



American Rescue Plan marks anniversary

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

In the year since Congress passed and President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), counties have taken a hard look at how its \$65.1 billion in direct funding can change their fortunes as they move past the COVID-19 pandemic.

From public health investments, wastewater upgrades, job training services, infrastructure improvements, small businesses and nonprofit support, covering revenue losses and more, counties are making detailed plans for the funding, but pulling back and looking at the overall impact of the legislation needs only two words.

"Hugely significant," said Deb Schorr, a Lancaster County, Neb. commissioner. "We received \$62 million, and our annual budget is \$200 million, so that gives you an idea what this means to us."

"For a lot of projects, we had dreams, but the funding just wasn't there."

Among other needs, Lancaster County has used ARPA funding to address a lack of community support for youth

See ARPA page 2



The Granville County, N.C. courthouse is featured in this artwork by student Elizabeth Gibson. Entries are now being accepted for the 2022 NACo Student Art Competition. Visit naco.org/art for more information.

Cover of NACo calendar features winning artwork by Granville County, N.C. student

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor

Elizabeth Gibson, a student at Creedmoor Elementary School in Granville County, N.C., saw her colorful depiction of her county's historic courthouse featured on the cover of the 2022 NACo calendar. Built in 1838, the brick Greek Revival-style court-

house includes a cupola on top of a domed room.

Elizabeth and more than 150 students across the country entered their artwork last year in NACo's inaugural Student Art Competition. NACo started

the contest to help young people learn more about the functions of county government.

"When students see an ambulance or sheriff's department car or they encounter someone from the school —

all of those are part of county services," said Granville County Commissioner Russ May, whose district includes Elizabeth's elementary school.

See STUDENTS page 3

County sees hope in behavioral health center

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

When the first attempt at a behavioral health funding levy failed in Larimer County, Colo., Jody Shadduck-McNally took it personally. Then, she made it personal.

Her years of involvement as a volunteer, hoping to improve

the county's behavioral service offerings, were fueled by the suicide of someone close to her after years of mental health struggles.

"This is something that has been important to me since 2010," she said. "We've always been advocating for a better system than just sending people into mental health crisis

and behavioral health crisis to the ER, except for those to have a medical emergency.

"In 2016, the voters didn't support those initiatives, but we didn't take no for an answer."

Shadduck-McNally spent the next three years lobbying influential community groups

See CENTER page 3

Counties making good use of funding one year after passage of ARPA

From ARPA page 1

in crisis.

“Right now, we don’t have a place where kids can go that isn’t inpatient treatment,” Schorr said. “We allocated a very large portion from our human services pot to establish a youth crisis center. Now with this funding available, we’re able to take that step forward to address what we have known was a need.”

Just shy of ARPA’s March 11 anniversary, NACo Past President Gary Moore of Boone County, Ky., testified March 1 before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform on the impacts of the American Rescue Plan’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund and counties’ commitment to the integrity of that funding.

“As the pressing challenges and needs continue to outstrip

depleted resources of many counties during this unprecedented national emergency, this law recognizes counties’ vast responsibility to care for our most vulnerable residents, sick, unemployed, elderly and our youth,” Moore said. “Counties are steadfastly committed at the local level to good financial stewardship, investing these recovery funds quickly and effectively to support the health and safety of our residents and strengthen the economy. I want to add we were also supportive of guardrails for these funds. Since the enactment, our American counties have been working hard to develop recovery fund implementation plans that will spur and equitable economic coverage across our nation.”

In Cherokee County, Ga., ARPA has funded \$3.2 million for the District Attorney’s Office to hire staff to clear the

backlog of cases that grew when the pandemic forced the court system to shut down or limit operations. Additionally, a \$1 million allocation to Be Pro Be Proud built a mobile workforce unit to train students and citizens and \$2 million in grants and loans supported small businesses.

“The American Rescue Plan Act has allowed Cherokee County the opportunity to fund projects and programs that would not have been feasible this quickly,” said Communications Director Erika Neldner.

“So far, the county has allocated \$11 million to specific projects listed above, as well as a housing needs study, a homeless shelter study, a community center, leased space for additional courts staff, premium pay to Cherokee Fire and Emergency Services squads, probate court premium pay, broadband expansion to the county’s main administration building and payments to unemployment.”

