

## NACo BOARD VOTES TO HOLD 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MD.

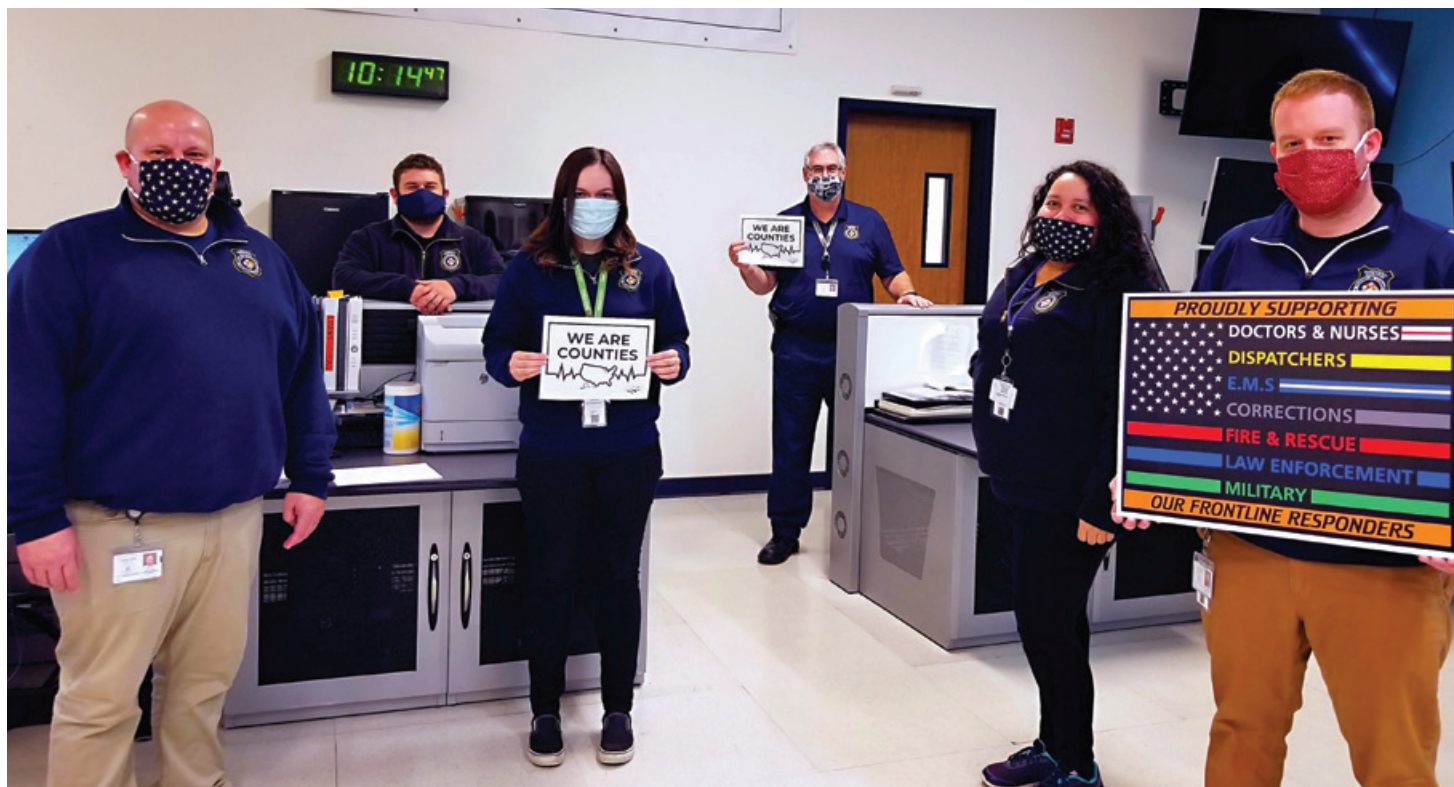
by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The NACo Board voted March 19 to relocate the 2021 NACo Annual Conference to Prince George's County, Md., revising the dates to July 9-12, at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, just outside of Washington, D.C. The conference would be a hybrid of in-person and remote programming. The Board also passed 27 interim policy resolutions (see details on pages 9-13) that will help guide NACo's advocacy through July's Annual Business Meeting.

Julie Chávez Rodriguez, White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, spoke to the Board ahead of President Joe Biden's planned March 24 appearance. As president-elect, Biden spoke during the Fall Board Meeting, too.

Rodriguez said Treasury Department guidance for the American Rescue Plan's \$65.1 billion in direct funding

*See BOARD page 16*



Franklin County, Pa. employees are among those who stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic. Passage of the American Rescue Plan will allow counties to recover from a demand for services and reduced revenues during the resulting economic downturn.

## Counties pivot to implement historic win of \$65.1 billion in American Rescue Plan

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Following President Biden's signature of the American Rescue Plan, counties are figuring out how to best spend the \$65.1 billion in direct funding heading their way in the next two years.

It's the largest federal allocation to county governments in U.S. history, and it helps counties recover from a combined demand for services during the COVID-19 pandemic and reduced revenues during the resulting economic downturn.

It will allow counties to replace lost, delayed or decreased revenue and will fund additional testing and vaccination measures and resources to reopen schools. It will also affect changes that will buttress services that counties offer, such as funding to families that has the potential

to cut child poverty in half.

"This is truly a one-in-a-lifetime investment in county government that provides much-needed relief and will be crucial to our nation's recovery," NACo President Gary Moore said of the bill. Moore is also judge/executive of Boone

County, Ky.

NACo solicited feedback and questions from members after the March 11 signing, which were then summarized for the Department of Treasury, which will craft guidance for how the

*See RESCUE PLAN page 2*

## NACo Broadband Task Force seeks solutions for counties

by **Rachel Looker**  
staff writer

As the United States bypasses the one-year mark since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, counties are working to come up with solutions to bridge the digital divide.

From virtual learning to telemedicine and workforce adap-

tations, the pandemic has highlighted the need for broadband infrastructure and the importance of reliable internet speeds for all counties across the country.

NACo President and Boone County, Ky. Judge/Executive Gary Moore announced in 2020 the formation of NACo's Broadband Task Force comprised of

three dozen county government officials. The group is focused on the challenges and opportunities facing underserved communities and the intersection of public and private sectors' efforts to deploy broadband. Its goal is to create a blueprint for governments working to bridge

*See BROADBAND page 2*



# \$10 billion for broadband is in Rescue Plan

From BROADBAND page 1

the digital divide.

In 2020, Congress passed the Broadband Data Act which requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to change the way broadband data is collected, verified and reported. The FCC secured funding through a provision in the year-end funding package Congress passed in December and is now moving forward with the implementation of the legislation.

Additionally, the FCC adopted new rules for the Digital Opportunity Data Collection to ensure the accurate collection of broadband deployment data. The new rules specify the fixed and mobile broadband service providers that are required to report availability and coverage data.

The rules also adopt requirements for reporting speed for fixed technologies and requires that fixed broadband internet access providers report whether broadband services are offered to residential and business cus-

## SPEEDREAD

FOUR SUBCOMMITTEES WITHIN NACo's BROADBAND TASK FORCE HAVE ESTABLISHED GOALS TO ADDRESS THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Preparing for broadband
- Barriers to buildout
- The Digital Divide
- Future-proofing the local economy

tomers.

These rules set standards for collecting broadband deployment data from state, local and tribal mapping entities.

NACo previously launched the "TestIT" mobile app that emphasizes the need for complete and accurate broadband data. The app highlights the gaps in the FCC's broadband maps, which are used by federal agencies to determine funding needs for investments.

Data collected from the app found that roughly 65 percent of all counties are experiencing the

Internet below the FCC's definition of broadband, according to NACo's connectivity report, "Understanding the True State of Connectivity in America."

As more internet disparities have become apparent because of the pandemic, the recently passed American Rescue Plan includes \$10 billion for capital projects, including broadband infrastructure, for states, localities, territories and tribal governments. Projects may relate to enabling work, education, health monitoring and remote options. An additional \$7 billion has been allotted to the FCC for its Emergency Connectivity Fund and E-Rate program, which helps schools and libraries support virtual learning. This plan allows counties to make necessary investments in broadband infrastructure.

Each subcommittee will report on their identified goals during the task force's monthly meeting on March 24. The livestream link is available to stream for Legislative Conference attendees. [CN](#)

# Distribution formula in the works

From RESCUE PLAN page 1

money can be spent. Counties will not have to suballocate their funding to cities and towns or ask states for the suballocations, as they did under the CARES Act. There will be some restrictions on funding use, such as funding pensions or cutting taxes, but generally the money should be used to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impacts.

"The implementation is almost as important as getting the plan passed in the first place," said Mark Ritacco, NACo's director of government affairs. "The reason we're here is because of the work of our members, the credibility that our members brought to the federal policy discussion, so therefore all of NACo's comments about how to implement this plan will be informed by our members."

In addition, public lands counties will share an additional \$1.5 billion over two years. While some counties have relied on property taxes to help

fund their operations during the pandemic, nearly 62 percent of counties contain untaxable public lands, but must still provide services. The Treasury Department will develop a distribution formula based on counties' poverty and unemployment rates, household income and land value.

"We truly appreciate Sen. Ron Wyden's (D-Ore.) efforts on our behalf recognizing that public lands counties have been hit pretty hard," said Greg Chilcott, a Ravalli County, Mont. commissioner who serves as president of NACo's Western Interstate Region. "We really appreciate the fact that [Congress] realizes we're in a deficit position and we will put this money to good use for our citizens."

Estimates of how much each county will be allocated, based on 2019 population, are available in NACo's COVID-19 Recovery Clearinghouse. Counties will receive their allocations in two parts — within 60 days of

See RESCUE PLAN page 14

### SNAP/STATS



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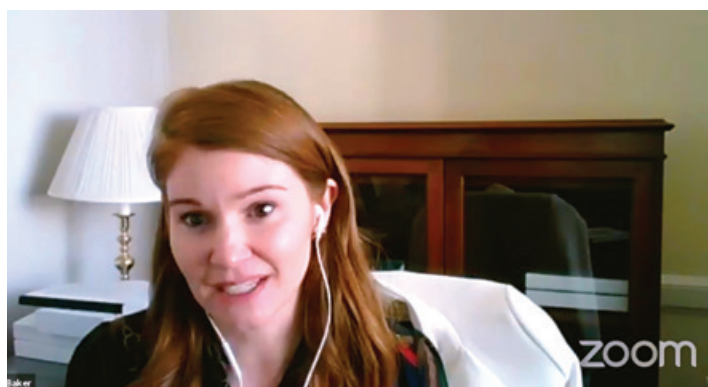
## TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION BILL IS ON THE MOVE

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

Two days after the U.S. Senate passed its \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package, all eyes in the Transportation Steering Committee turned to the surface transportation reauthorization that has been rumored to be another swing for the fences.

Lauren Baker, a staffer for U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Ranking Member Shelly Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), said the bill would take a more bipartisan tack.

"There's a lot of talk out there about infrastructure and that we might see this other very large infrastructure package come together as well, but our goal right now is that we're going to do the reauthorization bill in regular order, in committee," she said, noting that the



**Congressional staffer Lauren Baker discusses legislation with members of NACo's Transportation Steering Committee.**

first hearing, a week prior, had a distinctly bipartisan tone.

That reflected an Oval Office meeting President Biden called with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

"To me, that was really indicative of the priority of this and their willingness to work bipartisanship and their willingness to allow the committee to do the work that we need to do here, to actually put together a reauthorization bill to get it across

the finish line."

