realized how beneficial NACo and the Virginia Association of Counties are in accomplishing many of our collective goals. NACo not only offers networking opportunities and support from other local elected officials, it provides invaluable materials, information and resources to foster better governance. I believe if county staff and elected officials more fully understood the obvious benefits of NACo and their state associations, they would be much more likely not only to become financial members, but also actively engaged participants in all NACo programs. Some ideas to increase membership are:

- Offer a one-time membership discount to smaller counties that are not members.
- Hold a NACo cohort meeting in an underrepresented area.
- Offer to send a NACo representative or expert to an inactive county for consultations with the local elected bodies.
- Have NACo officers and board members dedicate themselves to reach out and visit inactive/non-member counties.

Wisconsin county student depicts 'e-chicken' in winning artwork



Outagamie County, Wisc. student Ella Stahmann brought to life a chicken using a digital computer program. The image of the beloved farm animal raised in her county was one of the winning artworks in NACo's 2021 Student Art Competition.

Brought to life through earth tones and contrast, Ella described why the chicken symbolizes her county and some of its qualities.

"I love my county because half of Outagamie County is farm/country area, and the other half is cities/neighbor-

hoods. I prefer farms but I like both. Chickens can be kept in both areas and more neighborhoods are allowing chickens. Chickens can be found in farms and city neighborhoods and this is why I chose a chicken to represent Outagamie County in my art."

The art competition is sponsored by Americans for the Arts, the nation's leading non-profit arts organization, which serves, advances, and leads a network of organizations and individuals who cultivate, promote, sustain, and support the arts in America.

They have partnered with NACo for almost 25 years to educate and inform county elected leaders about the importance and value of the arts to their community, both culturally and economically.

If you would like to give students in your county the chance to enter the 2022 competition, get all the details here: naco.org/art. Winning artwork will be featured in a 2023 calendar. Winning artwork from the 2021 competition is featured in a 2022 NACo calendar and in County News. **CN**

Winning artwork is featured in the 2022 NACo calendar and in County News.



SEND US YOUR MASTERPIECE.

2022 "I Love My County Because..." Art Competition now accepting entries.

Our annual NACo Student Art Competition in conjunction with National County Government Month (April) is now open. Students in grades 1-12 are encouraged to enter the competition with the theme "I Love My County Because..."

For more information, visit: naco.org/art

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Compromise for success

From LESSONS page 4

Palm Beach County, Fla. Commissioner Melissa McKinlay saw Washington’s position both as a reluctant government servant and a consensus-builder and could relate that to her own county experience.

“It’s not always making it about political affiliation, it’s about hammering out a compromise,” she said, alluding to an example she experienced — leading an effort to secure more COVID-19 vaccines for the seasonal farm worker population in her district.

“There was hesitancy to elevate them to being essential workers, but they were living in close-quarter, dormitory-style housing,” she said. “Sooner or later, they’d leave to go all over

the country, and I didn’t want them to bring the virus wherever they went.”

She pursued assistance from four of the five biggest agriculture-producing counties, all in California, and they made their case to the federal government, which then worked with the state to get a mobile vaccination clinic to the seasonal workers.

McKinlay also looked at Washington’s final days in office with an eye toward her own term limits, which will mean the end of her time as a Palm Beach County commissioner at the end of 2022.

“I’m hoping my exit can be as graceful as his was,” she said. “You realize there are ways to serve the public besides holding elective office.” **CN**

NACo second VP candidate profile

From GORE page 7

our youth. We must continue to learn from each other about what works and advocate for each community to have the resources, flexibility, and authority to tackle these challenges in a way to fits their values and priorities.

What measures would you recommend to increase and retain NACo membership and to encourage broad participation in NACo by elected officials and employees of NACo member counties? What specific role would you be willing to assume to help build and sustain membership in NACo?