In Lancaster County, Neb., the county worked with the city of Lincoln, where 90 percent of county residents live, to combine more than \$100 million in ARPA funding and have each government focus their efforts on their strengths — the city’s workforce development efforts and the county’s human services department.

“We have a wide variety of nonprofits in our community that were struggling,” Schorr said.

“They were seeing an increase in need for services with decreased revenue, their fundraisers were cancelled. We’ve tried to help fund different organizations in the human services field, everything from food insecurity to mental health to domestic violence. We set up an advisory council of people in the community, private foundation leaders, the Chamber of Commerce, the Community Foundation, the United Way. We tried to get a finger on the pulse of what was needed.”

The county has also started work on a multicultural center that will play host to several community organizations and provide space and shared professional and financial services that are crucial to their operations but had been out of reach given the fledgling finances of groups of their size.

“We know that the pandemic really hit minority populations extremely hard, so this was a way we can take that funding and help boost them up and be prepared for whatever the next challenges are.”

Moore told the Oversight Committee that the flexibility allowed by ARPA has been crucial to ensuring an even economic recovery.

“It has been wonderful gap funding for those needs in our communities that otherwise would not have been funded,” he said. “In my example, once again getting one gig of speed to every home in [Boone County] would not be happening without these funds — we found during the pandemic that connectivity was so critical. So, I do believe that it is creating jobs. It’s creating economic investment, it’s supplying a need that would not have been addressed without the funds.”

Mike Leachman, vice president for state fiscal policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, emphasized the work ARPA allowed in retaining state and local government jobs and compared the nation’s economic outlook after COVID-19 to the Great Recession, when states and localities cut 450,000 jobs, most of which have not returned.

“They were effectively still in recession, and that limited the economy’s recovery,” he said. “The bottom line is that unlike after the Great Recession, states, localities, territories and tribal governments are contributing to the recovery instead of constraining it and are well positioned to leave the country more prepared when the next downturn hits.

In the future, policymakers should avoid the mistakes of the Great Recession’s fiscal aid response and provide enough aid to enable states and other governments to meet the needs of residents and businesses.

“With aid and multiple pandemic bills in 2020 and the American Rescue Plan,” he noted, “it’s also been a huge success, helping to make the recession the shortest on record and creating much less hardship than we otherwise would have seen.”



NACo Past President Gary Moore of Boone County, Ky. testifies March 1 before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform. Photo by Hugh Clarke

SNAP/STATS

GAS PRICES

| STATE | PRICE PER GALLON |
|------------------|------------------|
| CALIFORNIA | \$5.57 |
| HAWAII | \$4.77 |
| NEVADA | \$4.77 |
| OREGON..... | \$4.66 |
| WASHINGTON | \$4.63 |

Source: AAA (American Automobile Association) as of March 9, 2022

Sales tax will fund new center

From CENTER page 1

extensively, giving what she estimated added up to 70 presentations about the benefits of more robust behavioral health care offerings. This paralleled her growth as a volunteer, first with her children's school district, then on the county planning commission and a participant in the yearlong county government orientation program.

"I went to every group that was listed, whether there were two people or 200," she said. "Everywhere I went, I asked people to raise their hand if they knew someone with a behavioral health issue or substance abuse issue or mental health issue."

And roughly 85 percent of the time, she said, the whole room raised their hand. That rising awareness helped contribute to the 2018 passage of a 0.25 percent sales tax that is estimated to raise \$18 million per year for 20 years.

Now, in her first term as a county commissioner, Shad-

duck-McNally is watching the Larimer County Behavioral Health Facility rise from a foundation she helped lay. The 55,000 square-foot building will support 64 beds and offer behavioral health triage services, professional mental health assessments, substance use diagnosis, crisis stabilization and short-term residential treatment with 23-hour observation.

"Our ultimate goal is to have really strong partnerships with those who are providing levels of outpatient care who don't need residential beds to provide their levels of care," said Laurie Stolen, behavioral services director, during a meeting with neighbors near the facility's site.

Stolen is one of six staffers whose position is funded by the sales tax revenue.

What helped gain support among the public, Shadduck-McNally said, was mapping the service gaps throughout the county and focusing on illustrating the need for funding to build a continuum of care.