Chairman Tom Carper (D-Del.) has a goal to get the bill out of committee before Memorial Day.

"That's very soon, but it's also quite realistic...if we are going to meet that Sept. 30 deadline [when the current authorization expires]. It's going to be quick."

Negotiations are scheduled to begin after March 19, once all senators' inputs for the bill

have been received. Some parts of the reauthorization that passed the committee in 2019 may be retained.

Capito is prioritizing a long-term investment.

"If we can agree on anything, I think that that is one of the things that everybody very much so does agree with, that we need this long-term commitment so that we can plan and move forward and really start to make some improvements on our transportation infrastructure," Baker said.

Capito also stresses the need for local flexibility, to allow local leaders to make their own decisions on how infrastructure plays out in their communities.

"If you have specific [requests], get them to us early," Baker said.

Charles Small, deputy assistant secretary for intergovernmental affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation, echoed Baker's thoughts, from the Biden administration's side, about the scope of the bill, calling it a "once-in-a-generation investment" that will last 20 to 30 years.

"Part of the reason we think we need to do this is we're go-

ing to really need to figure out a way to unlock the economic growth that this country is going to need once we get into the post-pandemic economy," he said. "At the end of every pandemic in the history of the world — the economy, the culture, things change, and certainly the way we travel is going to change. Being able to unleash that economic growth, to support what will be a new American economy, is going to be incredibly, incredibly important."

Small also reminded county officials that they could use federal transit funds to set up vaccination sites.

"There are a lot of important things happening right now, but vaccines are the most important thing happening now," he said. "By setting up sites there, it will allow you to vaccinate your transportation workers in a more efficient manner."

"More people are going to be using the transportation system, and so it's going to be vitally important to protect the integrity of our transportation system to ensure its workers are protected with the vaccine." **CN**



# EPA officials commit to county partnerships to help reach local environmental goals

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

Environmental and climate priorities for the Biden administration and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will focus on climate change, environmental justice and restoring fact-based decision-making, according to Casey Katims, the EPA's deputy associate administrator for Intergovernmental Affairs.

Katims discussed President Biden's executive orders related to the environment with county officials during the Environment, Energy and Land Use Policy Steering Committee meeting March 9 during NACo's Virtual Legislative Conference.

Biden issued an executive order that calls for embedding environmental justice into all federal policy decision-making, which included creating a new White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council which the EPA has been chosen to lead, Katims said.

Through an additional executive order by Biden, Katims said the EPA is reviewing all environmental rules from the Trump administration to ensure they

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are consistent with science, adhere to the law, and protect public health and the climate.

Rules relate to methane from oil and gas operations, the fuel economy, greenhouse gas emission standards and mercury limits.

Specifically on the local level, Katims said the administration is committed to supporting environmental goals from electrifying transportation systems to advancing environmental justice and increasing recycling.

He said the agency is committed to its partnership with counties.

"We know that you're on the frontlines of protecting your communities and ensuring the health and safety of your residents 24/7 and we can really only do our job by developing and fostering and cultivating that really close partnership," he said.

The EPA is seeking nominees starting March 12 for its Local Government Advisory Committee and Small Communities Advisory Committee for interested

county officials.

"We welcome at EPA your input and collaboration from ensuring clean air and water to addressing PFAS [certain man-made chemicals], from land use to waste management," he said. "The environmental challenges we're facing are really complex and can only really be addressed through a strong partnership between the federal and local levels."

The EPA's Municipal Ombudsman Jamie Piziali spoke with the committee about clean water issues.

In her role, Piziali serves as an independent, impartial and confidential resource to assist municipalities including cities, towns, counties, boroughs, parishes, tribes, associations and other public bodies that have jurisdiction over sewer and industrial waste.

"We're certainly all going to need to work together on more innovative ways to address Clean Water Act requirements to help communities who are addressing tough concerns like through overflows or advance treatment needs," she said.

"More holistic, more thoughtful and innovative planning can

really help make water infrastructure more effective and hopefully more affordable for everyone."

Piziali is working to plan several integrative planning efforts that are of interest to county officials including a partnership with the EPA's Environmental Finance Centers to provide technical assistance to municipalities that need assistance developing integrative plans.

The Finance Centers will also be holding an integrative planning peer-to-peer exchange focused on municipalities.

Elizabeth Knoll, U.S. Department of Energy deputy assistant secretary for the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, added that focus areas related to energy for the new administration center on energy jobs and energy justice.

The department is looking for ways to leverage programs to support job growth throughout the transition to clean energy, she explained, ensuring that communities are not being left behind.

"We believe that clean energy can and will support good paying quality union jobs," she said. "We've got a lot of work to do to

make that happen."

In other business, members of the Environment, Energy and Land Use Policy Steering Committee debated two proposed interim policy resolutions while passing two others.

Committee members passed a resolution encouraging Congress to enact the National Heritage Area Act for congressionally designated National Heritage Areas. Members passed a second resolution to enhance pollinator species and their habitats throughout counties.

A third resolution proposed to include local government entities within the Clean Water Act Section 404 Permitting Exclusions.

Lafourche Parish, La. President Archie Chaisson said the resolution is asking for exemptions to reduce costs and time during the permitting process for everyday work completed by county public works agencies.

"Just because there is a connection between a wetland environment and a drainage ditch on an urban street, we should not be forced to permit and then mitigate for that work being done on the urban street," he said.

Other committee members emphasized the importance of protecting wetlands and said they were concerned with the broad wording of the resolution describing it as a "blanket exclusion" for local governments.

The committee voted to table the resolution; however, later in the meeting, members passed an amended resolution specifying the exemptions were for "public works general maintenance and repair projects."

A fourth proposed resolution supported the development of a national equity map to obtain accurate geographic data that would enable counties to assess the systemic barriers underserved communities face when accessing county programs.

Members debated the resolution, arguing the equity map would create more division and lacks the time frame to collect accurate data, specifically in rural counties. The resolution passed 16-15. **CN**

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# USDA speakers present rural, agricultural programs and priorities to NACo members

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

President Biden has made the fight against climate change a centerpiece of his administration and agriculture figures into being a major part of that priority. Robert Bonnie, USDA's deputy chief of staff for policy and senior advisor on climate, told members of NACo's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Steering Committee March 8 that some attitudes toward climate policy have shifted significantly since his first stint at USDA during the Obama administration.

**"Whatever we build has to work in rural, it has to work for agriculture and forestry."**

"There was a lot of trepidation around climate policy, cap and trade policy, how it would impact agriculture and forestry in 2009 and 2010," he said. "Today, there's a lot more interest from some of the commodity groups, from folks in forestry, around climate change policy and the opportunities, incentives and markets to reward landowners and producers for 'climate smart' agriculture."

He acknowledged there is remaining skepticism about environmental policy and ensured that it would work with agriculture and forestry practices.

"Anything we want to do at USDA, we want to look for ways that incentivize and markets and other positive approaches to climate change that can work in rural America," he said. "That will be a critical tenant of everything we do."

He touted soil health, cover crops, improved nutrient management and methane capture as climate policy practices that could align agriculture and forest management as a key for forestry.

Bonnie noted that his work is focused on five policy areas:

- Enhancing USDA conservation incentive programs to partner with farmers, ranchers and foresters around climate smart practices
- Finding ways for USDA to bolster private investment in climate smart agriculture and forestry and removing the risk involved in adopting those practices
- Building tools for producers to better understand the implications of climate-smart practices and lowering the cost of participation
- Improving the resilience of agriculture and forestry in the face of climate change
- Ensuring climate-smart practices are available to farmers of all different sizes and cultural backgrounds

"Whatever we build has to work in rural, it has to work for agriculture and forestry," he said.

More immediately, the Biden administration is targeting the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn.

Sara Bleich, senior advisor for COVID-19 at USDA, outlined the department's role in the re-

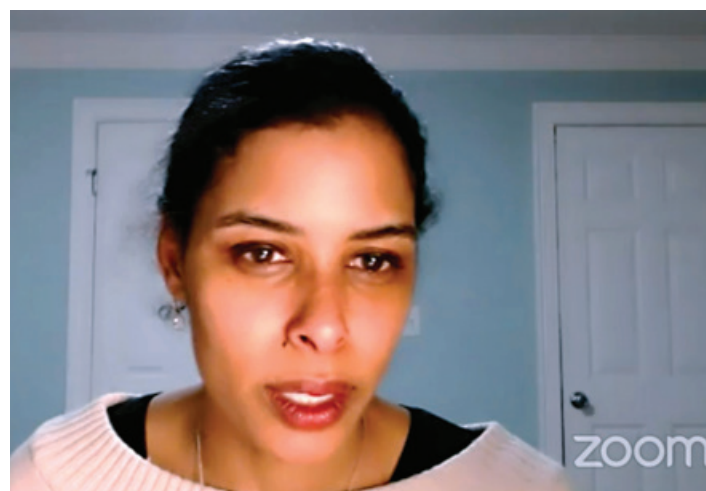
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sponse with regard to food and nutrition, rural development, food programs and farm worker safety.

In responding to 30 million adults and 14 million children at risk of food insecurity, USDA has allowed state, tribes and territories to serve free meals to children, increased and expanded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, increased funding to food banks and expanded markets between agricultural producers and food banks.

The department has also increased EBT benefits, allowed states to expand SNAP benefits to the lowest-income households and revised the Thrifty Food Plan to reflect the cost of a healthy basic diet.

Bleich noted that with a death toll of more than 80,000, rural Americans are dying at a higher rate (in rural areas with fewer than 10,000 people) than in urban areas. That is likely a result



**Sara Bleich, a senior advisor at USDA, speaks to NACo members.**

of underlying health conditions, age, lack of health insurance and difficulty accessing medical care.

"This administration will prioritize economic development and growth in rural America by making it central to USDA's mission," she said. "To do that, we will harness the vast and powerful resources of USDA to target underserved communities and those who have been marginalized."

The department will continue traditional USDA Rural Development programs, but also expand telehealth and distance

learning resources, extend eviction and foreclosure moratoria for single-family borrowers and multi-family residents and distribute the \$278 billion available through the Rural Development Business and Industry CARES Act program.

Bleich noted that many of the 45 percent of Americans who remain reluctant to seek out a COVID-19 vaccine live in rural areas, so she stressed the importance of county governments communicating the benefits of the vaccines to their residents, with whom they remain trusted messengers. **CN**



**Robert Bonnie, USDA's deputy chief of staff for policy and senior advisor on climate, speaks to NACo members March 8.**



# Wildfire, increased visitors vex BLM, Forest Service

by **Charlie Ban**  
senior writer

The National Interagency Fire Center spent 45 days of 2020 at the highest preparedness level in a year when 58,250 fires claimed 10.2 million acres of American land.

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Grant Beebe, the Bureau of Land Management's assistant director for fire and aviation, said that current weather patterns could mean similar tolls on the nation's public lands, which include more than 1 million acres that the bureau manages.

"We're expecting a pretty

busy season," he told the Public Lands Steering Committee March 12. "It really depends on how lightning comes in, whether it comes in wet or dry. We know we're going to have enough firefighting resources, both aerial and ground-based to manage our workload, but some of these fire seasons we've been having lately have really been taxing us, the whole nation, so we're really trying to bolster parts of our program."

The La Niña weather pattern in 2021 figures to leave the American Southwest dryer, which on one hand will cause drought conditions, but on the other, will prevent grass from easily carrying fire, moderating the wildfire threat somewhat.