NACo’s greatest strength is its members. Counties represent exactly the same communities as the President and Congress. That’s powerful and the greater the county engagement in NACo, the stronger NACo’s voice will be. Increasing and retaining NACo membership could be accomplished through two efforts: communicating the advocacy/resources/network of NACo to those not active; and 1:1 direct contact of county leaders. Communicating the advocacy/resources/network of NACo throughout the country by using social media, celebrating local innovation, etc.

I’m a strong believer of direct communication and sustained follow up. NACo is highly effective in the services it provides to

member counties. To increase and retain membership, I would work with NACo’s Leadership and the Membership Standing Committee to identify a list of priority counties and engage with those county leaders directly. Despite my responsibilities at home, if elected as NACo 2nd Vice President, I’ll bring the same energy, enthusiasm and commitment to getting things done as I do for my county as a member of the Board of Supervisors.

..... **ON THE MOVE**

NACo OFFICERS



- President **Larry Johnson** (left) pauses for a photo with members of the Idaho Association of Counties’ at their Mid-winter Legislative Conference in Ada County.

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NACo STAFF

- **Brayden Cohen** has joined NACo as a legislative assistant. He previously interned at NACo, and also has work experience from the Department of Health and Sanitation in Kisumu County, Kenya and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Department. He earned a master’s degree in Public Health and a bachelor’s degree in Public Policy, both from George Washington University.



Cohen

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GET TO KNOW...

Warren County, N.J.

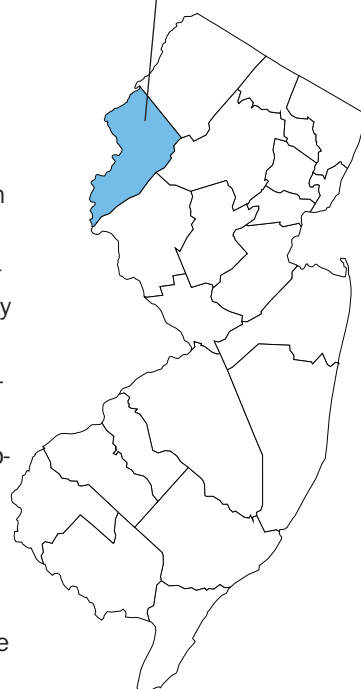
Welcome to Warren County, N.J.

Nestled in the northwest corner of New Jersey, Warren County was formed Nov. 20, 1824 from a portion of nearby Sussex County. The county borders Pennsylvania on its western edge and is separated by the Delaware River.

The county seat was established in 1825 as the town of Belvidere, which means "beautiful to see" in Italian. The mostly rural community focused mainly on agriculture until the early 1900s.

The county took its name from Revolutionary War hero Dr. Joseph Warren who died in the battle of Bunker Hill.

Some fun facts about the county: In the 1880s, it became the largest producer of musical organs in the United States. **The actor who played "Superman" in the**



original 1940s films, Kirk Alyn, was born in Warren County. The county's largest employers include Warren Hospital, Mars North America and Albeas Americas.

"Get to Know" features new NACo member counties.

**It's a bird!
It's a plane.
It's Kirk Alyn!**



UNTOLD STORIES

Join NACo's **Untold Stories** campaign to highlight the human impact of county services

Visit NACo.org/UntoldStories to submit your story and access resources to engage your local audience, including a letter to the editor template, a media relations guide, social media templates and more.

BRIGHT IDEAS | BROWARD COUNTY, Fla.

Rider's Choice Provides Better Paratransit Services for Less

PROBLEM: Disabled residents needed a more flexible transit service to accommodate their unscheduled needs.

SOLUTION: Create a payment program allowing residents to flexibly handle their transit needs while easing the burden on the overall paratransit network

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Broward County, Fla. has a robust fleet of paratransit vehicles accommodating their disabled residents, carrying out thousands of trips a day. But there is something the system cannot handle: Last-minute changes to their schedules. To compensate, the county introduced the Rider's Choice program, giving participants the option to use whatever driving service they prefer for short trips within the county.

Introduced as a pilot program in 2018 under supervision by Broward County Transportation Director Paul Strobis, Jr., the Rider's Choice program allows for flexibility for disabled people.