While the facility is under



Artist's rendering of the Larimer County Behavioral Health Facility.

construction, with a 2023 opening date targeted, the county is awarding impact grants to achieve the goals that will eventually be covered by behavioral health services. Grant recipients define the problem they plan to address, proposing solutions to improve the challenges faced in the communities they serve.

The county identifies the trends that drive needs and direct money accordingly, awarding \$6 million through 110

grants to providers since 2019. The current focus is on youths, particularly as they deal with the consequences of interruptions in their formative years, and addresses suicide, which, until 2021, had seen a steady increase in Colorado and Larimer County. Shadduck-McNally wants to seize that lull and use that small victory as fuel to address the problem with more resources.

The behavioral health center

also aims to provide job training opportunities to help build the behavioral health workforce, to meet a need that the county itself will be perpetuating.

"We need more workforce in behavioral health," Shadduck-McNally said. "We can be a place where people come to do their internships or work in these centers and get trained and help provide a workforce that is desperately needed at this time." **CN**

'Early learning spawns curiosity that may lead to future county service'

From STUDENTS page 1

"So it's important for students to understand where their Mom and Dad's tax dollars are going and how those tax dollars support their daily activities," May said.

Elizabeth depicted a scene of the Granville County courthouse writing, "I love my county because of the beautiful architecture" across the dome in her artwork.

May said Elizabeth, who he met along with her parents at a recognition ceremony held in the fall, "love architecture."

"Anytime you challenge a student with a project like this," he noted, "those students who are really curious and want to learn more will explore and look into it and try to define for themselves what that means."

Creating artwork about counties can also "foster conversations between them and their parents," he said. "And

through those conversations, they kind of can understand what the county does for them."

And who knows? Some of these students might end up

working for a county someday. "Early learning spawns curiosity, and curiosity may lead to future service in the county," May said.

Art teacher Leslie Nunnery

of Creedmoor Elementary helped her students enter NA-Co's competition. May said he wasn't surprised at the level of participation by students in his county.

"Our county government does a very good job of letting people know about various services," he said. "We use social media and print media to get the word out. It's a very close-knit community and engaged."

In addition to recognition from the county board, Elizabeth and fellow students from the county who were also winners were recognized by the county's Board of Education.

"When a child's lightbulb comes on and they're really engaged in something," May said, "what we don't want to do is put a shade on it — we want to make sure the shade is removed and it's illuminated, so they can take that experience and grow further."

Students across the country can enter the 2022 art competition by visiting naco.org/art for all the details. **CN**



Elizabeth Gibson (center), a student at Creedmoor Elementary School in Granville County, N.C., holds a certificate from the county recognizing her artwork of the county courthouse.



Tackling the 'second pandemic' in schools

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

A top official in the Department of Education is advising counties to “be bold and creative” when it comes to finding ways to help youth in their communities who are facing mental health challenges.

“We’re seeing a 25 percent increase in emergency room visits across the country for student mental health issues,” Nick Simmons, a senior advisor at the Department of Education told county officials Feb. 14, during a workshop on “Leveraging Federal Funding to Strengthen Mental Health in Schools.”

“Fifty-three percent of parents reported being concerned or very concerned about their child’s mental health,” he said. “We’re seeing an enormous tragic spike in the dropout rate, which is nearly quadruple from where it was. We’ve been set back decades of work.”



Onondaga County, N.Y. Executive J. Ryan McMahon makes a point as fellow panelists Nick Simmons (left) and Mary Kingston Roche look on. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Montgomery County, Md. Councilmember Craig Rice, chair of NACo’s Human Services and Education Policy Steering Committee, led panelists on a discussion about

the needs and struggles of our nation’s youth.

“In the midst of the very tumultuous times that we find ourselves in, we realize our children have been facing

more than any generation before,” he said.

With historic American Rescue Plan funding, Simmons is especially hopeful that counties will be able to fund the

arts, after-school programming, theater and sports as well as hire mental health experts to give students a chance

See HEALTH page 5

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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From HEALTH page 4

to work through their trauma.

“What we see in the most successful efforts across the country are ones where a district is working very closely with their county and or city level to create a program like this in the short term,” he said.

Onondaga County Executive J. Ryan McMahon, II is well ahead of the curve on tackling mental health issues in his community. He said he recognized the need for addressing the mental health crisis in his schools long before COVID hit.