Chris French, associate deputy chief of the U.S. Forest Service, talks with NACo members March 12.

The bureau's rural readiness outreach to local firefighters has involved free training and transferring

equipment to local departments, including 35 wildland fire engines with \$3,000 each worth of firefighting tools and radio systems.

Chris French, the associate deputy chief of the U.S. Forest Service, said that the existing relationships between the service and local governments helped both weather the 2020 wildfire season.

"If we didn't have those foundations it would have been even more challenging," he said.

Even so, the status quo won't cut it.

"We know the scale of our actions are not meeting the scale of the problem of wildfires," he said.

"We're starting to really understand how to target that work but we're also trying to be real with the folks on the [Capitol] Hill and our community partners that at the end of the day, we just have to do a lot more."

He noted that the growing cost of fire suppression was affecting budgets for other Forest Service priorities, including fire prevention, but also for permit delivery, land exchanges and other business opportunities that would benefit counties.

French noted that reducing low-value timber without a robust market for it remained a vexing problem, so he asked counties to offer ideas for incentives that would help move what is hazardous fuel wood.

He also stressed that timber

sales would remain a key part of green infrastructure and crucial to the Biden administration's climate policy.

"Sequestering carbon in national forests, sequestering that carbon into long-term storage and building products is a key cycle that we want to continue to emphasize and support," he said.

He acknowledged that national policies can interfere with local priorities.

"We're going to try to make sure we don't do that," he said. "Just looking at things such as recreation alone...we recognize that that can have impacts and we want to work together with both about the infrastructure that's associated with that, the access that's associated with that but also how do you turn that into sustained, long-term good jobs for folks?"

The Forest Service saw a more than 200 percent increase in visitation to parks during the pandemic in 2020 and 30 percent of visitors were new to the system.

"We're really looking at this right now and trying to advocate for and make adjustments in the way we deliver our facilities, our access, our recreation opportunities," he said.

"There are a lot of lessons to be learned from last year, how to keep people safe and do that work and that comes with close coordination with county health agencies, local law enforcement and really trying to work together." **CN**

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# LUCC members briefed on vaccinations, transportation and infrastructure

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

The COVID-19 vaccination program is building momentum, according to Nancy Messonnier, director of the Centers for Disease Control's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease.

As of March 10, Messonnier said 60 percent of individuals over the age of 65 have received at least the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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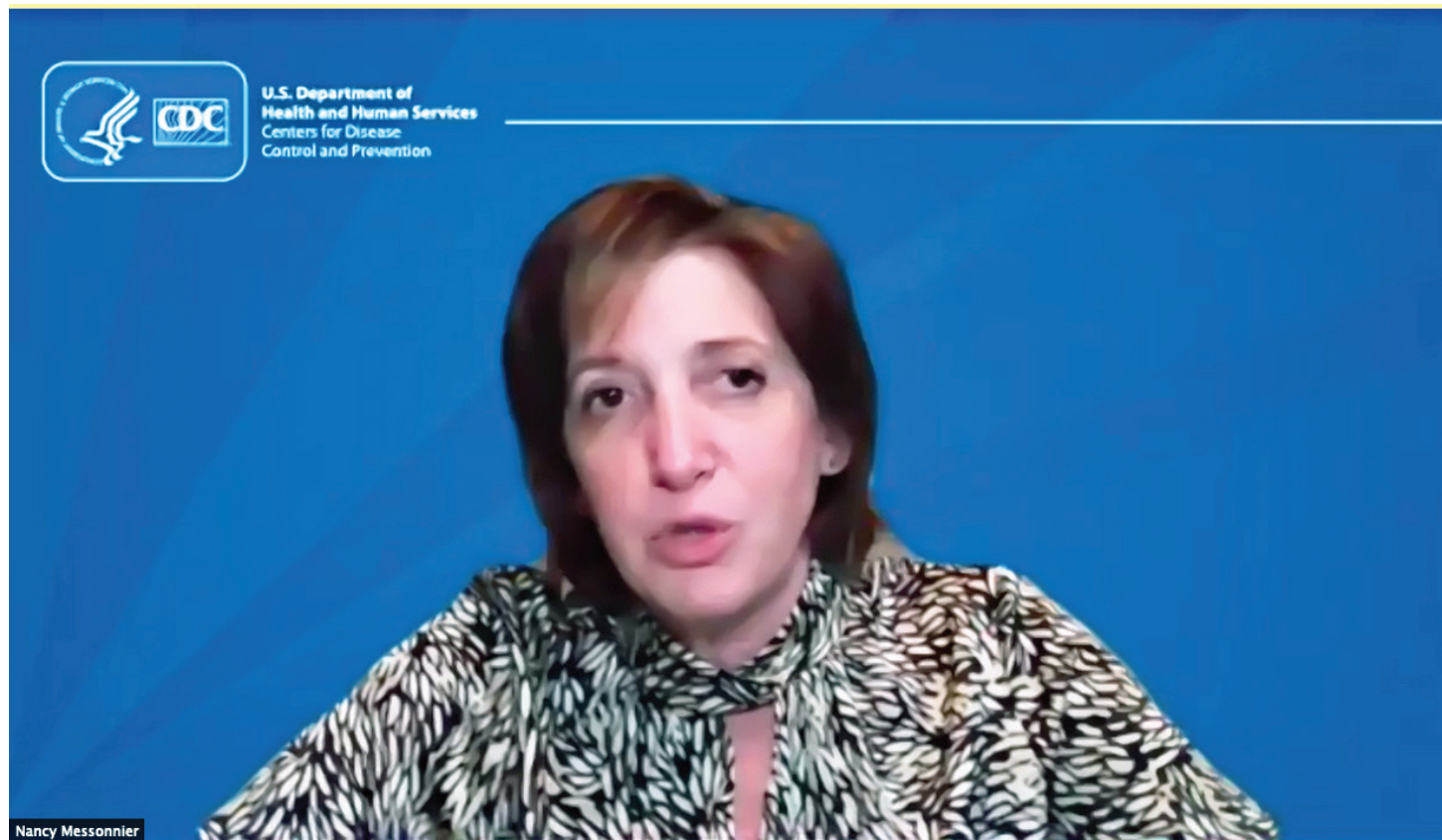
"The entire country really has to be coming together around this vaccine implementation or we're never going to achieve the full success," she told members of NACo's Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) March 10 during NACo's Virtual Legislative Conference.

Messonnier emphasized the importance of counties and communities coming together to ensure successful vaccine distribution and said the CDC's COVID data tracker, which features state-by-state vaccine data, will soon have county level statistics to provide full visibility of what's happening at the local level.

"You're going to see over the next six weeks a substantive increase in vaccine supply and in order to fully take advantage of that increasing vaccine supply, we're going to need to turn on every channel that we can in order to administer vaccines," she said.

She advised county officials to prepare for an increase in supply as more vaccines become available and highlighted programs to aid in distribution including the Retail Pharmacy Program, the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program which ensures underserved communities are equitably vaccinated and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Community Vaccination Centers.

"This is a time for all of you



Nancy Messonnier, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Disease, addresses NACo members.

who know your communities to build out a plan for how you're going to best vaccinate," she said.

In Franklin County, Ohio, vaccination efforts have focused on equity.

Franklin County Public Health Commissioner Joe Mazzola said the county has created an equitable COVID-19 vaccine strategy that is focused on communication, engagement and access.

In the diverse county of 1.3 million residents, the public health department focuses on adopting equity as the foundation for conducting its daily work.

There are currently 65 pandemic providers in the county including the public health department, hospitals, pharmacies and community health centers, he said. Each provider had to receive approval from the state.

Mazzola said fire and EMS personnel have also become pandemic providers. The health department is now allocating vaccines to local fire and EMS departments to go into the community to start to vaccinate underserved areas.

For Mazzola, lessons learned throughout the pandemic include the importance of local

coordination, consistency in guidance and overall public health system response.

"It's not just about the health department, it's about our entire public health system," he said. "That includes all of our county governments, nonprofits and healthcare partners as well."

LUCC members also heard the latest updates on the Biden administration's infrastructure agenda from Christopher Coes, the Department of Transportation's principal deputy assistant secretary for Transportation Policy.

With the House passing the American Rescue Act, Coes said the relief includes funding to support transportation, transit, public transportation



The Department of Transportation's Christopher Coes speaks with NACo's Large Urban County Caucus (LUCC) members.

operations, airports and Amtrak.

He added that the administration is focused on providing reliable, convenient public transportation for the country's essential workers and said Biden has committed to ensure there is high quality pub-

lic transportation services in communities with populations of more than 100,000.

"That is going to require not only federal government support, but it's also going to require us to coordinate with our local and state partners on the ground," he said. **CN**

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Ruby Lopez Harper, with Americans for the Arts, addresses members of NACo's Arts and Culture Commission March 11.

# Arts and culture advance equity, bridge racial divides

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

With the last year highlighting racial disparities related to the COVID-19 pandemic and inequalities among communities of color, county officials are turning to the role the arts can play in advancing racial equality.

Ruby Lopez Harper, vice president of equity and local arts engagement for Americans for the Arts, told members of NACo's Arts and Culture Commission March 11 during the Virtual Legislative Conference that the arts have not been an outlier in the focus on equity. She said there have been numerous calls for the arts to diversify their leadership.

"What this has meant for the field is a renewed energy around anti-racist practice, adoption of statements supporting the Black Lives Matter

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movement and the rise in transparency around how organizations are taking actions and not just delivering lip service," Lopez Harper said.

County arts agencies can implement equitable practices in their role serving as the center point of arts and culture in communities, she said.

**"This is an energized moment that can push practice and capitalize on a dedication and commitment to making every community better." —Lopez Harper**

"They [county art agencies] have positional power and advocacy and mobilization muscle and at this moment, it is very important that we consider their place in recovery efforts and look at them as part of the recovery infrastructure," she said.

Americans for the Arts is promoting and endorsing a framework called the Cultural New Deal that provides specific measures to be considered to advance work when focusing on equity.

"I encourage you to be humble in this moment — listen, invite, open the door to what is possible and make space for business not as usual," she said. "This is an energized moment that can push practice and capitalize on a dedication and commitment to making every community better."

Axel Santana, an associate with Policy Link, a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity, said arts and culture play a more important role than just entertainment in serving as a tool to advance equity.

"Working with artists and cultural organizers and em-

bedding creative practices into your work, we believe can help open up a world of possibilities in your journey to achieving equitable outcomes for your community," he said.

Policy Link completed an analysis of cultural plans to see



Former Oakland County, Mich. Commissioner Shelley Taub accepted the Public Leadership in the Arts Award.

what strategies focus more on equity. The Cultural Equity Plan serves as a tool to provide guidance and resources for communities interested in forming a plan dedicated to accomplishing equity through the arts and culture.

"If cities and regions hope to build on this vibrancy and address the historical and under-investments in communities of color, it's important to develop and implement cultural plans by bringing an explicit racial and ethnic demographic lens to planning," he said.

Santana said this includes ensuring that all people are represented in the development of arts policy and that there are venues for the fair distribution of resources.

He added that creating opportunities for policies in the arts and culture sector aid in equitable development such

as investing in artists of color, realigning public arts and culture investments for racial equity and creating alignment between investment and demographic populations.

To celebrate the accomplishments of county officials' efforts in the arts and culture sector, Jay Dick, senior director of state and local government affairs at Americans for the Arts, presented the Public Leadership in the Arts Award for County Arts Leadership to Shelley Taub, former Oakland County, Mich. commissioner and former Arts and Culture Commission chair.