"Paratransit is a lifeline safety-net program, because a lot of my customers can't transport themselves or afford private transportation," Strobis said. "One of the limitations [to paratransit] that has always been in place is that everything must be done in advance... There's a lot of restrictions to its usage in someone's daily life."

The Rider's Choice program aims to meet three criteria: Enhance the mobility of customers, provide a lower-cost alternative to paratransit and create a new customer base for the local taxi services.

To that end, the county will pay for up to two trips a day through a taxi or driving service instead of having riders preschedule paratransit. The



Broward County Transit Program TOPS in action, providing paratransit support for 60,000 trips a month in and around large Florida cities like Fort Lauderdale.

county partnered with a local company called Cab Connect to create a closed-loop taxi payment system through a special payment card that tracks ride parameters to ensure proper usage.

The paratransit network provides door-to-door service

the regular paratransit network cannot accommodate at a far lower price if they are capable enough to not need additional medical assistance. On average, the cost per trip in Rider's Choice amounts to \$14 a ride while the paratransit trips run closer to \$30.

'Paratransit is a lifeline safety-net program...'

— Paul Strobis

with trained personnel assisting the disabled from the entrance of their homes to the entrance of their destinations. The vehicles are equipped to handle wheelchairs and the drivers are trained to assist. Rides are scheduled at least a day in advance so that the computer system can schedule vehicles, combine trips for efficiency and ensure all participants have their needs met. The Riders Choice "regular" program does not use trained personnel.

The county will pay for two trips a day, each no more than \$18 a trip, and the participants cannot leave the county. The program grants riders the flexibility to travel for shopping and other immediate needs

Rider's Choice programs have appeared across the country. Advocates for transportation for persons with disabilities have implemented similar systems tailored to the needs of each locale. Each program is somewhat different — sometimes contracting directly with a service provider, creating vouchers, setting no hard limits on trip numbers or allowing users to use up to the full voucher amount for the day or week.

Contracting with Cab Connect allows the county to ensure the funds are being spent in compliance with the rules of the program and allows the county to pay one entity and let Cab Connect handles payments to different services.

With the data collected from Cab Connect and the payment cards, Strobis was able to show that the program could provide more flexibility and more trips at the same cost or lower, ensuring the longevity of the program. "As stewards of public money, we wanted it [Riders Choice] to sustain itself," he said.

By 2019, the program was in full swing and averaged around 3,500 trips a month; the paratransit program now handles around 60,000 trips a month. Strobis said the cost of the program is essentially paid for by the cost savings of shifting users to Riders Choice. When the pandemic hit in 2020, Strobis said the program lost about half of its riders and has steadily climbed back to 75 percent ridership, roughly 3,000 trips a month. The pilot program has been so successful, with around 700 enrolled, that the Broward County Commissioners last year approved transitioning from a three-year pilot to a full-time program. **CN**

The Broward County Rider's Choice program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the Transportation category.



PINAL COUNTY, Ariz.

The Pinal County, Ariz. seal depicts the tools of the county's primary industries as well as the document that created the county.

The crossed pick and shovel symbolize the lucrative mining industry in the county, copper, lead, gold and silver being the primary focus.

The copper mines inspired the color of the seal.



The shovel is believed to symbolize the agricultural industries of the county, including cattle, citrus, and cotton, according to Art Carlton, a public works employee who has worked for the county for more than three decades.

The scroll depicts the document which carved Pinal County out of the nearby Maricopa and Pima counties. The county took its name from the Pinal mountains of nearby Gila County.

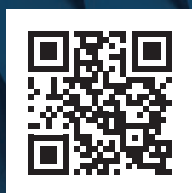
Behind the scroll, the year 1875 marks the date the county was formed.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Dakota Hendricks at dhendricks@naco.org.

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Automating Data and Analytics to Improve Public Health in LA County

Back in 2018, an article in Health Management Magazine discussed the need to elevate the role of clinical laboratories in healthcare delivery, patient health, and the management of public health priorities. The article points out that, at the time, contemporary research indicated a subordinate role for laboratories, with pathology services generally treated as a low value commodity.