McMahon saw a sharp increase in mental health-related events as early as 2018, he noted. The county expanded programs to meet the growing needs of the community. As early as 2008, social workers were integrated into public schools, hiring specialists focused on one-on-one interactions with students. They also built mental health clinics for students and their families.

“Whether you’re a working

class, suburban district, a rural district or affluent school district, our focus is making sure that every kid gets the services they need to get through this,” said McMahon.

Mary Roche, director of policy at the Institute for Educational Leadership, praised the organization CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) for their unique Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) model to educate and assist youth. Roche spoke of five key competencies schools should focus on in the classroom to bolster the resiliency of the young. SEL helps to foster learning and development through:

- self-awareness
- self-management
- social awareness
- relationship skills
- responsible decision-making

Roche also supports the adoption of a community school strategy, where the school district is a hub for the community and many of

its resources through the use of a community coordinator. The coordinator completes an analysis of assets and needs for the school and community, working to find partner organizations to bolster the needs of both, building a pipeline of support and funding for critical systems like integrated health clinics, social workers and child psychologists.


County officials who attended the panel discussion asked many questions, looking for examples on how to implement the SEL model, how to tackle drug use and self-medicating youth who lack access to mental health care to funding new initiatives.

“The final word I would leave you all with is to be bold, be creative in this,” Simmons said.

“There’s no need to let ‘perfect’ be the enemy of good and innovative... Our kids are struggling so much, you know that the house is on fire for them. And so, it doesn’t have to be a perfect solution but everybody.” **CN**

GET TO KNOW...

Tuscarawas County, Ohio



Welcome to Tuscarawas County, Ohio

Tuscarawas County was created in 1808 and is nestled in the northeastern part of Ohio, south of the city of Akron.

The county name originated from a Native American word meaning either “open mouth” or “old town.” The county seat is New Philadelphia.

The county was once part of an expansive canal system in the 1800s known as the Ohio Erie canal until the rise of the railroads caused canals across the country to be abandoned. The county is home to the first protestant settlement, Schoenbrunn Village and the only revolutionary war fort built in Ohio, Fort Laurens.

Native son, legendary Cy Young, pitched his way to 511 wins in the major leagues, winning more than any other pitcher. Young set several records that stood for decades and left such an imprint on baseball that an award was named after him. He was born in Gilmore.

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.

WORD SEARCH

DOUGLAS COUNTY, Neb.
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

BASEBALL: The annual College World Series baseball tournament, begun in 1955, takes place each June in the county.

BOZELL: One of the largest ad agencies in the world is located in the county, founded there in 1921.

BRANDO: Legendary actor Marlon Brando (who starred in “The Godfather” and many other films) was born in the county.

BUFFETT: The “oracle of Omaha,” billionaire businessman Warren Buffett, lives in the county, in the same home he bought in 1958.

DOUGLAS: The county is named for Stephen Arnold Douglas, a politician who debated Abraham Lincoln in what became known as the “Lincoln-Douglas debates” during the presidential election of 1858.

FORD: President Gerald R. Ford, the country’s 38th president, was born in the county.

JOHNNY: Johnny’s Cafe is the oldest steakhouse in the county, opening in 1922 and still going strong with the granddaughters of the original owner running the eatery.

MILES: The county’s land mass is 394 square miles.

MILITARY: The Offutt Air Force Base, located south of the county, employs more than 5,000 people.

MISSOURI: The county is bordered on the east by the Missouri River.

NEWSPAPER: The local newspaper is the Omaha World-Herald, founded in 1885.

OMAHA: The county seat is Omaha, a Native American word meaning “upstream people.”

POPULATION: With nearly 600,000 people calling the county home, Douglas County is Nebraska’s most populous county.

RAILROAD: Ground was broken in 1863 for the Union Pacific Railroad in Omaha, the first railroad to the Pacific Coast. Today the company’s headquarters are located there.

REUBEN: Many say the Reuben sandwich was first created in 1925 by Reuben Kulakofsky, a local grocer.



Cy Young



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Kings County, Calif. Supervisor Craig Pedersen discusses the impact of unclear environmental rules.
Photo by Hugh Clarke

Hotly contested water quality rules boil over

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

Conflicting opinions clashed during a workshop last month about the upcoming proposed changes to the definition of “waters of the United States” (WOTUS) under the Clean Water Act (CWA). Attendees passionately disagreed on which waters should be considered federal jurisdiction versus state and local jurisdiction. Members from different regions clashed over what is deemed an overreach by the EPA and Army Corps. In contrast, others said the changes would consistently give them the ability to better protect ephemeral and intermittent streams.