Taub worked in Oakland County to appropriate \$2 million in federal CARES Act funding to support cultural institutions that were impacted by COVID-19 and has been a proponent of the cultural and economic value of the arts throughout her career. **CN**





NACo  
2021 | **VIRTUAL  
LEGISLATIVE  
CONFERENCE**

# BOARD ADOPTS NEW POLICIES RANGING FROM BEES TO BROADBAND

NACo'S POLICY STEERING COMMITTEES AND THEIR SUBCOMMITTEES MET DURING THE CONFERENCE TO CONSIDER NEW LEGISLATIVE POLICIES. THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVED 27 INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS MARCH 19. THESE INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS WILL SUPPLEMENT EXISTING NACo POLICY UNTIL NACo'S HYBRID 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MD. (NATIONAL HARBOR). THE APPROVED INTERIM RESOLUTIONS ARE:

## COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FY 2022

### Appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

**ISSUE:** Support Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to support the following levels of funding for core U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill: no less than \$4.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

formula funding; no less than \$1.7 billion in formula funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME); \$3 billion for Homeless Housing Assistance grants, including at least \$290 million for the Emergency Solutions Grant program plus an amount to fully fund expiring supportive housing and Shelter Plus Care rent subsidy contracts; expansion of the Section 8 voucher program in addition to full funding for existing Section 8 project-based and tenant-based contracts; \$40 million for HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and \$500 million in Section 108 Loan Guarantee authority.

### Expand Federal Residential Eviction Moratorium

**ISSUE:** The federal halt on residential evictions during the COVID-19 pandemic is sched-

uled to expire March 31, 2021.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to implement a comprehensive halt on residential evictions to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 until the federal public health emergency declaration is rescinded. NACo further urges Congress to provide additional funding and flexibility to state, county, local and tribal governments to administer rental assistance and additional housing stability supports throughout the duration of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

### Change Private Activity Bond Requirements to Increase the Use of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits

**ISSUE:** The requirement that affordable housing develop-

ments use tax-exempt bonds for 50 percent of aggregate basis of buildings and land in order to access the 4 percent Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is an inefficient use of scarce private activity bond (PAB) authority.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports legislation to amend Section 42 of the Internal Revenue Code to lower the aggregate basis for housing developments using private activity bonds from 50 percent to 25 percent in order to increase the amount of 4 percent Low Income Housing Tax Credits available to develop more affordable housing.

### Permanently Authorize EB-5 Regional Center Program

**ISSUE:** The EB-5 Regional Center Program (the "Program") authorization expires

on June 30, 2021. Long-term authorization by the U.S. Congress is needed to ensure the Program can achieve maximum economic impact and job creation by creating certainty in the marketplace.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports bipartisan federal legislation developed by Senator Grassley (R-IA) and Senator Leahy (D-VT) to reauthorize the EB-5 Regional Center Program for five years and to ensure any reform of the EB-5 Regional Center Program maintains the ability to deliver job-creating capital to American communities, avoids retroactive application of new law on matters already filed, allows for economic impact models to be used in measuring job creation and enhances program integrity measures.

See **RESOLUTIONS** page 10



# Protect pollinators, develop National Equity Map

From *RESOLUTIONS* page 9

## ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND LAND USE

### Enact the National Heritage Area Act to Establish Uniform Criteria, Oversight, Accountability and Funding Stability for congressionally designated National Heritage Areas

**ISSUE:** Currently, 591 counties across the country are home to 55 National Heritage Areas (NHAs) authorized by Congress. The NHA request begins at the local level and is presented by a member of the State's Congressional delegation for authorization by Congress. The authorization assists counties and provides funding stability to improve the local economy, quality of life, and tax base through locally controlled public-private partnerships which foster investment in historic preservation and natural resource conservation. Thirty of these NHAs need reauthorization in 2021, with most others facing the same

prospect in the next few years. The National Heritage Area Act will replace this haphazard system of individual reauthorizations with a standardized, nationwide program. In December 2020, similar legislation was approved by the U.S. House on a bipartisan voice vote but was not acted on by the Senate.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to pass the National Heritage Area Act of 2021, as it will assist counties to enhance their historic, cultural and natural resources.

### Protect and Enhance Pollinator Species and their Habitat throughout our Nation's Counties

**ISSUE:** Farmers depend on pollinator species such as bees, butterflies, moths, hoverflies, flower beetles, pollen wasps, some birds, and some bats to successfully produce approximately one-third of all United States agricultural output. Pollinators play a crucial role in the production of fibers, edible oils, medicines, and other products. Given the breadth, severity, and persistence of alarming pollinator losses, it

is critical that the federal government work collaboratively with state and local officials to expand efforts to reverse pollinator losses and help restore populations to healthy levels.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports federal efforts to protect pollinators by working collaboratively with state and local officials on best management practices to enhance pollinator-friendly habitat and encourages our federal partners to provide education, technical assistance, conservation efforts and incentives to conserve pollinators' health.

### Include Local Government Entities within CWA Section 404 Permitting Exclusions

**ISSUE:** The Clean Water Act (CWA) provides an exemption from permitting under Section 404 for normal ongoing silvicultural activities and operations, provided that they follow the recommendations provided by the respective State Department of Environmental Quality.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

(EPA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) to include local government public works general maintenance and repair projects in Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting exclusions.

### Development a National Equity Map

**ISSUE:** Access to geographic data at a scale and resolution is the framework for policy decisions. It is critical that accurate data is available to develop policies on current county issues, such as social inequity accentuated by civil unrest, the COVID-19 pandemic, and climate change. Scientific data has highlighted the extent of social stratification by race and class, leading to social and environmental injustice disproportionately impacting people of color, indigenous people, and those living in poverty.

Understanding the distribution and nuances underpinning these inequities is vital to addressing them. A National Equity Map would enable Counties to assess whether and to what extent underserved communities face systemic barriers in accessing benefits and opportunities from County policies and programs.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports the following federal efforts to develop a national equity map to provide accurate data and geographic information at a scale and resolution that helps ensure evidence-based policy decisions on social and environmental equity at a local level:

Executive Order 14008, Section 222(a), which requires the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, within 6 months of the date of this order, to create a geospatial Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool and annually publish interactive maps highlighting disadvantaged communities. And

S. 101- 117th Congress (2021-2022): A bill to establish the Environmental Justice Mapping Committee and for other purposes.

## FINANCE, PENSIONS AND INTER-

## GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

### Revise IRS Code to Enhance Private Sector Investments in Growing County Economies

**ISSUE:** Federal income taxability of government economic development grants is disincentivizing businesses and developers from investing in our counties.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to eliminate the federal taxation of government grants as contributions to the capital of a business under Section 118 of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC), to enhance public and private sector investments in growing and revitalizing county economies.

### Make State and Local Governments Eligible to Receive Payroll Tax Credits Authorized Under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act

**ISSUE:** Under current law, state and local governments are not eligible to receive the emergency paid leave payroll tax credit established under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to immediately pass a legislative fix in future COVID-19 response proposals that would extend the emergency leave payroll tax credit to state and local governments.

## HEALTH

### Prioritize Racial Health Equity in a National COVID-19 Vaccination Program

**ISSUE:** The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted minority and low-income communities, and emerging research indicates the share of vaccinations among those communities is smaller than their share of cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to prioritize racial health equity

See *RESOLUTIONS* page 11





# Funding needed for mental health programs, veterans

From *RESOLUTIONS* page 10

ty as a central component of a national COVID-19 vaccine program. NACo further urges Congress to enact additional emergency supplemental appropriations to fund coordination among federal, state, county, local and tribal government to ensure Black, LatinX, Native, immigrant and other communities of color have equitable access to vaccines; address the legitimate concerns of communities of color who have low confidence in the government and scientific community due to consistently poor health outcomes as well as historical and systematic mistreatment; strengthen local and community-based public health infrastructure; encourage comprehensive, research-based communications campaigns to address misinformation in minority communities regarding the vaccines; and expand, train and sustain a community-based workforce to aid in vaccine distribution.

## Fund Creative Arts Therapies for Treating Veterans

**ISSUE:** The U.S. House defense appropriations bill includes language to support increased support for creative arts therapies for treating U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) service members with traumatic brain injuries and psychological health conditions. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appropriations bill also has language to support creative arts therapies for military veterans and includes \$5 million for creative arts therapies in treating veterans through the VA's Whole Health initiative.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to fund creative arts therapies for treating service members and veterans with traumatic brain injuries and psychological health conditions within the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) appropriations bill and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) appropriation bill. NACo supports the first-time funding of \$5 million for creative arts therapies in

treating veterans through the VA's Whole Health initiative, and further, building upon FY 2020 language and appropriations, supports the expansion of DOD and VA programs to provide clinical services and other care to service members and veterans in all counties, parishes and boroughs.

## Address the Impact of COVID-19 on Community Violence

**ISSUE:** Examining the adverse impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on domestic violence.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to direct the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), to provide a comprehensive joint study to Congressional Committees of jurisdiction on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on community violence including the collection and analysis of gun sales as well as intimate partner and domestic violence data. NACo also reaffirms its call to Congress for continued funding to collect community violence data, research to better understand the causes of community violence, and development of

prevention strategies to limit community violence.

## Support Mental Health Funding and Programs

**ISSUE:** Robust funding for mental health programs is needed now more than ever as the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on many Americans' mental health and well-being since its onset.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the administration to prioritize mental health care that enhances counties' ability to provide local systems of care by: (1) increasing federal funding for mental health programs under the Department of Health and Human Service's (HHS's) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and (2) supporting a set-aside mental health fund for state, county, and other local governments in addition to regularly appropriated funding for the aforementioned mental health programs to specifically address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health and substance abuse within their jurisdictions.

## Crisis Response Methods for People

## with Behavioral Health Conditions or Developmental Disabilities

**ISSUE:** Without adequately resourced crisis response systems in place, counties rely heavily on law enforcement staff and institutionalization, especially through jails and prisons, with the result being cost burden to public systems and poor outcomes for people in crisis.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports federal policy that would assist counties through funding and technical assistance, in addressing behavioral health crises by implementing the following: 1) crisis first responders with specialized skills and training, including social workers and mental health professionals, who can alert law enforcement as needed (e.g., the CAHOOTS model); 2) Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training required for law enforcement; 3) 24-hour walk-in crisis centers, accessible to all whether brought by a peer, family member, police officer or on their own, where a person in crisis or pre-crisis can obtain the resources they need to alleviate or avert the crisis; and 4) trained and certified peer supporters and peer mentors to respond at the scene of crisis, in crisis centers, and as part of

follow-up. In addition to support for the community-level interventions above, we urge the federal government to support the development and continuation of virtual platforms for crisis response teams.

## Address Toxic Exposure for Veterans

**ISSUE:** Approximately 3.5 million veterans have been exposed to burn pits that spewed toxic fumes and carcinogens into the air, but most struggle to prove the direct service connection necessary to be eligible for VA benefits to cover the associated diseases. The result is a delay in critical medical care and other supports for former servicemembers, an increase in the workload of resource-strapped County Veteran Service Officers tasked with connecting veterans to federal benefits, and the potential to shift the responsibility of providing healthcare and other services to county systems.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to pass legislation ensuring veterans who served near burn pits receive VA health coverage and disability benefits for associated medical conditions by eliminating or easing the direct service connection requirement and in-

See *RESOLUTIONS* page 12





# Expand the arts, support nutrition programs

From RESOLUTIONS page 11

vesting in additional research.

## HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION

### Provide the Resources Necessary for Developing and Expanding Arts and Cultural Programming in Counties

**ISSUE:** The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is the only arts funder in America, public or private, that supports the arts in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. Most counties across the country benefit from an NEA grant. The Challenge America funding category specifically offers support for projects that extend the reach of the arts to populations whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, economics, or disability. The Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY 2021 provided a \$5.25 million increase to the National Endowment for the Arts for national grant making as well as waiver language that allows FY 2019 and FY 2020 grants to be used for general operating support, as requested by arts advocates.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to continue to provide the resources necessary for developing and expanding arts and cultural programming in counties, parishes and boroughs throughout the U.S. NACo supports funding in Fiscal Year 2022 at \$167.5 million or above for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to ensure that counties can continue to access these important federal funds. Counties also propose maintained or increased funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Arts Education grant program within the U.S. Department of Education.

### Update the Thrifty Food Plan Used to Calculate Benefits for the Supplemental

## Nutrition Assistance Program

**ISSUE:** Serving as the foundation for calculating Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) is used by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to portray what a “minimal cost,” nutritionally adequate food plan entails for different households, reflecting age and gender. It is based on assumptions about dietary needs, actual consumption patterns, and food prices. While benefits are tied to inflation adjustments, the underlying TFP has not been revised since 2006.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports a thorough review and updates to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) to account for the cost of food more accurately, dietary needs, purchasing patterns and regional differences in food costs, housing and medical care, which affect the purchasing power of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

### Guarantee Access to Federal Child Nutrition Programs

**ISSUE:** Current federal child nutrition programs do not adequately

meet the needs of children experiencing food insecurity, which negatively impacts their learning, physical health and overall wellbeing.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to pass legislation that would guarantee all children have access to breakfast, lunch and snacks at school, in child care and during the summer months at no cost. Congress must ensure that Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) and participating childcare providers receive adequate funding and reimbursement to implement this program and meet rigorous nutrition standards, to remove administrative and resource barriers that block children in accessing the nutrition they need to thrive. We encourage Congress to additionally promote partnerships with local agricultural producers to incorporate healthy ingredients into school meals.

## JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Oppose Proposed Changes in the Public Assistance Program Until the COVID-19 Crisis is Resolved

**ISSUE:** Just prior to the

change of Administration, FEMA released new rules for public comment that if adopted, significantly change the threshold calculation of eligibility for a Presidential declaration of disaster and for Public Assistance grant program funding. This shifts the financial burden of disaster recovery and directly impact the financial risks to local government and were made without input from local subject matter experts.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo opposes drastic, sudden or dramatic changes to the disaster Public Assistance qualification rules until the COVID-19 crisis and recovery are completed. NACo urges the President to require the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to involve local and state Emergency Management subject matter experts in the development of future necessary changes to the Public Assistance eligibility calculations. This involvement must be during the formation of the proposed policy rule change if the change requires local and state government to significantly change their operating methods or fiscal responsibilities in disasters.

## Fund the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Incentive Grants at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

**ISSUE:** Both the U.S. House and Senate bills include language calling on the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) to include arts-based juvenile justice programs among its strategies.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress to provide \$61.5 million funding to the Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) for the purposes of including arts-based juvenile justice programs among its strategies and expanding existing programming for justice-involved youth in all counties, parishes and boroughs.

## Direct the U.S. Department of Justice to Provide Increased Funding to Local Law Enforcement for the Procurement of Body Cameras

**ISSUE:** In light of recent and historic events, increased transparency into the operations of police officers and departments has become necessary for the safety of both the alleged offender and officer. Especially in heavily policed communities, body cameras can increase the accountability of police officers, as well as protect officers from false allegations. While the majority of law enforcement agree that body cameras are a helpful tool that can be used to promote equity, procuring this equipment can be a challenge due to local funding constraints.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports increased funding through the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance to local law enforcement for the procurements of body cameras.

## PUBLIC LANDS

### County Approval in Land and Water



See RESOLUTIONS page 13



From RESOLUTIONS page 12

Conservation Fund Implementation

**ISSUE:** The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) allows federal agencies to acquire private land and water, or an interest in private land and water, to be made public without input or approval from local government.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports a policy requiring the written approval of the local jurisdictional county or county government-equivalent for the federal acquisition of land, water, or an interest in land or water under the federal LWCF program and will work to ensure that the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal agencies will seek written approval from jurisdictional county governments prior to acquiring private lands.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

Ensure the Participation of County Officials in the Development and Implementation of Broadband Expansion Efforts

**ISSUE:** County officials are uniquely positioned to advise and help facilitate digital connectivity for urban, rural, and tribal jurisdictions for which long-standing connectivity inequities have been made more acute by the COVID-19 pandemic. The expansion of broadband internet will require resources from all levels of government but foremost will require the integration of local government in establishing the programmatic components that will successfully implement connectivity for all communities.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and involved federal agencies to commit to the inclusion and engagement of county officials in the earliest phases of the strategic planning and expansion of broadband services and access.

TRANSPORTATION

Direct the U.S. Department of Transportation to Reinstate the Local Labor Hiring Preference Pilot Program

**ISSUE:** Since 1986, the federal regulation in 2 CFR part 200.319(c) has prevented recipients of federal grant money from including provisions that require or incentivize contractors to hire a portion of workers from communities around a given infrastructure project. At the time, the rationale for prohibiting local hire incentives was that such provisions could reduce the number of bidders on projects, resulting in an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars. However, no empirical evidence was ever cited to back up this assertion and Congress itself has never prohibited local hire.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo urges the U.S. Department of Transportation to reinstate the Local Labor Hiring Preference Pilot Program that will enable counties to evaluate the impacts of utilizing certain local contracting requirements on the competitive bidding process.

Support Local Preference Programs on Federally Funded Transportation & Infrastructure Projects

**ISSUE:** Federal restrictions on Local Preference Programs prohibit counties from including race- and gender-neutral geographic preferences in solicitation packages when any federal funding is involved.

**PROPOSED POLICY:** NACo supports the use of Local Preference Programs to encourage the procurement of services from local businesses competing for suitable contracting opportunities. NACo urges Congress to waive the prohibition against local preferences in federal grant programs funded as part of COVID-19-related transportation and infrastructure bills, where counties bring at least a 25 percent local match to the federally funded project.

BULLETIN

\$1.9 Trillion AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Important information for three+one clients regarding the latest round of federal aid from three+one’s Director of Public Partnerships, Bill Cherry:

The latest federal aid package includes \$65.1 billion going directly to counties, and another \$65.1 billion earmarked for cities, towns and villages. Also included is \$130 billion for K-12 schools, \$40 billion for colleges and public universities, and \$30 billion for public transit. Provided below is our initial interpretation for three+one clients of the allowable uses of the funds. We will continue to rely on our partners at the National Association of Counties (NACo), and the guidelines soon to be issued by the U.S. Treasury Department and the U.S. Department of Education for more detailed information as it becomes available.

ALLOWABLE USES OF FUNDS:

- **COVID EXPENSES:** Municipalities and public entities will be allowed to use the funds to cover any public-health expenses related to COVID-19, or to pay for any mitigation efforts related to stopping or slowing the spread of the pandemic.
- **COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE:** The funds can be used to offset the negative impacts to the community and its businesses brought about by the health crisis. This could include grants to small businesses and not-for-profit organizations, rental and homeowner assistance, help for tourism and a wide range of similar recovery programs.
- **PREMIUM PAY FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS:** The



funds can be used to offer “Premium Pay” to public employees who have been designated as “Essential Workers.” These funds can also be transferred to the private sector through grants in order for businesses to offer Premium Pay to their essential workers. There will be a cap of no more than a \$13 per hour bonus per employee, with a limit of no more than \$25,000 going to any single individual.

- **LOSS OF REVENUES:** The funds can be used to offset the loss of revenues brought about by the pandemic. For example, if a municipality’s sales-tax receipts were lower in 2020 than they were in 2019, funds from the American Rescue Plan could be used to fill in that revenue gap. The U.S. Treasury may also require data that shows a reduction in government services related to the corresponding dip in revenues, but that is not completely clear at this point.

- **INFRASTRUCTURE:** The funds can be used for infrastructure projects such as broadband expansion or improvements, water and sewer system improvements, and other similar infrastructure projects that are not necessarily directly related to COVID-19. Additional guidance from the U.S. Treasury, when it is issued, is expected to further clarify these types of

allowable expenditures.

A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF A PROHIBITED USE:

- **NO PENSION EXPENSES:** The funds cannot be used to pay for public or private employee pension-fund contributions or costs.

There may be other prohibited uses of American Rescue Plan funds. Rest assured, we will constantly monitor the U.S. Treasury website in order to provide our three+one clients with the most recent information.

We are expecting our valued municipal and public-entity clients to see an **inflow of about \$1 billion in cash** within the next 60 days. And about 12 months from now, we expect to see a second \$1 billion infusion going to these same clients. That is an enormous amount of liquidity that must be managed with the same due diligence and fiduciary oversight that our clients have already been using to manage their other public funds.

We have expanded our three+one team and added new technologies in order to be fully prepared to seamlessly assist our clients with this once-in-a-lifetime funding opportunity. Keep in mind that by maximizing the interest income of these funds while they are in your custody, your municipality and your community can get an even bigger “bang for the buck.” It is also important to remember that **three+one’s services are considered to be an allowable expense** under the latest U.S. Treasury guidelines.



‘I don’t think this kind of funding comes along very often, not even every few generations’

From RESCUE PLAN page 2

the bill’s implementation and one year after their first disbursement. All must be spent before Dec. 31, 2024.

“I don’t think this kind of funding comes along very often, not even every few generations,” Haywood County, N.C. Manager Bryant Morehead told the Smoky Mountain News. “I’ve been in government 20 years and don’t ever remember getting \$12 million from the federal government. We owe it to taxpayers to spend this money wisely.”

Well before the money arrives in counties’ coffers, they are formulating plans about where it will go. Indiana County, Pa., due to receive \$16.3 million, is eying broadband expansion. Frederick County, Md. (\$50.3 million) is planning to bolster services for mental health, addiction and health disparities. Vanderburgh County, Ind. is forming a “Road to Recovery” committee to determine how to spend its \$35.2 million.

Counties are still assessing

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

A sample of county allocations

COUNTY	EST. ALLOCATION	2019 POPULATION
Westchester County, N.Y. ....	\$187.6 million.....	967,506
Denton County, Texas .....	\$172 million.....	887,207
Hamilton County, Ohio .....	\$158.5 million.....	817,473
Jefferson Parish, La. ....	\$83.9 million.....	432,493
Clearfield County, Pa. ....	\$15.4 million.....	79,255
Laurel County, Ky. ....	\$11.8 million.....	60,813
Sweetwater County, Wyo. ....	\$8.2 million.....	42,343
Hancock County, W.Va.....	\$5.6 million.....	28,810
Jones County, Iowa.....	\$4 million.....	20,681
Liberty County, Fla. ....	\$1.6 million.....	8,345

Source: NACo Counties Futures Lab, from U.S. House of Representatives and Congressional Research Service

their needs and strategizing the optimal use for the funding.

“At this point we have more questions than answers,” said Carol Muller, administrative officer for the Minnehaha County, S.D. Commission. “The county wants to ensure that dollars expended will meet guidelines and the highest priorities that exist. As an example, we are

gathering what our municipalities will be receiving as we want to ensure efforts are not duplicated.”

NACo Executive Director Matt Chase applauded the House and Senate for passing the State and Local Coronavirus Fiscal Recovery Funds and thanked President Biden for signing the bill into law.

