Generosity inspires hope for Maui County leaders

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Facing a long, painful rebuilding process following the greatest natural disaster in Maui County, Hawaii’s history, Councilmember Yuki Lei Sugimura is drawing motivation from the outpouring of support from both strangers who want to help and colleagues from across the country.

As of Aug. 14, 99 people were confirmed dead and hundreds were missing following wildfires fueled by a hurricane, overwhelming local firefighting forces and destroying structures indiscriminately over five hours Aug. 9. The wildfire is the deadliest in U.S. history in over a century.

Search and recovery efforts had only covered 25% of the affected areas in the West Maui area of Lahaina—where 2,000 homes and businesses have been destroyed — and Sugimura’s Upcounty and Kula areas (where 19 homes were lost), while firefighters continue to control two large fires.

The continuing devastation is being met on several fronts, including a disaster declaration by President Biden, deployment by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), large and small private donations and the offers of mutual aid from counties both in and out of the state. One donation, for example, has included 10 tiny homes.

“Everybody is willing to help, and that keeps me very hopeful,” Sugimura said. “I fear that as elected officials, our job is to keep people connected and keep resources moving. But I’m keeping my sanity, by remembering that there’s hope out there.”

Though her home was spared from the fire, Sugimura watched as it advanced quickly.

“I was removed from it, but every day I work to hear the reality of how everyone else is doing,” she said. “I hear from so many of my constituents who need help. They need basic necessities. So many people are still missing. One of my staff members’ families can’t find their auntie.”

Dallas County tackles homelessness

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Dallas County, which has the largest population of people experiencing homelessness in Texas, is working with local governments and non-profits to combat the crisis through the R.E.A.L. Time Rehousing program.

The county has seen results with the program, which launched in October 2021: Chronic homelessness has decreased by 32% and unsheltered homelessness has decreased by 14%.

Non-profit Housing Forward is leading the strategy for and administering R.E.A.L. Time Rehousing, which has enrolled 3,264 people and placed 1,548 in housing to date. The $72 million initiative, which has administered $2,440,452 in flex funds, is primarily funded through the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Two-county solution offers urban kids a rural retreat, new jobs for locals

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Marilyn Kirkpatrick had an out-of-the-box solution for her district’s parks problem that will, in turn, let hundreds of urban Clark County, Nev. kids out of a box of their own.

With millions of dollars in tax revenue built up to create a new park, specifically a 4-H camp, the world would seem to be Commissioner Kirkpatrick’s oyster. But much like oysters, available land surrounding Las Vegas is in short supply, dramatically limited by federally owned land throughout the county — the norm for the state.

Over three years, the largest plot she could find for the camp was 10 acres. She and Varlin Higbee, a commissioner in neighboring Lincoln County, hatched a plan.

“I called Varlin and said, ‘If I give you $5 million, will you buy a camp for me?’” she said.

He and the Lincoln County University of Nevada, Reno Extension Office had a place in mind — a corporate events center in Higbee’s hometown of Alamo that was on sale after declining use since the COVID-19 pandemic. It meant...
Maui County agencies try to help fire victims piece their lives back together

A helicopter ride with the fire chief showed Sugimura full scale of how destructive and variable the fire was, annihilating some communities and sparing others nearby.

"Some of the towns look like a war zone," she said the day after the flight.

Over the long term, Maui County will likely suffer from depressed real estate tax revenue because of the devastated property and lower transient occupancy tax revenue once the big picture for tourism becomes apparent, though County Assessor Scott Teruya said it was too early for his office to review imagery that forms valuations. The county lost a senior recreation center, and the changing map, including lost communities and shifting population, will require the county transit system to alter bus routes.

"The resolve of our families, businesses and visitors has been tested like never before in our lifetime," County Mayor Richard Bissen said in a public address. "With lives lost and properties decimated, we are grieving with each other during this incommunicable time.

"Even though we are hurting, we are still able to move forward, especially when we do it together."

In the meantime, the county is providing 12-hour shuttle service between shelters and shopping and medical locations. A family assistance center is helping coordinate information that missing people. Maui Economic Opportunity is generating a housing inventory list and seeking leads on available homes, units and rooms for rent. The agency will act as a liaison between the client and landlord or realtor, making payments directly to the landlord or landlord.

But immediately, hundreds of residents have lost their homes and possessions and have retreated to six county-run shelters or the homes of friends or relatives. More than 300 FEMA workers have delivered 50,000 meals, 75,000 liters of water, 5,000 cots and 10,000 blankets for the county to distribute.