Navis Bermudez, deputy assistant administrator at the EPA’s Office of Water, said the Clean Water Act “defines waters in the U.S., and this definition is fundamental to the entire CWA. It establishes which waters will receive protection from toxic wastes and other pollution and which water bodies will not.” The problem comes in the implementation: Rural farmers and ranchers are subjected to vague language about ephemeral streams, human-made ditches and dried-up creek beds.

Bermudez said the EPA is interested in hearing from those “on the ground,” dealing with the direct implementation of the rule so the agency can col-

laboratively craft a strong and durable regulation. The EPA will soon announce the dates and locations of 10 regional stakeholder engagement opportunities to better hear from local communities, she said.

Polk County, Minn. Engineer Rich Sanders, National Association of County Engineers representative, asked for more collaboration in the intergovernmental partnership, noting that it is highly critical for counties to meet with federal partners when crafting regulations. Sanders said counties should be given the flexibility to handle their own permitting when state and local regulations are stricter than federal requirements.

“The absence of burdensome bureaucratic red tape can assist in increasing the purchasing power of our existing funds,” said Sanders.

Others asked for ephemeral streams to be excluded, as they are not “navigable waters.” Rural Affairs Steering Committee Supervisor Craig Pederson, Kings County, Calif. supervisor, said producers and ranchers value clarity above all else. The new rulings are not clear enough, especially when paired with the significant fines attached to some of these violations.

Sublette County, Wyo. Commissioner Joel Bousman, chair of the Public Lands Steering Committee Commissioner,

urged the EPA to delay making significant changes until after the Supreme Court ruling in *Sackett v. EPA*.

“This court case has major ramifications for the Clean Water Act implementation and could send agencies all the way back to the drawing board to start over writing a rule under a new Court precedent,” said Bousman. He also supports the exclusions of human-made structures like retention ponds to expedite repairs and reduce costs.

Santa Fe County, N.M. Commissioner Anna Hansen expressed her support for including language around ephemeral streams, as her county has one primary water source classified as ephemeral and intermittent. New Mexico lacks “primacy” for issuing permits. The Land of Enchantment is only one of four states that do not have primacy under the CWA for issuing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permits for point source discharges. This lack of authority ties New Mexico’s state water regulations to the federal government. **CN**

For more information, NACo created the WOTUS Action Center with copies of public comments and a detailed analysis of the proposed WOTUS rule. To learn more about the proposed rule’s potential impact, visit www.naco.org/wotus.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

BOB DIXON

NACo Board Member
Presiding Commissioner
Greene County, Mo.



Dixon

Number of years active in NACo: Three years

Years in public service: 20 years

Occupation: Licensed Realtor

Education: Business Administration, M. Ed. Drury University, 2009

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Serve 16 years in the state Legislature

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Ronald Reagan, Warren Buffett, William Wilberforce

A dream I have is to: Continue serving my fellow man.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Drive the western United States in two trips.

My favorite way to relax is: Walking an Ozarks trail.

I’m most proud of: My three daughters.

Every morning I read: A little bit of the Bible.

My favorite meal is: Steak and potatoes.

My pet peeve is: When people drone on after the point is made.

My motto is: Do your best; forget the rest.

The last book I read was: *Love Does*, by Bob Goff

My favorite movie is: “Amazing Grace”

My favorite music is: Anything but rap

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln

My county is a NACo member because: We seek to make a positive impact on federal policy, and we appreciate many membership benefits.

You’d be surprised to learn that I:
Have restored three historic homes.





**SUBMISSIONS
DEADLINE:**
March 31, 2022 at
11:59 p.m. EDT

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ON THE MOVE

NACo MEMBERS

- Former NACo President **Colleen Landkamer** has been named USDA Rural Development director for Minnesota, her second such posting. Prior to both stints, she had served as a Blue Earth County, Minn. commissioner.