“The legislation recognizes counties’ vast responsibilities to care for our most vulnerable residents – our sick, unemployed, elderly and youth,” he said. “For too long, the pressing challenges and needs facing our counties have outstripped our depleted local resources.”

Chase noted that the bill’s passage affirmed a strong fed-

eral-state-local partnership, and with it, an investment in counties on the front lines and a commitment to defeating this pandemic and its resulting economic devastation.

“While counties face record demand for essential services, we have shed jobs at rates far outpacing the rest of the economy,” he said. “Even as the nation’s economy inches toward recovery, one in every 10 jobs yet to be recovered is from our local governments.”

“The American Rescue Plan advances us on the road to recovery, honors our frontline heroes and equips us to help end the pandemic and drive economic recovery,” Chase said.

“With the critical aid in this bill, we will now be able to strengthen our communities by investing in small businesses and nonprofits, vaccine distribution, public health and safety, human services, especially for those suffering from domestic violence, mental illnesses and substance use disorders and much-needed infrastructure, including broadband.” **CN**

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES

NACo

DETAILS COMING SOON!

SAVE THE DATE

2021 NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JULY 9-12

IN-PERSON AND VIRTUAL

PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, MD.



## NetSmart NACo

## SOLUTIONS SPOTLIGHT

## Technology platform will maximize effectiveness of Bernalillo County

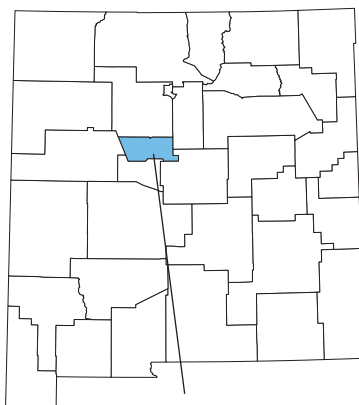
*'Soft landing spot' offers reconnection to community*

The rate of serious mental illness in jails is three to six times higher compared to the general population, according to a report from the Council of State Governments Justice Center. When persons with a mental illness or a substance use disorder are released from detention, they are often reincarcerated at a later time, in part because they do not receive the necessary behavioral health care and other life-changing services that could help prevent their re-entry into the justice system.

Bernalillo County, N.M. experienced these trends and moved proactively and intentionally to successfully transition justice-involved individuals back into their communities. Through its Behavioral Health Initiative, the county developed a variety of programs tailored to address not only mental health, but also physical health and social determinants of health (SDoH).

One of Bernalillo County's most notable initiatives is its Resource Re-Entry Center, an award-winning program built to reduce recidivism and connect individuals with behavioral health needs to resources upon release from jail. Nearly 50 people enter the center daily as their first stop after being released from the county's detention center.

"Our Resource Re-Entry Center is that soft landing spot for folks to get connected to services," said Margarita Chavez-Sanchez, M.S., Director, Bernalillo County Department of Behavioral Health Services. "Case managers and transition planners are available to connect individuals to long-term supportive services."

**Single technology platform for informed decisions**

Bernalillo County, N.M.

Technology and data-sharing are critical at the Resource Re-Entry Center, allowing staff to coordinate care, make informed decisions at the point of care and seamlessly facilitate referrals to community partners. Initially, staff was using a separate electronic record for mental health services and tracking information on Excel spreadsheets.

Recognizing the efficiencies and integration capabilities of a single, consolidated technology platform for the Resource Re-Entry Center, the Bernalillo County Department of Behavioral Health Services is partnering with Netsmart to implement their CareManager platform.

**Making a difference**

Transition planning begins at booking, starting with assessment and other pertinent information being sent electronically to the platform. The CareManager platform will consolidate all authorized information about persons transitioning through the Resource Re-Entry Center into a single view, with the ability to drill down to more details.

"This will enable transition planners to review information prior to meeting with persons transitioning through the Resource Re-Entry Center, creating a seamless transition from jail to the re-entry center and then into the community. Not

only will it be valuable for the transition planners and case managers, it will also give the individuals being served a much better experience and minimize the need to retell their story," said Julie Hiett, Netsmart senior director of Population Health Management.

Using a single platform will also eliminate data siloes and empower a more holistic and "whole-person" view within the system. This view is more than a convenience for Bernalillo case managers; it will also ensure data does not get missed and will help reduce treatment redundancies.

The platform will allow Bernalillo County case managers to see a variety of data, assessments and care plans from the time a person is booked into the jail all the way through their arrival at the Resource Re-Entry Center. They also plan to integrate the platform with both Bernalillo County jail IT systems, improving efficiencies and client experience.

A total of 12,468 persons met with Resource Re-Entry Center case managers in 2020 after being released from incarceration. Referrals (including follow-up) are made to a variety of community-based providers for behavioral health services, housing, transportation, education and training, medical care and more.

With comprehensive data that will be available at their fingertips from the Netsmart CareManager platform, county case managers will be able to spend quality time with those they meet with and make informed referral decisions based on a person's unique circumstances.

The ultimate goal: Provide the support needed to help persons stabilize, stay healthy, regain self-sufficiency and break the cycle of recidivism.

## NACo-NATIONWIDE SCHOLARSHIP 2021 APPLICATIONS OPEN SOON



Are you the parent, grandparent or legal guardian of a high school senior? If you have an active account funded by employee dollars to a 457(b) Plan offered through the NACo Deferred Compensation Program, your student is eligible to apply for one of four \$2,500 college scholarships. Scholarships will be awarded in the fall of 2021.

In its 18th year of existence, the NACo/Nationwide scholarship essay contest is an educational opportunity for high school students transitioning into a new stage of their lives. Engaging young people in civic life and responsibilities is a great way to show high school students the valuable roles that counties play in the lives of their residents. The 2021 scholarship program's goal is to help ensure that young people get involved and stay involved in local government — and understand the importance of being good stewards of their future finances.

To help students consider the importance of saving early and consistently, students are asked to write an essay that answers the following question:

The pandemic has changed the way we interact and engage with each other on a daily basis. As it relates to our counties and jurisdictions in America, it has accelerated planned initiatives to explore various mediums of access to reach current and future customers. Due to this new reality, what are three creative and strategic ways that you would recommend in preparing and securing financial wellness in this new digital world? Please incorporate technology options as well as forms of education and access into your response.

**Eligibility requirements**

Graduating high school seniors who are legal U.S. res-



idents are eligible to apply. Please keep the following criteria in mind:

- The applicant's parent, grandparent or legal guardian must be enrolled in and have a current employee funded 457(b) Plan offered through the NACo Deferred Compensation Program.
- Applicants must enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study no later than the autumn term of the 2021-2022 school year or at an accredited trade school or two-year or four-year college.
- Immediate family members of NACo employees, members of the NACo Defined Contribution and Retirement Advisory Committee or its governing board of directors, staff of individual state Association of Counties that are members of the LLC and Nationwide employees are not eligible to apply; this program is not offered outside the United States.
- The application can be submitted online starting April 1 at [nrsforu.com/scholarship](https://nrsforu.com/scholarship). The deadline is May 31, 2021.

**41 years of partnership — and still going strong**

The NACo-Nationwide Scholarship is one of the many benefits available as a result of four decades of partnership between Nationwide and the National Association of Counties (NACo) and its member counties. For additional information about the NACo Deferred Compensation Program, please contact David Belnick at [belnid1@nationwide.com](mailto:belnid1@nationwide.com) or 410-790-5440, or contact your Nationwide representative at 1-877-677-3678.



# NACo Annual Meeting set in the DC metro area

From BOARD page 1

to counties was coming soon and thanked counties for their work championing the bill.

“We want to hear from you all, what are important things for the Treasury Department to keep in mind as we think about flexibilities around state and local funding,” she said. “What are the kinds of issues

“WE ARE PROUD TO WELCOME AND HOST THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES TO PRINCE GEORGE’S COUNTY, MD.”  
— LESLIE W. GRAVES

you are facing and the kinds of critical needs that you have that should be informing the next steps of our implementation?”

Though county officials were not able to make the trip to Washington, D.C. for the Legislative Conference, they’ll be roughly a mile away during the Annual Conference.

“We are proud to welcome and host the National Association of Counties to Prince George’s County, Md.,” said Leslie W. Graves, president and CEO of Experience Prince George’s.

“It is a pivotal time to come together through leadership, empowerment and great purpose. Throughout your visit, we encourage you to experience and enjoy the many unique amenities of our destination.”


Interest in an in-person conference began to grow as the country gets on track to vaccinate all adults by the end of May. The close proximity of Prince George’s County to NACo’s office in Washington, D.C. also played a role in the decision, as it is easier to plan and execute the conference without air travel in a short preparation time of three months.

The location is also suitable for bringing any federal officials to the conference to discuss federal COVID aid implementation and rulemaking.

NACo will offer a hybrid experience for both in-person and virtual participation, including for the Annual Business Meeting and second vice president election.

NACo will comply with any state or county public health measures.

NACo will reimagine the conference agenda and format to reduce the overall number of sessions and to maximize the use of the convention space for social distancing, COVID screening/testing and live streaming. A safe experience for members to the maximum extent possible will be ensured by including experienced conference organizers in the execution of the event.

The Annual Conference was originally scheduled to take place in Travis County (Austin), Texas, which will now play host to the 2023 conference. Chatham County (Savannah) Ga. will play host to the 2027 conference. 

## GET TO KNOW...

### Cameron County, Pa.

#### Welcome, Cameron County, Pa.

Cameron County is located in north-central Pennsylvania. The county is the smallest in the state by population and is one of the smallest counties in the state by land area. It was founded in 1860.

During World War II, the proximity fuse was invented in the county, which allowed bombs to explode at predetermined levels instead of on impact. The county also played a key role in producing dynamite used in constructing the Panama Canal.

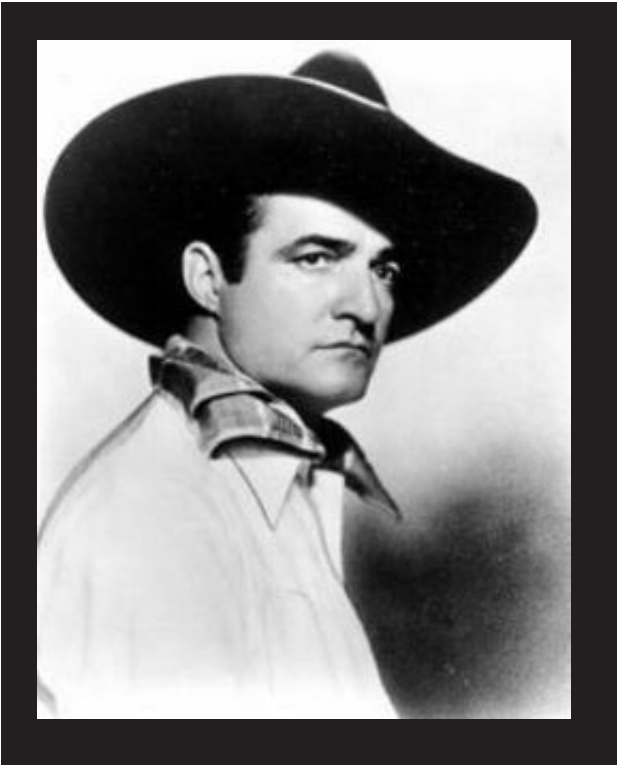
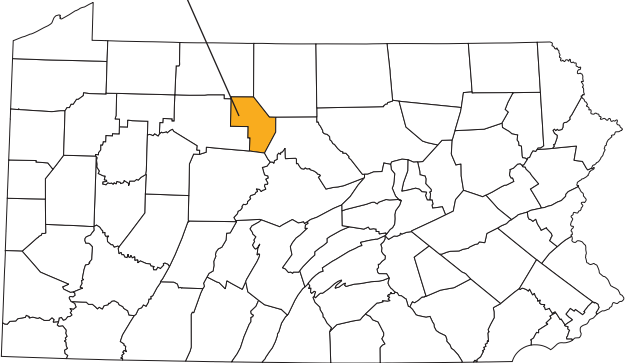
The county seat of Emporium was home to the Incandescent Lamp Company that later became known as Sylvania Electronics.