The argument of the authors was that with the ever-increasing reliance on data to improve service delivery, patient outcomes, and population health management, laboratories should play a transformational role in the progress of value-based healthcare. The article put forward a vision of “Lab 2.0,” where laboratory medicine plays an integral role in value-based healthcare by “combining longitudinal patient results with population data and the latest medical understanding to connect the clinical dots.”

Connecting the Dots with Data

Fast forward to 2021 where the global SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic put “Lab 2.0” into breakneck motion by placing a greater dependency on laboratories to provide data to help manage population health. Public health organizations — from the largest state to the smallest communities — found themselves relying on a network of laboratories to process and provide results from COVID-19 testing.

The largest county in the United States, Los Angeles County is home to more than 10 million people and host to millions of visitors each year. When the true scope of the pandemic came to light, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC

DPH) knew the importance of laboratory testing as a mechanism to track the progress of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and took action to make the collection of results more efficient.

1.6 Million Cells of Data ... and Counting

As of October 5, 2021, over 31.5 million positive and negative SARS-CoV-2 test results have been reported to LAC DPH via the electronic lab reporting (ELR) system. In addition, more than 900,000 test results have been reported in flat files from laboratories not yet reporting via ELR. At the height of the pandemic, an average of 5,400 and up to 35,000 flat file test results per day were being reported to LAC DPH.

In theory, a specific reporting structure should help address data quality issues, but

in practice, with laboratories processing hundreds or thousands of results every day and the tedium of manual data management of flat file lab results, even with the best intentions, data quality issues are going to occur.

Consider this — with an average of 5,400 daily file test results reported to LAC DPH, even a 5% daily error rate would result in 270 “out of compliance” reported results every day. Assuming it would take 10 minutes for each “out of compliance” result to be followed up on and rectified, the LAC DPH would have had to expend 45 work hours — greater than 5 FTEs per day.

With flat file data coming in from more than 50 different laboratories, the LAC DPH understood that standardization of the information provided by these individual laboratories would be critical. The team provided each lab-

oratory with specific data reporting requirements for flat files, including how 32 fields of data should be laid out and how the information in each cell should be formatted.

Improving the Course of Public Health with Analytic Automation

With a set format for each laboratory established, an Alteryx workflow was built to examine the structure of each report and determine if the columns were in the right order. More than that, the workflow could examine each individual cell to make sure the required information was present and in the right format. For laboratory reports that were verified, the results were included in additional analyses to track the spread of

the virus.

In this same process, reports that were out of compliance — either because of formatting issues and/or missing/incomplete data — were pulled and inconsistencies/errors identified.

Now, instead of the LAC DPH having to contact the specific laboratory with the reporting problems, an analytic workflow automated the notification process with an auto-generated email that was sent to the laboratory with detailed information. This automated notification sped up the process by which the laboratory could rectify the reporting issue and resubmit the information.

In addition to the time and resources saved, the LAC DPH sped up time to insight, which allowed the DPH to monitor percent positivity, pinpoint areas of concern, and better inform policy decisions.





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QUESTIONS?

Contact awards@naco.org

PROFILES IN SERVICE

VARLIN HIGBEE

NACo Board Member
County Commissioner
Lincoln County, Nev.

Number of years active in NACo: Four

Years in public service: 48

Occupation: I have been in public service 48 years; owned and operated a livestock operation along with working full time for the Nevada State Department of Transportation. I retired from NDOT in 2015 after completing 30 years of service. Served on WIR Public Lands and Natural Resources Committee and as a member of Western Region and Rural Action Caucus. In 2023, I will serve as board chair of the Nevada Association of Counties and chair of the Natural Resource Committee in Nevada.