Landkamer

NACo STAFF

- **Alyxa Hawkins** has joined NACo as a public affairs coordinator. She previously served as administrative coordinator at the Montgomery County Medical Society and as SaveFirst training coordinator at Impact America. She earned a bachelor's degree in Health Services Administration, with minors in Business and History.
- **Franklin Vanegas** has joined NACo as deputy director for information technology. He previously served as IT manager at Sparksoft Corporation and senior help desk team lead at NuAxis Innovations. He earned a bachelor's degree in Information Systems Management.



Hawkins



Vanegas

2022 NACo HEALTHY COUNTIES FORUM

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BRIGHT IDEAS | NEW HANOVER COUNTY, N.C.

Bright Ideas: Improvements Create HHS Mail Efficiencies

PROBLEM: Vital documents sometimes took two to three days to send to residents, from the county health and human services department, causing headaches and interruptions in service.

SOLUTION: Restructure the process, making submitting and handling mail far easier and giving much needed flexibility to staff.

by **Dakota Hendricks**
staff writer

For New Hanover County, N.C., excellence comes through hard work and being proactive.

"Sometimes it's hard to be proactive," said Chief Strategy Officer Jennifer Rigby. "As a county or government official, you're just kind of fighting fires and you're in a very reactive state. The more you can put yourself in a proactive state the better you will end up serving customers, the better you will support your team and your staff."

Five years ago, the county launched the Office of Strategy and Budget, which focuses on systems review and improvements to achieve the goals and vision set forth by the county commissioners. In 2019, the budget portion moved to the finance department, which freed up space to hire two additional employees to the Office of Strategy. As part of the new team, JD Limberger was hired as the senior strategist and process improvement analyst, playing a vital role in reshaping how the county functions in large and small ways.

In 2019, Limberger identified potential improvements in the county health and human services department's mail system, both in reshaping the mail room space and altering how the process functions. With help from Regina James-Boston, Health and Human Ser-



(L-r) New Hanover County, N.C. Commissioners Jonathan Barfield, Jr.; Deb Hays; Bill Rivenbark and Julia Olson-Boseman, along with and Senior Analyst JD Limberger, accept the NACo 2021 Achievement Awards certificate.

vices assistant director of Centralized Services, they created a plan to implement changes on an ambitious 30-day timeline.

Limberger identified gaps within the mail-sorting process: High traffic within the mail room, limited space for sorting, junk mail processing and delivery time. Prior to the change, mail was sorted into bins and then employees would come to the room and fetch their mail whenever they found the time. The inconsistency led sometimes to two- or three-day delivery times for critical mail pertaining to HIPAA, Medicaid cards and more.

"When you're doing an application for food and nutrition or an application for Medicaid, there's all kinds of time guidelines and so things have to be addressed within a 24-hour period or a two-day period," he said. "By changing the direction of how we were doing this, it really made a big difference to our customers."

Limberger made several recommendations to improve the process: Additional nearby office space was added to the mail room to make sorting far

easier; the mail room staff took over delivery of mail which reduced traffic around sensitive information and vastly improved delivery time from days to hours and they modified the sorting process to remove junk mail from circulation. This improved response time to residents who less frequently missed important deadlines, reducing the traffic for reapplications. The changes also helped reduce strain on other departments. Return mail was previously sent to supervisors to sort out; now it is quickly handled and resent to the correct address.

Boston and her team took Limberger's recommendations and continued to review their work. The team implemented an outdoor roadside drop box, further reducing traffic inside the building. This gave residents a better experience as they no longer had to wait in line and go through security to drop off mail. Within a short time, 15 percent of all traffic came through the drop box, with the county identifying 444 residents using the box in seven days. In 2020, 4,655 docu-

ments came through the drop box, 2,955 in 2021.

"It's an ongoing process," said Boston. "We need to continually evaluate and reevaluate and make it better so that we can provide good customer service to our external and our internal customers as well because the internal customers are the ones who make sure our external customers get the things they need."

The recommendations were made and continued. "The sustainability is a lot of times out of my control," he said. "We can identify problems, we can fix the problems, but here's the thing at the end of the day... I can't really maintain those changes."

"I came back a year later and I did a walk-through of that department, and I was blown away that not only had they sustained all the changes, but that they grew," he said. **CN**

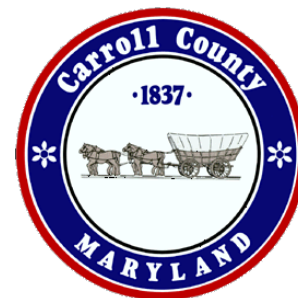
The New Hanover County Mailroom Process Improvement program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2021 NACo Achievement Award in the County Administration category.