Presently, Cameron County is the heart of the powdered metal industry and is known for its natural beauty that attracts hunters, fishermen and nature enthusiasts.

Film Actor Tom Mix, who starred in many Western movies, was born in Cameron County.

**The flagstone surrounding the tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National cemetery was quarried from the county.**

“Get to Know” features new NACo member counties.



## WORD SEARCH

### CHATHAM COUNTY, Ga.

Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

**AIRPORT:** The county is home to the Savannah-Hilton Head International Airport.

**ATLANTIC:** The county is located on the Atlantic coast.

**BAPTIST:** The First African Baptist Church served as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

**BRITISH:** The county was occupied by the British in 1778 during the American Revolution.

**CUISINE:** Some of the most well-known culinary items on restaurant menus include fried green tomatoes and shrimp and grits.

**FILMS:** “Ford v Ferrari,” “Forrest Gump” and other films and TV shows have been made in the county.

**HISTORIC:** The county seat, Savannah, is one of the largest National Historic Landmark Districts in the country.

**PARADE:** One of the largest St. Patrick’s Day parades is held in the county each year.

**PARISH:** The county was formed in 1777, from Christ Church Parish and St. Philip Parish.

**PITT:** The county was named for William Pitt the Elder, earl of Chatham.

**POPULATION:** The county is home to nearly 300,000 people.

**PORT:** The Savannah River ports of Savannah and Garden City operated by the Georgia Ports Authority and Port Wentworth services ships from around the world.

**SAVANNAH:** The county seat.

**SCOUTS:** Juliette Gordon Low established the country’s first Girl Scout troop in the county in 1912.

**TREES:** The county is known for its live oaks.



PROFILES IN SERVICE

GREG PUCKETT

NACo Board Member  
County Commissioner  
Mercer County, W.Va.



Puckett

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

**Years in public service:** Six

**Occupation:** County commissioner and also executive director of a non-profit organization tasked with combating community-based issues around substance use disorders, poverty, access to services and quality of life.

**Education:** BA in Communication Arts from Concord College (now university) and numerous certifications and health impact strategy programs.

**The hardest thing I’ve ever done:** While it may not be the “hardest,” certainly being a county commissioner is the most challenging. Although I’m uniquely familiar with advocacy and policy development, it’s the negative rhetoric that has permeated the political spectrum that has created the most difficulty. People are afraid to move forward quickly and this causes a lot of second guessing and stagnation for fear of making the wrong move. Now the hardest thing? Knowing what you want and still not finding a way to get there.

**Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner:** Muhammad Ali, President Teddy Roosevelt and Tom Hanks. I think each would have a unique

perspective on life and how we should behave and treat others. Ali would be able to talk about the struggles of racial inequity and how standing up for something, no matter how difficult, can change the world. Teddy Roosevelt was the leader that we should aspire to be — committed to wanting more for others and leaving a legacy for the world to follow. Tom Hanks would be my favorite. I think his perspective on how to use the power of storytelling and the ability to connect with others on so many levels through his work beyond the silver screen would be life-changing.

**A dream I have is to:** Tour the country/world with good friends and good food. I want to enjoy the culture of others and be able to pass along some of the things I’ve learned to other communities. Secretly, I want to drive the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile for a year— so now that may not be a secret.

**You’d be surprised to learn:** I have acted in some movies, played professional basketball (at a minor level) and have visited 46 states.

**The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done:** Traveled extensively across the country many times. I don’t think I can narrow it down to one thing. It’s kind of a series of things that is explained by my restlessness for wanting more all the time.

**My favorite way to relax is:** Play basketball. It’s a little tougher these days, but it’s still a joy among joys. Other than that, it has to be travel.

**I’m most proud of:** So many things. Of course, being a dad to two of the greatest kids is the biggest blessing of all. My daughter, Lauren, will be heading off to Eckerd College to play volleyball and study marine science in the fall. My son, Joseph, is a freshman and a competitive swimmer. From there, I would say being swim coach has brought me a great deal of joy, especially in recent years. Not just for my own kids, but every one of the athletes that give me their time and effort.

**Every morning I read:** I give a quick scroll through Facebook and I read over the list of emails that have come through. I still like reading the paper and I always check my calendar for

the day.

**My favorite meal is:** It has to come with the scenery, but an amazing cheeseburger with some crinkle fries at the end of a hot summer day when the sun is going down and Jimmy Buffett is playing on the radio just can’t be beat.

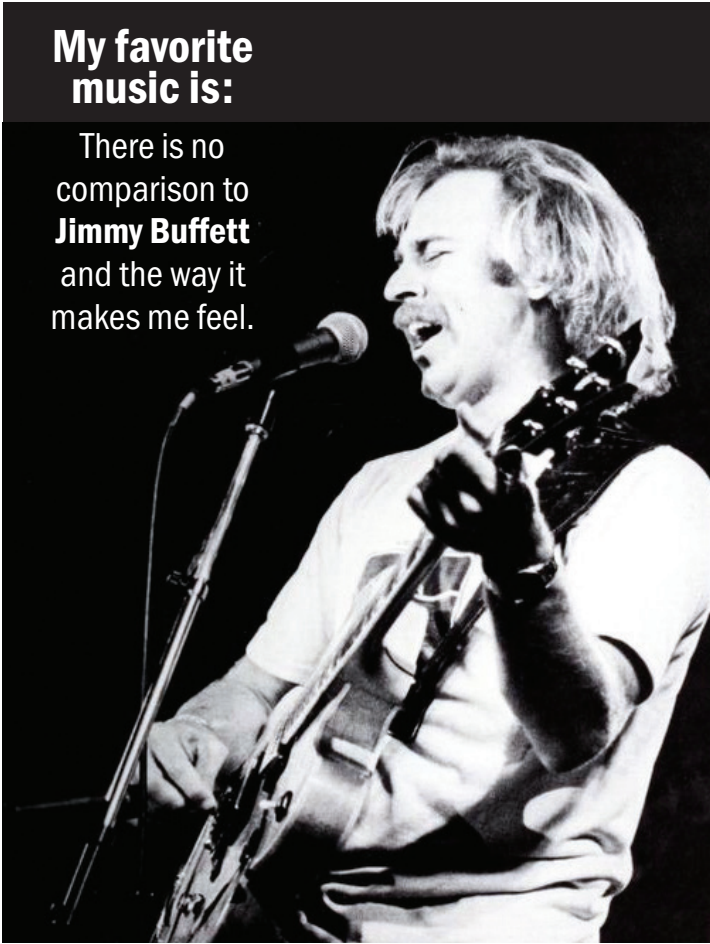
**My pet peeve is:** People not caring about their community. That’s very broad, but more specifically is mistreating their community by tossing out garbage or not keeping their property in good order.

**My motto is:** You can’t be yourself, when others tell you who you are. (I’ve had that since high school.)

**The last book I read was:** *One Life, One Legacy* by Justin Spencer

**My favorite movie is:** There are so many that I would like to say that are my favorite. I still gravitate back to *Parenthood* with Steve Martin. That movie had just about everything and related back to the confusion, joy, pain and comfort that is family.

**My favorite music is:** There is no comparison to Jimmy Buffett and the way it makes me feel. Of course, I also grew up on 45 records from the ‘60s and ‘70s, so the Beach Boys, Beatles, Sam Cooke, Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons, Queen and others had a big influence on me. Being an ‘80s kid also let me enjoy the



My favorite music is:  
There is no comparison to Jimmy Buffett and the way it makes me feel.

hair band years. These days, I think I’m chilling back to Kenny Chesney, the Zac Brown Band and a few more depending on the day.

**My favorite U.S. president:** Teddy Roosevelt. No doubt. He was such a leader and truly cared for the people. He would promote economic growth and still understand the value of protections of the environment. He was stubborn, but he worked across the aisle and governed by unity. I have always admired his tenaciousness.

**My county is a NACo member because:** The value of what we learn from others is incomparable. Not only can we share what we do, but we can learn from our peers in a way that creates comfort in knowing that others have ventured there before us. Don’t get me wrong, I like being innovative where we can, but it’s easier to move forward faster, knowing that we can do something when it’s already been tried and tested elsewhere. Being a member also helps bring accountability and trust in other levels. It’s being part of a movement and having a voice of unity and being part of committees. It is not partisan. It’s about working together to show that local government, if given the authority, the fiscal means and the intestinal fortitude can be the driving force that creates change and, in today’s climate, saves lives.



OSCEOLA COUNTY, Fla.

The Osceola County seal evolved as a result of the county’s 1987 Centennial Celebration. Local artist Barni McIntire designed the seal. McIntire used her own stylized “old timey” lettering around its border and horizontal lines throughout to give the design the feeling of a wood carving. County commissioners later modified the seal to be used as the everyday logo for vehicles, buildings and letterheads.



The oval-shaped seal features a paddle wheel boat to signify the county’s first transportation.

Clouds, water and the sun depict the county’s beautiful weather.

The sun was later replaced by the Spaceship Earth sphere to symbolize Epcot, a theme park at Walt Disney World Resort.

In the background of the seal, the county courthouse is surrounded by oak trees.

There are silhouettes of Cabbage palms and cowboys toward the front of the seal.

If you would like your county’s seal featured in “Behind the Seal,” contact Rachel Looker at [rlooker@naco.org](mailto:rlooker@naco.org).



# NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION



## MISSOURI

• The health department in **AUDRAIN COUNTY** used a local airport to hold a mass vaccination event. Through a partnership with the Missouri National Guard, the City of Mexico and the county, the health department aided in the mass vaccination site and distributed 2,500 available vaccines to individuals over the age of 65 and adults with high-risk conditions. Cars lined the runway to receive a dose of the vaccine.

## CALIFORNIA

• Supervisors in **SAN DIEGO COUNTY** launched the **Mobile Crisis Response Team** to help those experiencing mental health or substance use crises. The pilot program provides an alternative to individuals who are experiencing behavioral health crises and do not need law enforcement intervention. Through the Mobile Crisis Response Team, individuals may receive crisis intervention, triage and assessment services as well as be connected to additional care.

• The Transportation Commission in **VENTURA COUNTY** launched a **free emergency roadside assistance program** for vehicles disabled on certain freeways throughout the county. The Freeway Service Patrol Program includes assistance and free tows for broken-down

vehicles, the *Ventura County Star* reported. The goal of the program is to keep motorists safe and reduce congestion on freeways.



## FLORIDA

**BAY COUNTY** and **OKALOOSA COUNTY** have formed a partnership to help the region's **artificial reef program**. Artificial reefs were deployed last year off Bay County's coast to grow the reef system. Okaloosa County is now helping with the project to monitor the artificial reefs, collect data and keep the systems healthy, WMBB reported. The collaboration helps improve the environment along the coast.