"We still don’t know the total number of people impacted because we don’t know how many are staying with their families," Sugimura said. "We’re moving to get people moved into hotels long term."

"We want to put them in something closer to being at home, we don’t want to make them sleep on a cot in a gym full of people."

The generosity of donations has reached the point where Sugimura said she feels comfortable not having shelter workers check IDs to ensure someone lives in a disaster zone, which helps because many people, fleeing for their lives, lost their identification in the process.

"No matter what, people still need help meeting their basic needs," she said.

Teruya recruited 15 volunteers from his staff to come in and work to help 180 residents replace their drivers’ licenses and IDs.

Gov. Josh Green (D) has created a joint task force with the National Guard to lead recovery efforts. Many areas of the county cannot be accessed by property owners because of the ongoing search and recovery operations and because some victims may still be on the ground. Maui County Police have suspended access to affected areas because of the high volume of traffic while recovery efforts are continuing, except for first responder, medical, utility, county, supply and transport and volunteer personnel.

Assistance from the state and federal government is allowing for more recovery time for emergency service workers.

"You can see those guys are exhausted," Sugimura said. "They’re emotionally drained, but they want to get back out there and help."

More than a dozen of the county’s emergency service workers lost their homes in the fires.

Attorney General Anne Lopez, meanwhile, is investigating the county’s response, which did not include the use of sirens.

"The sirens are for a tsunami, that siren provokes a specific response," Sugimura said. "That’s all we use them for. We don’t have a siren for hurricanes."

"I don’t think anybody could be quite prepared for this," she said of the combination of hurricane-force winds and wildfire.

Regardless of those findings, people need help now, and Sugimura praised the federal government for its response getting FEMA personnel in place on Maui.

"We have such a limited reach as a county government, so getting the president of our nation caring and our governor caring really helps," she said. "Talking with other NACo members makes me realize how lucky we are here, because the state takes care of prisons, judiciary, hospitals, all the big services," she said. "Here, the county does county roads, zoning and planning, emergency services, but our scope is a lot smaller."

Her priorities are persuading people to register with FEMA at the county shelters immediately, of shortening the timeline for relief funding.

"Come and talk to them now, while they’re there in person," she said. "We have them right here in our community, not..."
If anyone had the right consistency to understand the varied needs of counties, it was John Cornyn.

The fourth-term Republican Senator has represented Texas’s 254 counties since 2002, after hearing cases relating to county governments as a member of the state Supreme Court and serving as state attorney general.

And his familiarity with the assorted situations counties face prompted him to co-sponsor legislation that will allow counties greater leeway for COVID aid spending.

“We’re as diverse as we are plentiful,” he said July 22 at a General Session, noting he represented both the third most populous county (Harris) and the 3,069th most populous (Lovington). “I depend heavily on my friends and colleagues at the county level. I cannot be in all 254 counties at once, so I look to those local leaders to help me understand the challenges our collective constituents are facing and what the best way to respond is.”

After the American Rescue Plan Act split more than $65.1 billion among every county in the United States in 2021, local feedback helped him figure out how to continue making ARPA work even better for counties.

“Now we need the flexibility, because we just can’t spend it on the things we need the most. Over time, the greatest needs in many areas weren’t masks and testing sites, they were transportation and infrastructure that lost funding because of the severe strain on revenue caused by the pandemic,” he said. “That’s the beauty of this effort, it puts the decision-making in the hands of the elected leaders that the American people trust the most.”

The Cornyn-Padilla Amendment, cosponsored with Sen. Alex Padilla (D-Calif.), passed as part of the fiscal year 2023 omnibus spending bill, but counties are awaiting long-overdue guidance from the Treasury Department as to exactly how they can spend and should report up to one-third of their ARPA allotments if they are spent on infrastructure projects.

“We cannot be in all 254 counties at once, so I look to those local leaders to help.”

Cornyn suggested county officials ask their federal officials to help pressure the Treasury to follow through.

“I won’t quit fighting for answers, and I know you won’t either,” he said.

“I know how much is riding on that guidance every day we’re moving closer and closer to the deadline for you to make decisions on how to spend that money where you can permissibly spend that money. There’s no reason why you and your county should be in limbo for more than 200 days after we signed. They need to get moving so you can put these critical projects into motion.”