Education: Attended college at Utah Provo Orem Technical College in the fall of 1978. Graduated in spring of 1980 on a work release and placement



Higbee

program in a mine.
The hardest thing that I have ever done: Was pay off the debt that I incurred during the 80s under Jimmy Carter. That was a hard lesson learned about inflation and the rise of interest rates. (Word of advice, never sign a floating interest loan!)

Three people I would invite for dinner: Ronald Reagan, Donald Trump and my great-great grandfather Joseph Henry Sharp, who settled us in Nevada in 1859.

My dream and greatest success: Would be to help play a part in restoring federalism back to the states, so that every county was represented equally in its Senate, ending the abuse

that rural counties have had to endure at the hands of the urban counties or aristocracy by the masses. Every county should have representation in state government regardless of population. As every state is represented in Congress by two senators regardless of the population in each state.

You would be surprised to learn: That I built my own home including the basement.

The most adventurous thing I have ever done: Was the stupidest thing I ever did. My nephew and I rode off into a blizzard in northern Nevada looking for cattle that were stuck near the Marries River. When the river froze over, the cows would not cross the ice to get out of the mountains for the winter. We spent all day lost and part of the night before the clouds lifted and I could see the lights of the ranch about 10 miles away.

My favorite way to relax is: A silent ride across the desert, with no sign of man for at least 50 miles.

I am most proud of: My family and my heritage. They left me with strong ties to the land and a fierce commitment to freedom, liberty and its defense.

Every morning I read: From the scriptures, it sets the tone for the day and my mind on the real things that matter.

My favorite meal: Steak and potatoes

My pet peeve is: Close-minded people that refuse to try to see other points of view and criticize all points of view that differs from their own.

My motto is: If it is not broken, don't try to fix it.

The last book I read was: "Liberty and Tyranny" by Mark Levin.

My favorite movie is: "Tombstone," with Val Kilmer.

My favorite music is: Soft rock and country.

My favorite president is: Ronald Reagan.

My county is a NACo member because: When counties communicate and speak as one, it is a powerful voice and body to reckon with, on both state and federal levels.

WORD SEARCH

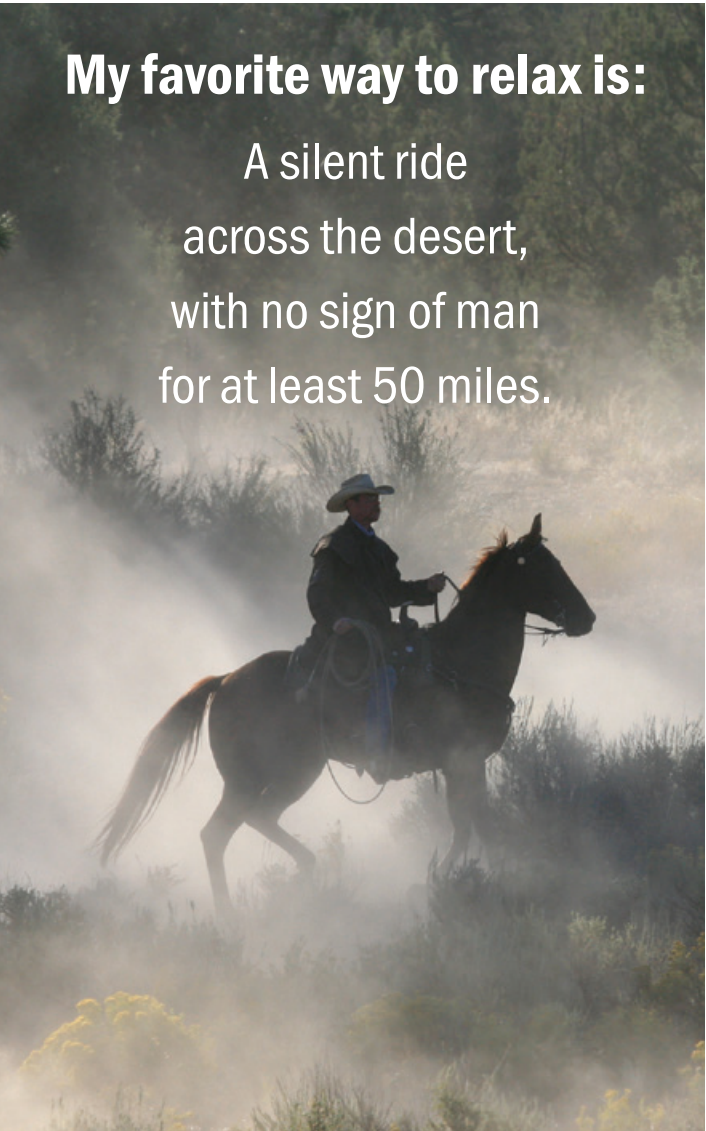
KANAWHA COUNTY, W. Va. Created by: Dakota Hendricks