CARROLL COUNTY, Md.

First adopted in July of 1977, the Carroll County seal has remained in use ever since. The seal depicts a "four horse freight wagon" encircled by the inscription "Carroll County, Maryland" with the year the county was formed, 1837, written above.

The seal also has two stylized six-leaved blossoms on either side of the wagon.



Carroll County was once a heavily trafficked area filled with freight caravans, called Conestoga caravans, shipping food and resources through the region and into Pennsylvania. Heavy traffic led to the creation of turnpikes in the area, further easing travel, encouraging the development of taverns and infrastructure and improving access to vital resources like lumber and flour.

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

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NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ALABAMA

LEE COUNTY is participating in a program designed to help the county as well as residents. Residents can pay some **traffic tickets and violations** online. WTVM-TV reports the county has joined a state pilot program called Alabama Online Traffic Resolution which will reduce strain on the traffic docket. It also gives residents the flexibility to handle minor issues without attending court.

the groups disproportionately affected by HIV, *The Silicon Valley Voice* reported. The county aims to distribute 850 test kits this year.



CALIFORNIA

• **RIVERSIDE COUNTY** has launched a new program to better support the **homeless** in their community. According to *Redlands Daily Facts*, the Collaborative Court program will provide an avenue for homeless residents with misdemeanors to enter programs to support mental health and substance use issues. The programs are weeks-long efforts to reduce or eliminate criminal charges while treating underlying causes of homelessness.

• **SANTA CLARA COUNTY** is tackling the spread of **HIV** with a new program allowing residents to request a free at-home HIV test kit. The county aims to equitably distribute test kits to

COLORADO

In **GARFIELD COUNTY**, residents can receive funding to **bolster their energy efficiency** through the ReEnergize Garfield program. The county has partnered with the nonprofit Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER) to allow low- and moderate-income families to apply for assistance in modernizing their homes with insulation, air sealing, window replacements and other energy efficiency upgrades through the program. With additional grant funding, ReEnergize has expanded to allow even more moderate income families to be eligible for the program.

MARYLAND

ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

has launched a new program called the **Juvenile Justice Therapeutic Crisis Intervention Project**. The project will allow at-risk students to enroll in programs to prevent them from entering the juvenile justice system. Through grant funding, a licensed clinical social worker will meet for one-on-one interactions with students while they are away from school on suspension, helping them “get needed help and navigate their way back to school.”

MICHIGAN

• **WASHTENAW COUNTY** is working to create easier access for young adults to attend driving classes and acquire their **driver's license**. Teens under 18 must take a potentially expensive drivers' course that could cost up to \$600. MLIVE reports that some young adults who cannot afford the class drive without a license, leading



to “a common on-ramp into the criminal legal system.” The local sheriff's department is taking part in a pilot program called Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office Driver's Ed Initiative, which will fund classes for 70 students this year with the hope of expanding the program countywide in the future.

• **WAYNE COUNTY** is hosting a Zoom **Mental Health** panel called “My Struggle Is Your Struggle.” The summit will discuss substance use, grief, self-care, empowerment and more. For more information, contact the Wayne County Women's Commission Chair Carmen Carter at 248.910.6527.

NEW JERSEY

• Awareness of government services will get a boost in **MIDDLESEX COUNTY** thanks to the efforts of the Middlesex County Community Health Team, a field-based campaign which includes door-to-door canvassing as well as remote canvassing via phone and text messaging. The team is a collaboration by the Board of Commissioners Department of Community Services and other county departments and offices. The team aims to provide



ILLINOIS

COOK COUNTY has partnered with the local Community and Economic Development Association to create the Low-Income Household Water Assistance Program to help residents **pay for their water bills**. The county is using ARPA funding to support those who are struggling, according to *Journal and Topics*. “We understand that during difficult times, the government needs to assist those who need it most,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. The program assists with connection, disconnection, late fees and payments.