He also recounted how the 2022 elementary school massacre in Uvalde County motivated his support for the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act and its $13 billion in expanded Medicaid coverage, mental health programming and school mental health services, along with new restrictions on firearms and strengthened protections for victims of domestic violence, as well as enhanced school safety.

“Our schools across the state of Texas...look very different from the elementary and junior high schools and high schools that I went to,” he said.

“They are pretty tightly controlled as they need to be, unfortunately, under these circumstances. The school safety is critical, because no child should have to go to school worried about their safety, and no parent should have to send their child to school worried about their safety.”

Though he wasn’t speaking about the Safer Communities Act, which he reminded the audience was the largest investment in community-based mental healthcare in American history, Cornyn’s remarks about supporting ARPA and the CARES Act demonstrated how recent crises had changed his approach to government.

“If you told me when I went to the Senate then I would have voted for trillions of dollars in spending for anything, I would have said ‘You’re completely nuts.’ But here we were, trying to do our best to respond to this unprecedented virus and its consequences.”

Counts found a Senate ally in Texas’ John Cornyn
A current “crisis in American civility” can be traced back to changes in journalism and social media in the past few decades, but county officials can play a role in fixing the problem, according to longtime journalist Joan Lunden.

“Those of us in the journalism world and those in the political arena are facing some of the same challenges, together, like public trust — how did we get here?” asked Lunden, a best-selling author and former co-anchor of ABC’s “Good Morning America,” in her address to county officials Sunday afternoon.

“Our parents and grandparents always started their day reading a newspaper,” she noted. “Today, only 6% say they start their day reading a newspaper.”

“Today, when people wake up, and they learn about what’s going on in the world, what do they do? We all know what they do,” she said. “They look at their phones.”

“And there’s also been an increasing number of alternative news sources that may come available on those phones,” she noted. “Need I point out the quality of some of these new sources? I hesitate to call them news sources. Even the most unreliable and discredited and unresearched sources of information are attracting more viewers every day. So authoritative news outlets are finding themselves these days competing with purveyors of what’s being called news, but it is often made-up news or conspiracy theories.”

“The problem is two-fold, she said. “People can’t always discern what they’re viewing. And now they spend very little time and form a very quick uneducated opinion after viewing a two-minute video on YouTube. They think they know more than if they read an article or a news report based on well-researched, credible evidence.”

Lunden pointed out that in a recent Pew Research study, more than half of all journalists say a lack of trust in news is the most challenging problem in modern journalism. In that same study, she noted, American consumers of media say they also feel that made-up news and misinformation, especially when it is made to incite fear and mistrust, is a critical problem. In fact, they said it was a bigger problem than most key issues in the country.

“That concern over misinformation and divisive rhetoric... It was above terrorism, illegal immigration, racism and roughly on par with violent crime and climate change,” Lunden said.

Social media, she said, was designed initially to “bring us closer together and stay connected, and yet, that same technology can push us apart, polarize us and divide us.”

“Those of us in the journalism world and those in the political arena are facing some of the same challenges, together, like public trust — how did we get here?” asked Lunden, a best-selling author and former co-anchor of ABC’s “Good Morning America,” in her address to county officials Sunday afternoon.

Lunden addressed county officials July 23. Photo by Denny Henry

Economic mobility ‘more than just a paycheck,’
Allan Golston says

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Counties play a critical role in economic mobility and opportunity, according to Allan Golston, president of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s U.S. Program, who spoke to county officials July 23 at the NACo Annual Conference’s second General Session.

The program’s team works with local leaders and engages in state and national policymaking to ensure every young person has the tools to succeed, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity or family income.

“We know that economic mobility is more than just a paycheck,” Golston said.

Data from grantees, spending time in communities speaking with people about their lived experiences and receiving input from over 300 local government leaders, Golston said.

The strategy has three pillars:
1 Making it easier for people to access the $60 billion in safety net benefits that go unclaimed each year
2 Working to create user-friendly tools and resources to help local leaders promote economic mobility in their communities
3 And bringing partners together across all sectors to make the economic mobility field less fragmented.

“We have millions of hard-working people earning low incomes, who aspire to live healthy and productive lives, but their hopes are often dashed, because they face systemic barriers,” Golston said. “We have stagnant wages, low job quality, a lack of access to affordable housing, safety benefits and local services, and all of this combined causes people to stumble and not put the toothpaste back in the tube as they say.”

“How do we fix this?” The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has examples of how to bring back a return to civility, he said.