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

- APPALACHIA:** The region features this lush mountain range.
- CARRIAGE:** The Sunrise Carriage Trail is a popular hiking trail near Charleston.
- CHARLESTON:** The county seat was founded in 1794, originally as "Charlestown."
- CLAY:** The Clay Center for the Arts is a popular attraction in the county.
- FOREST:** Kanawha State Forest is a popular outdoor recreation destination in the county.
- FOUNDED:** The county was founded Oct. 5, 1789.
- KANAWHA:** The name of the river running through the county and the Native American word for "white rocks."
- LAPETUS:** The lapetus ocean lies deep beneath the Appalachian Mountains.
- LLLOYD:** Basketball Hall of Famer Earl Lloyd played for West Virginia University before becoming the first African American to play in the NBA.
- MALDEN:** Malden was once the name of one of the magisterial districts of the county.
- MINING:** Mining is a prominent industry in the region.
- MUSEUM:** The West Virginia State Museum is located in the county.
- POPULATION:** The county's population is more than 180,000.
- SALT:** Kanawha once had a thriving salt industry.
- STAATS:** The Staats Mill covered bridge is a historic landmark in the county.



Miami-Dade County, Fla. Commissioner Eileen Higgins testifies Feb. 9 before the bipartisan U.S. House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth on Capitol Hill on the role of infrastructure in connecting residents with economic prosperity. Higgins is a vice chair of NACo's Transportation Committee.



My favorite way to relax is:
A silent ride
across the desert,
with no sign of man
for at least 50 miles.

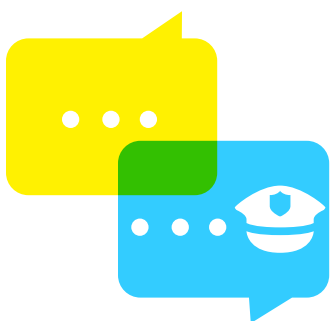
NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



Members of the San Diego MEHKO Coalition rally with Supervisor Joel Anderson on the weekend before the board authorized the home kitchens. Photo courtesy of the San Diego MEHKO Coalition

CALIFORNIA

SAN DIEGO COUNTY has approved a new ordinance called the “New Home Kitchen” program that will allow residents to operate “mini restaurants” from their homes. KSWB-TV/FOX5 reported that home kitchens are held to food safety standards, must have adequate storage as well as have ongoing inspections. County supervisors introduced the proposal in 2018, saying the program could allow for greater economic support for families. Supervisors say the approved ordinance could benefit residents hardest hit by the pandemic.



FLORIDA

• **CLAY COUNTY** has launched a new app allowing **real-time communication** with the police. The app allows citizens to contact police to report a crime through text messages with a capability to upload photo and video according to WJXT-TV. The 911 dispatchers can go live with those reporting a crime, can receive GPS coordinates and more. Users have the capability to report anonymously as well.

• To better educate their residents, **JACKSON COUNTY** will start a new program called the **Jackson County Citizens’ Academy**. WJHG-TV reports

the county will launch the first course with 12 residents involved. The program aims to teach the participants how counties operate by breaking down the role of various departments and taking them on tours of county facilities.