## INDIANA

Commissioners in **ALLEN COUNTY** approved a resolution opposing a state bill affecting zoning approval for commercial solar and wind

energy projects. The state bill sets standards for installing wind and solar infrastructure. Commissioners oppose the legislation because it supersedes local regulations and allows projects to be completed without county oversight, allowing wind turbines and solar panels to be placed without local approval. More than half of Indiana's counties passed similar resolutions.

## MARYLAND

• Libraries in **ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY** are helping the elderly, individuals with disabilities and those without

internet **schedule COVID-19 vaccine appointments**. Librarians help library patrons utilize computers and access the county's website where they can sign up for a registration list or create an account with local hospitals to schedule a vaccine appointment, WBAL-TV reported.

## MICHIGAN

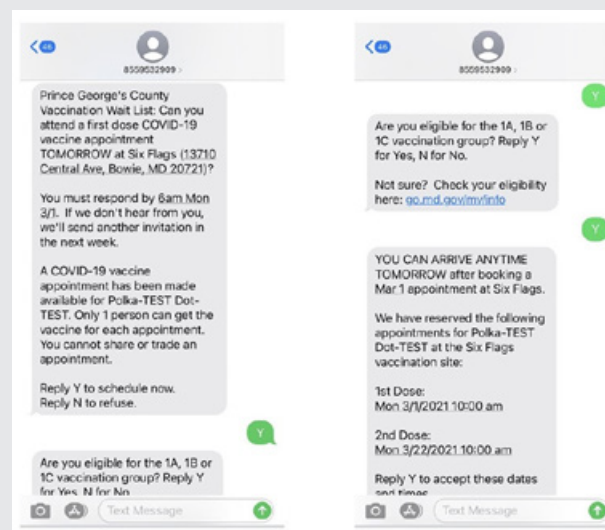
• The health department in **ST. CLAIR COUNTY** launched a **new software tool to notify those who test positive** for COVID-19. The Patient Education Genius tool helps support investigations and prioritize

disease outbreaks, according to *The Times Herald*. The system alerts individuals who test positive for the virus and sends a link to an online survey to identify close contacts.

• **WAYNE COUNTY** is using new technology to **prevent the spread of COVID-19 in jails**. The Integrated Viral Protection unit uses technology to disinfect the air. The county's William Dickerson Detention Facility is the first in the country to receive the device, which has been used in schools, hospitals and entertainment venues, CBS Detroit reported.

## MARYLAND

• State officials in Maryland expanded a text-based outreach program to **book vaccine appointments** for **PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY** residents at the mass vaccination site at Six Flags America. At least 500 appointments at the site have been set aside for county residents to ensure vaccine equity in addition to what residents can schedule online or over the phone, WUSA reported. The appointment tool notifies residents three times over several days about receiving a vaccine at the mass vaccination site and has a response rate as high as 96 percent.





## MINNESOTA

Childcare providers in **BECKER COUNTY** affected by COVID-19 are now eligible for **\$1,000 relief grants** through the Emergency Relief Grant program. Certified child care centers and family child care providers are eligible for the \$1,000 emergency child assistance grant. The funds come from a state grant that the county received to develop grant programs for businesses impacted by COVID-19.



## NEW JERSEY

Concerned for what it would mean for a nearby natural area, the **WARREN COUNTY** Board of Commissioners passed a resolution opposing a **plan to limit rockfalls** along I-80. The state Department of Transportation says a .4 mile stretch of the interstate has the highest rockfall risk in the state, but strategies to prevent falling rock include blasting it away or anchoring it with mesh, and barriers and fencing can be put up to block debris from reaching the road, both of which would destroy the natural beauty of the Delaware Water Gap, WFMZ News reported.

## MISSOURI

• A new program in **ST. LOUIS COUNTY** is **bringing COVID-19 vaccines to residents' doors**. The county is partnering with fire districts to distribute vaccines to those who are homebound and unable to go to a clinic or appointment. Officials are working with referral agencies to ensure all those who are qualified can receive a vaccine in their home.

## NEVADA

• Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D) introduced a bill that **opens up a large stretch of federal public land in CLARK COUNTY** for commercial and residential development. The bill would also conserve 2 million acres of public land as wilderness, including 1.3 million acres of the Desert National Wildlife Refuge, the *Nevada Independent* reported. The bill was developed in consultation with the county over several years.

## NEW YORK

• Inmates in the **ONTARIO COUNTY** Jail are being paired with **shelter dogs** in a program called Jail and T.A.I.L.S. (Teaching Animals and Inmates Life Skills). Dogs and their potential handlers are selected based on their temperament. The inmates teach the dogs obedience, socialization and behavior skills to prepare them for finding a new home, and in return, the inmates gain new skills, which the *Democrat and Chronicle* said could help with getting a job in the animal care field or the experience can provide a positive reference for a job in an unrelated field.

• While the lessons are fresh in their minds, the **TIOGA COUNTY** legislators passed a **pandemic operations plan** to prepare for the potential that county employees will have to work remotely again because of a public health threat. The plan

outlines who can do their jobs from home and how to access resources to do so seamlessly, WENY News reported.

## PENNSYLVANIA

**CAMBRIA COUNTY** has launched a **county-wide notification system**. Cambria Alert and Response Engagement System, or CARES, will alert residents to emergency situations such as weather or natural disasters, and will be able to target specific geographic areas when issuing alerts.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

**ANDERSON COUNTY** is forming its own **ride-on demand** program, "Point-to-Point Transportation." The county is trying to get non-profits and people on board to become contractors as drivers. County leaders are hoping to cover most costs with grant funding. The project will likely start with a pilot program that provides transportation to veterans, WSPA News reported.

## TENNESSEE

The General Assembly is advancing a bill that would take **local health officials' authorities** and give them to county mayors. WJHL reported that the bill would limit county boards of health to an advisory role if a public health emergency is declared by the county mayor. In that situation, the county board of health would advise the mayor regarding the adoption and enforcement of any rules or regulations.

## TEXAS

• **HARRIS COUNTY** has **sued the Texas Department of Transportation** to stop expansion of

I-45. The lawsuit seeks to have a court remand the project back to TxDOT to consider the environmental impact and add local community and stakeholder input into the process. Houston Public Media reported that the project has received opposition from people worried about noise, air pollution and displacement, as the project requires new rights-of-way that locals say could force the relocation of homes and businesses along the corridor. The Federal Highway Administration has joined the effort, citing civil rights concerns in its request that the state halt the project.

• Texas Attorney Gen. Ken Paxton has sued **TRAVIS COUNTY** and the city of Austin over **local mask mandates**, in violation of Gov. Greg Abbott's (R) statewide orders lifting all coronavirus measures. Although the statewide orders claim to supersede "any conflicting order" on the local level, Austin and Travis County officials argue that these continued mandates are legal, because, according to the Texas Health and Safety Code, there are rules that allow municipalities to issue re-

quirements protecting public health, Eater reported.

## VIRGINIA

**LOUISA COUNTY** is planning to **provide fiber broadband access** to every household and business within five years through a partnership with Dominion Energy, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative and a subsidiary of the Central Virginia Electric Cooperative. *The Central Virginian* reported that the effort was funded through federal and state grants and county government assistance.

*News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. Does your county have news we should know about? Contact cban@naco.org and rlooker@naco.org.*

## WASHINGTON

The **KING COUNTY** Council passed an ordinance giving grocery store workers in unincorporated parts of the county \$4 per hour in **hazard pay**. The ordinance exempts independently owned stores in areas that have been historically underserved.

## NEVADA

• When **WASHINGTON COUNTY** Regional Animal Services did a routine microchip scan, it learned that the chip's owner, a stray cat named Coal, had been **roaming the streets for 14 years**. Coal was reunited with his family.





## BRIGHT IDEAS | ORANGE COUNTY, Calif.

# Orange County Makes Travel Easier for Airport Passengers with Disabilities

### PROBLEM:

Airport travel is often difficult for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder or other hidden disabilities.

### SOLUTION:

Create a program that provides customized assistance to make the traveling process smoother for those who need additional help.

by Rachel Looker  
staff writer

Sandee Evanskey hadn't been on a plane for more than 20 years.

The almost 70-year-old Orange County, Calif. resident uses a walker and has a fear of flying.

Her daughter, Staci LaMar, had concerns prior to her mother's trip to come see her in Savannah, Ga., for the holidays, knowing she faces mobility challenges and is technologically challenged when it comes to routine airport tasks such as checking in at a kiosk.

"We thought we hit the jackpot when we discovered the Helping Hands program," she said.

The county-owned John Wayne Airport launched the Helping Hands program in 2018 to relieve stress for individuals with disabilities during their travels.

Customer Relations Staff Specialist Cheryl Waters said her team saw a need for the program and felt they could provide a personalized and customized experience to help travelers passing through the airport.

Waters helped Evanskey on the day she was traveling to see her daughter.

"Cheryl treated my mother as if she was her own," LaMar said. "She met her curbside at departures, walked her through the check-in process, through security and got her to her gate safely."

The Helping Hands program works with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and airlines to arrange for spe-

cial assistance and provides personalized help for travelers through every step of the arrival, check-in, security and boarding processes.

"It's a concierge type of program that is specialized and custom tailored to families and individuals with special needs," Waters said.

While it's not required, individuals who know they will be traveling through the airport may reach out before their day of travel online or over the phone to the airport's customer relations staff to coordinate assistance.

"We custom tailor it to their needs and their comfort," Waters said.

The airport also offers tours before a trip to walk individuals through the major steps of travel and experience the airport environment.

"We work with TSA to provide a mock security screening experience so that when their bag is taken and put through the conveyor belt, they know what to expect when the flight

comes," Waters said.

She explained how her team works closely with TSA and utilizes the TSA Cares program where travelers are connected to a passenger support specialist to help them through the security process.

As part of the program, individuals receive yellow bracelets to be easily identified by airport employees who know that extra care and time may be needed.

Waters said the bracelets are more discrete than other identifiable means such as lanyards.

"We wanted something kind of inconspicuous to where our team here at the airport could recognize that they may be a part of the Helping Hands program, but not really drawing attention to themselves," she said.

Waters, who coordinates requests for assistance, explained how airports pose specific challenges for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder or other hidden disabilities

with overstimulating factors such as bright lights, noises, TSA screening and large crowds.

The program has assisted 118 individuals to date.

Customer relations staff completed the Airports Council International (ACI) Disability Sensitivity Training to interact with travelers with physical, sensory, mental and other hidden disabilities.

Waters said training is also offered to other airline partners.

"It equips us and equips our staff to be much more sensitive and have a better understanding of what somebody with special needs might be experiencing," she said.

Customer relations staff formed partnerships with local and national organizations including the Orange County Alzheimer's Association, the Orange County Braille Institute, the University of California and the Orange County Deaf Equal Access Foundation, among others. Other collaborations involve parent and educator groups.

Waters emphasized the importance of working with community partners and working as a team of airport staff to get a similar program up and running.

"I think it's important to let the public know that we have staff that are capable, they're educated, they're sensitive and our whole John Wayne Airport team works to provide the best customer experience that they can through this program." **CN**

*Orange County's Helping Hands program is the recipient of a Best in Category 2020 NACo Achievement Award in the Human Services category.*

*For more information about the Helping Hands program at Orange County's John Wayne Airport, contact Customer Relations Staff Specialist Cheryl Waters at [cwaters@ocair.com](mailto:cwaters@ocair.com).*



The Helping Hands Program at the county-operated John Wayne Airport in Orange County, Calif. helps individuals with disabilities navigate through the airport during their travels. Photo courtesy of John Wayne Airport