The first recommendation is to be a leader, set an example and set a tone of respect and call out bad behavior in your own party. Another is to avoid jokes that dehumanize people. It was also recommended to be kinder on social media.

“Quite frankly, the American public is absolutely exhausted from all of it,” she said. “It’s our democracy and it’s our incredible way of life that is so worth the effort.”

Allan Golston makes a point during his speech July 23 to county officials at the NACo Annual Conference. Photo by Denny Henry

See GOLSTON page 5
‘Dr. Drew’ applauds progress in mental health care, but says there’s work ahead

by Meredith Moran

\[Include the content from the page being referenced here\]

by Meredith Moran

Dr. Drew Pinsky, an internist, addiction medicine specialist and media personality, spoke to county officials July 22 about the importance of psychiatry and mental health parity alongside Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger at the NACo Annual Conference General Session.

"It's odd that we in this country try to treat illnesses in the cranium different than every other organ in the body — our lungs get sick, our brains get sick," Pinsky said. "... We're allowing people to die in the streets. It is a level of insanity; I don't understand it. As somebody who worked in a psychiatric hospital for decades, it's not that hard to treat. We know how to do this. We just need the resources, we need the beds, we need the psychiatrists."

Pinsky applauded the federal priorities of NACo's Mental Health Commission, of which Barger is a co-chair. "I support everything in that proposal," he said.

"They're excellent. My lungs could fill with air reading them," he noted, before adding that parity and investing in psychiatric care are crucial in alleviating the nation's mental health crisis.

"We have armies of social workers, we have a lot of good psychologists, a lot of good chemical dependency workers, but not enough doctors," Pinsky said. "And the physician must be at the head of these teams. These are medical disorders that require medical assessments, medical intervention, medical planning ... Asking mental health workers, chemical dependency counselors, social workers to do the work of physicians, it is literally the same thing as taking a team of physical therapists and making them do orthopedic surgery.

"They are not trained to do that, and they are not in a position to intervene medically on these brain diseases," Pinsky said. "They are extremely important and they are extremely skilled, but if you leave out the doctors and the nurses, you are literally running open-air hospitals without doctors and nurses in our county [Los Angeles], where seven patients are dying a day."

Despite the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, there's still progress to be made in parity, he said.

"When the resource management comes down on you, whether it's the insurance reviewer or the Medicaid reviewer or Medicare is running out or whatever," Pinsky said, "on the medical side, if the insurance company wants to know how long this person is going to be in the hospital, I go, 'Hey, they had surgery on Tuesday, they still need nursing wound care, they need three more days of antibiotics and then we'll see.' Case closed; they don't argue with me.

"In psychiatry, when I ask for an extra day, they fight. 'What's the criteria? How do you do that?' If you leave the criteria for parity to the resource provider, there will be no parity ... So, for parity to work, one thing must be in place, which is that when doctors can defend his or her decision and it is their opinion that the patient is to stay in the hospital, they stay in the damn hospital, and that's it."

Pinsky said medical-assisted treatment is a "giant leap forward" and is something that gives him hope about the advancements of improving mental health in the United States.

"There are street teams in our county that are starting, medical physician squads that are going out and they're starting to prescribe," Pinsky said. "Also, long-acting anti-psychotics — they're expensive, they have to be funded. That is the missing piece. We have to have the ability to administer them when somebody's ananosognosia [when someone rejects a diagnosis of mental illness] is such that they cannot participate with us in the treatment.

"We have to have the ability to do that, much the way we do with the brain disorder we call dementia. That's the only one we're allowed to do that with, and yet that's a disease that is progressive no matter what we do; it's inexorable. And yet, something like schizophrenia, if we intervene early, we can massively change the course of the illness."
Twenty years from now, will county officials look back and say they seized the day for their constituents?

That’s what White House Intergovernmental Affairs Director Tom Perez is hoping.

Perez, speaking to the NACo Board of Directors July 23 in Travis County, Texas, ticked off a laundry list of legislation designed to help the American people post-pandemic.

“When I reflect on what’s been done over the last few years, from the American Rescue Plan, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, to the broadband opportunities, the Inflation Reduction Act, there are so many opportunities to build community,” he said.

Although he now has the ear of the president, Perez’ roots are in county government.

He was the first Latino elected to the Montgomery County Council in Maryland in 2002. After that he worked as a civil rights attorney in the Department of Justice and Secretary of Labor in the Obama administration, from 2013 to 2017.