IOWA

LINN COUNTY recently approved a major new **solar plant**

project. KCRG-TV reports the Coggon Solar Plant will convert 640 acres of farmland to a solar farm for 35 years, then the property will be returned to farmland. The project is estimated to power 18,000 homes.

MARYLAND

• **BALTIMORE COUNTY** has formed a collaborative effort to make a **more diverse police force** reflective of the community they serve. The Community Policing Partnership brings together several policing institutions, local school districts and the county executive office to create pathways for careers in public safety. “The Community Policing Partnership will coordinate efforts across county government to strategically develop pathways for modern public safety careers, continue strengthening the diversity of our workforce and ensure Baltimore County builds a stronger future together,” said County Executive Johnny Olszewski, according to WMAR-TV.

• To compensate for staff shortages, **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** Assistant Chief Administration Officer Earl Stoddard asked for the National Guard to supplement their **school bus drivers**. CBS News reported that more than 50 bus routes in the county have been affected by the shortage. The request is not unheard of. Massachusetts started the 2021 school year with assistance from the National Guard driving school buses. In 2022, the omicron variant surge has caused staffing shortages in every industry, impacting schools and businesses across the country.



MICHIGAN

MACOMB COUNTY has launched a **conviction integrity unit**. WJBK-TV reported recently that the prosecutor’s office will champion the effort to protect innocent residents caught up by the justice system. The county has seen 168 individuals exonerated; however, they estimate about 1,600 are innocent and in need of assistance.

MISSOURI

JEFFERSON COUNTY is tackling the critical shortage of

personnel in emergency management by **lowering the age requirement** to work as a dispatcher. The county 911 center has lowered their requirements to high school graduates age 18 and older in the hopes that they can ease the burden on current dispatchers. KMOV-TV reports the county has had a shortage predating the pandemic; however, the strain has increased with lengthy shifts. The call center handles an average of 300 calls per day, dispatching calls to more than 17 fire departments.

FLORIDA

• A Florida teen has inspired **WALTON COUNTY** to take action to **clean up several beaches**. *Northwest Florida Daily News* reports the county is pleased with a pilot program that encourages beachgoers to clean up Grayton Beach, providing baskets for visitors who can fill them up and dispose of any debris in trash cans provided. The program’s success at one beach encouraged the county commissioners to ramp up the project, attempting to implement the idea at all beaches in the county before spring break.

Walton County teen Hannah Smith, a junior at South Walton High School, shows off “beach cleaning baskets” — part of a pilot program the county hopes to expand. Photo courtesy of Walton County





VIRGINIA

Can't sleep and need a new book in the middle of the night? The **FRANKLIN COUNTY** Public Library has installed a **self-service 24-hour library kiosk**. The kiosk contains 235 books, audiobooks and DVDs that the public can browse and borrow. A county library card is required to borrow the items, and the machine is Wi-Fi-enabled. Users can also dispense a free kit containing a pair of gloves, face mask and hand-sanitizing wipe. The Wi-Fi service allows users to download e-books and audiobooks to their smartphones or tablets, check their library accounts and access thousands of fiction and nonfiction titles from a digital materials collection. The kiosk is equipped with security cameras and illuminated at night. Photo by Bill Mitchell

MONTANA

GALLATIN COUNTY is using its American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding to **invest in local nonprofits**. According to KECI-TV, the county is setting aside \$500,000 for nonprofits affected by the pandemic. The local nonprofit One Valley Community Foundation will assist the county in distributing funds to the organizations in need. The county has already used \$300,000 to bolster the United Way program. Counties are using ARP dollars to invest in nonprofits, with the goal of building community partners that will outlast the funding.

NEW YORK

- Being on probation will no longer impede earning a **high school equivalency diploma** in **ALBANY COUNTY**. The new program is a partnership among the County Probation Department, Capital Region Boards of Cooperative Educational Services, Capital District Educational Opportunity Center and the State University of New York. Participants will be committed from three months to a year to the program, in

which they will be required to put in between 10-12 hours a week in class time.