CALIFORNIA

• **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** has launched a one-year pilot **doula program** that will train and pay doulas to serve critically at-risk mothers. Doulas are trained to provide guidance and support during labor and birth. County Supervisors Board Chair Nathan Fletcher said the new pilot program will “generate better outcomes by providing doulas to assist in pregnancy, labor and delivery, and by training the next generation of doulas to serve their communities.” The county will spend \$400,000 on the program.

information directly to residents at home on all **resources and programs offered by the county**, including COVID-19 vaccines and testing, telehealth, emergency rental assistance, MCAT and more. The team will focus on building a connection with multicultural families by prioritizing bilingual communication to ensure they are receiving support and relief.



• The **MONMOUTH COUNTY** Prosecutor's Office's Safe Place program will offer safe locations to report **bias incidents or hate crimes**. The goal of the Safe Place program is for people to spot the decal in a location's window (a school, organization or business) and know that they're provided a safe environment to request assistance if they believe they have been the target of a bias incident or hate crime.

NEW YORK

The **SCHENECTADY COUNTY** Legislature's Committee on Health, Housing and Human Services has voted to create a new position within the health department that will handle an expected increase in children testing for **elevated levels of lead**. The new staffer will work with landlords and homeowners

to remediate lead hazards, *The Daily Gazette* reported.

NORTH CAROLINA

• **NEW HANOVER COUNTY** will offer a free **dental care program** for low-income older adults. The program will be coordinated by the Health and Human Services and the Senior Resource Center through a contract with Access Dental Care, a mobile practice established by the North Carolina Dental Society, and will target adults 55 and older who are at or below the 200 percent poverty level who do not qualify for full Medicaid.

• **WAKE COUNTY**'s Lease 2 Home program will offer **incentives to landlords and property owners** to offer qualified tenants homes at prices they can afford. The \$1.1 million initial budget will cover payments for every lease signed — with bonuses if a voucher is accepted, help if damages exceed the security deposit, two months of rental payments if a unit is vacant for more than 30 days and bonuses for lease renewals.

TEXAS

• **MCLENNAN COUNTY** social service workers are partnering with lawyers and parents who have successfully navigated the **Child Protective Services** (CPS) system. The Parent Advocacy Program is a new resource for families in McLennan County who have been contacted by CPS and don't know where to turn. The program aims to keep families together and to stop children from entering into foster care in the first place and is available to any parent with an open

CPS investigation in McLennan County.

• **TARRANT COUNTY** allocated \$30,000 to several transit agencies to provide **free rides to polling places** for the March 1 primaries.

"It is crucial that people get out to vote in the primary election, and access to transportation should not be a barrier to getting to polling locations," said Judge Glen Whitley.

• **TRAVIS COUNTY** is partnering with the city of Austin to **create a public health commission** that would oversee and inform public health operations in both.

The commission will monitor local public health issues, strategize performance improvements, advise leaders, address public health disparities and perform public outreach.

VIRGINIA

ARLINGTON COUNTY is building an alert system to **manage emergency mental health calls**. The Marcus Alert, named after a teacher who was killed by police while experiencing a mental health crisis, would transfer people who call 911 or 988 to a regional call center, where staff determine whether to de-escalate the situation over the phone, dispatch a mobile crisis unit or send specially trained law enforcement, ARLNow reported.

WASHINGTON

The **KING COUNTY** Board of Health voted to **repeal a law requiring bike helmets**



SOUTH CAROLINA

RICHLAND COUNTY's library system will distribute up to six packets of seeds per household to encourage **home gardening and pollinator conservation**. The program is a partnership between Richland Soil and Water Conservation District and Dominion Energy, and the county will establish a traveling pop-up seed sanctuary to distribute seeds at community festivals, farmers markets and other county events.

because of the disproportional enforcement against BIPOC or Black, Indigenous and people of color community members and people experiencing homelessness, the *South Seattle Emerald* reported. A 2020 investigation by Crosscut found that at least 43 percent of helmet

citations since 2017 were given to people struggling with homelessness, and from 2019 on, that number increased to 60 percent.

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.



OREGON

In recognition of the disparate effects of **wood smoke**, the **MULTNOMAH COUNTY** Board of Commissioners revised the county ordinance to extend the county's smoke surveillance season year-round from the earlier five months, eliminate an exemption for EPA-certified wood stoves and remove the "green day" term that signified that it was OK to burn wood. An earlier resolution put the county in line with international benchmarks for pollutants that are less than half what the federal government currently allows.



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