“It’s an honor to be here, it’s an honor to be back,” he told his NACo audience. “Because 20 years ago, I was coming to these conferences and I was always feeling at the end that I learned far more than I imparted.”

Perez, a native of Buffalo, N.Y., said the one thing he learned early on in life, “especially in the world of governance,” is the importance of understanding the moment in time you’re living in. “…and to seize that moment, because you don’t want to look back years later and say, ‘We had this opportunity that was unbelievable in scale and scope, but we didn’t seize it.’”

“The last time we had an opportunity of such scale and scope to transform communities was in 1932 when the New Deal came,” he noted. “We had some opportunities during the Great Society [1965] as well.”

Perez noted some of the good things happening under the Biden administration, including the impact of the 2021 expansion of the Child Tax Credit, which reduced childhood poverty by 40 percent, he said.

“One thing we know right now is that we know how to reduce childhood poverty, significantly, because we did it… that’s a big deal!”

“So here we are, and we have only begun those investments and the reason I’m here is to make sure, that you know you are indispensable partners in these efforts,” he said.

“I was just talking to a judge from Bend County in Texas, he was telling me they used some of their ARPA funds to help restaurants stay afloat,” Perez said.

“They figured out who their food insecure people were, and they paid the restaurants to feed those people. That’s what it’s all about. I come to you with gratitude not only for what you have done but how you have done it.”

But Perez noted there is “unfinished business” when it comes to mental health. “It’s not just a healthcare imperative. I would say it’s a moral imperative to continue our work building out a mental health infrastructure. That is absolutely one of the unfinished pieces of business from this pandemic.”

On July 25, President Biden announced new action to guarantee access to mental health care, unveiling a proposed rule that would ensure mental health benefits on private insurance plans more closely mirror physical health benefits.

“Fentanyl is another example,” Perez said.

“These issues we’re talking about — they’re not Republican, they’re not Democrat. I lost my niece, who was my god-daughter, very suddenly. This is ripping communities apart and we have got to get a better handle on it. It’s a four-legged stool: It’s the federal government, our state and local partners, our non-profit partners, parents and advocates and foreign governments as well. You are one of the indispensable partners in that.”

Perez also talked about the challenges of writing grant submissions for ARPA funding.

“I’ve heard from a number of counties, because they don’t necessarily have that robust grant writing team and the ability to get the money shouldn’t depend on the ability to have the grant writer. It should depend on the quality of your project. We’ve got a lot of work to do.”

“We need to be doing this together,” he said. “There are a lot of people who are sick and tired of being sick and tired, of our politics.”

Perez said he was talking with Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, president of the National Governors’ Association, and noted that the governor’s signature initiative is “learning how to disagree without being disagreeable.”

“I told him a story about someone I had worked for, a guy named Ted Kennedy. I worked for him in the U.S. Senate, from 1995 to 1998. One of his closest friends in life was a guy named Orrin Hatch, then a Republican U.S. senator. People used to ask him, ‘Is this friendship contrived or is this real?’ The answer is, it was very real.”

“We have a children’s health insurance program today because Sen. Kennedy and Sen. Hatch came together,” Perez said.

“We have a Hate Crime Statistics Act because they came together. We may not agree on everything, but we can disagree while still being respectful.”

“That’s one of the reasons why I’m excited to be here. Because you have set that tone in the work that you do. I know when I was on the county council, one of my closest allies was my Republican colleague whose district abutted mine.

Perez reflected on the nation’s unemployment figures but also acknowledged there is work to do for local government hiring — local governments have yet to recover 162,000 jobs compared to pre-pandemic levels. “…we still, by the way, gotta work on making sure that public-sector employment continues to rise, he said.

“The last jobs report was promising,” he noted, “but that’s the one area where we still have work to do and you know that, because you’re confronting those challenges day in and day out. As your former Labor secretary, I’m acutely aware of that.”

“So, let’s keep this momentum going, let’s collectively resolve to reach a point when we can look back in 20 years and say that moment in time when we had opportunity unprecedented since the New Deal, was a moment in time that we seized, and we expanded opportunities.”

“We built an America where ZIP code didn’t determine destiny, we built an America where equity really was something that wasn’t aspired to but something that was realized. We built jobs in rural, urban, suburban, exurban America. We built an America that worked for everyone. That’s what our work together means.”
Wraparound services needed to remedy homelessness

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

To alleviate the country’s crisis in housing and homelessness, national and local leaders are urging large urban counties to go beyond merely providing more housing and address broader societal issues, like lack of access to health care, food insecurity and substance use disorder.