- Aiming to combat a rising problem, **NASSAU COUNTY** has created an **antisemitism task force**. The task force will include the county executive or his designee, six legislators and five community leaders picked by the legislators based on their expertise and background in opposing antisemitism, Patch reported. The task force will gather facts about the origins and extent of antisemitism in Nassau County, including through meetings, and issue a report with recommendations for legislative action.

NORTH CAROLINA

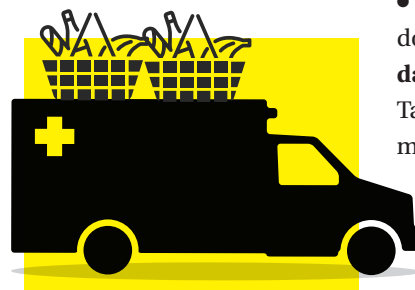
A new **MECKLENBURG COUNTY** program, dubbed "**Participatory Budgeting**" sets aside funds for residents to have direct participation in deciding how it's spent. Six volunteer groups, one for each county district, will decide what projects they will fund with \$500,000. Their proposals will be evaluated by county staff. Each project can cost up to \$125,000.

OHIO

The **CUYAHOGA COUNTY** Office of Early Childhood is starting a pilot program for **families with children** to socialize and receive free services based on their needs and interests. The Family Space program will create neighborhood hubs where parents can bring their children, but the focus will be on connecting parents. It is being piloted in library branches and parents will form advisory committees at each of the locations, *The Plain Dealer* reported. The committees prioritize needed services, including literacy services, health care or job training.

PENNSYLVANIA

CUMBERLAND COUNTY's new First Responder Assistance Network will provide occupation-specific **professional counseling** and therapy to all police officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians and dispatch center workers. It's an evolution of the volunteer-based Critical Incident Stress Management Team begun in 2018. Counselors have been specifically educated on the ins and out of the emergency services practices. PennLive reported that the First Responders Assistance Program provides support that could touch on any variety of problems, including stress, depression, anxiety, grief, eating disorders, gambling and substance use, and includes crisis intervention and group debriefings for departments and clear paths to in-patient mental health or substance use treatment.



TEXAS

The **BROWN COUNTY** Office of Emergency Management will not only show up in an emergency but lend some help afterward. A refurbished ambulance will come stocked with toys, blankets, emergency food and other tangible **resources for the victims of disasters**, all supplied by local church and citizen donations. The Emergency Chaplain's Ministry started by County Judge Paul Lilly and the Office of Emergency

Management will respond to fires, floods and tornadoes and when requested by local fire and law enforcement agencies KTAB-TV reported.

WASHINGTON

- KING COUNTY** is giving people experiencing homelessness **temporary paying jobs** helping clean parks and roadways. The jobs and housing program will help those workers get assistance from case managers who can guide them through the process of acquiring supportive and affordable housing. The program can support up to 400 people and has already hired enough people to form two clean-up crews, which started work this month. The program is being funded by federal COVID-19 relief funds as well as the county's general fund. In May, the county council approved \$38 million for the program.

- Although **PIERCE COUNTY** does not have a **vaccine mandate** to enter businesses, the Tacoma-Pierce Health Department has launched a program — dubbed "BRAVO" — to recognize those 12 and older who have voluntarily enacted their own requirements.

Local businesses request customers provide proof of vaccination before they are allowed entry. In return, participating businesses receive guidance, support and free promotion from the health department.

News From Across the Nation is assembled by Charlie Ban and Dakota Hendricks. Does your county have news we should see? Contact us at cban@naco.org and dhendricks@naco.org.



UTAH

Residents will be able to take care of **SUMMIT COUNTY** feral and stray "**community cats**" in their neighborhoods. The program allows free-roaming unowned cats that live outdoors if they have sponsors who get them sterilized, vaccinated against rabies and "ear-tipped." The program requires caregivers, who are not considered the animals' owner, to pay a permit fee of \$50 to have a cat colony. Anyone who has a history of animal abuse or neglect is prohibited from being a community cat sponsor or caregiver, the *Park Record* reported.



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