“We know we could put people in an apartment and take the subsidy, but if we don’t provide really good wraparound support services to address their mental health needs, trauma histories, struggles with drug and alcohol issues, opportunities for education and work — all of those wraparound supports are what keep people housed,” said Jeff Olivet, executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, speaking at the Large Urban County Caucus meeting July 22. “So, the real recipe that we know works is a combination of housing and services, it’s not ‘either or.’

“... We need to have an expansive understanding of what homelessness is — it’s driven by structural factors, like the lack of affordable housing, like structural racism, but it also is about the individual,” he said.

“If we don’t acknowledge that people have serious needs around behavioral health, health care — around exits from domestic violence, sexual assault and human trafficking — we have to understand both the structural and the individual,” said Kevin James, a senior program manager for the Corporation for Supportive Housing, pointed to the Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond, which offers supportive housing as well as referrals to transportation, food resources and legal and integrated health services, as an example of what can be done at the local level to help avoid the cycle of homelessness.

Over half a million people are experiencing homelessness in the United States, and moving forward, there needs to be more of a priority on preventing homelessness as opposed to beginning to provide support once people are already experiencing it — much of which can and should be done at the local level, Olivet said.

“When I think about prevention, I think about counties,” Olivet said. “Because I start thinking about public health, I start thinking about corrections and re-entry, about the role of health, about intervening in child welfare and foster care so that no young person ever ages out of foster care and into homelessness ... If we don’t go upstream with preventing homelessness in the first place, we’re going to be at this work for a long time.”

Implementing Universal Basic Income (UBI) — consistent, unconditional cash payments — is another way that counties across the country, including Cook County, Ill. and Los Angeles County, Calif., are supporting residents. While UBIs by nature provide direct payments under no condition, data from Cook County’s Promise Guaranteed Income pilot shows that the funds are primarily used to pay for housing, food, transportation and medical bills.

“The Promise pilot is rooted in strong evidence that direct cash benefits are spent wisely and support economic mobility,” said Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. “These programs are effective in improving entire families’ financial, educational, physical and social outcomes, and it’s a great example of the principles of good governance, because it focuses on high impact, accessible benefits paired with low administrative costs that save taxpayer dollars.”

Jeff Olivet, executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, speaks July 22 to Large Urban County Caucus members. Photo by Denny Henry
When it comes to housing affordability, no matter what size your county, it’s likely a problem with no easy answers. What’s most important is getting creative to solve the problem, a panel of county officials said Saturday morning at the Annual Conference.

Speakers addressed the issue at a standing room-only meeting that attracted hundreds of county officials, called “Curbing the Crisis: County Recommendations to Advance Housing Affordability,” hosted by members of the NACo Housing Task Force.

NACo President Denise Winfrey kicked off the meeting, observing that “people who should be out and on their own are still in the basement, in spare rooms, still on the couch … because they can’t afford to go anywhere.”

“Fresh out of school, they’re getting started, they don’t have the resources to afford anything decent to live in,” she noted. “I’m not talking about anything fancy, just a studio with a bathroom. It’s very expensive.”

Like other counties across the country, Winfrey noted that in her community of Will County, Ill., where she is on the county board, residents are seeing fewer and fewer housing options.

County officials explored answers to the housing affordability problem during a panel discussion Saturday moderated by Valley County, Idaho Commissioner Sherry Maupin, who co-chairs the NACo Housing Task Force. Even rural counties like hers, with a population of about 12,500, see housing challenges, she noted.

Maupin noted that all counties need to find “common goals and solutions for a growing problem and throughout our time on the Housing Task Force, that’s exactly what we’ve been working to achieve.”

In Mono County, California, we’re 94 percent public lands, said Mono County Supervisor Jennifer Kreitz, with some people living across the border in Nevada, where it’s cheaper to live.

“We have to look at OK, what are the needs? And how do we start chipping away at it, little by little? That is sometimes the best way, is incremental changes. We just set aside $2 million of our ARPA funds for housing in Mono County, so we’re trying to get four units here, five units there. The county has a population of 13,000. “That’s really how we’re going to bring back housing for everyone.”

When it comes to housing affordability, said panelist Williamson County, Texas Judge Bill Gravell, the size of your county doesn’t matter. “It doesn’t matter how small you are or how large you are,” said Gravell, whose county is located just north of Travis County with a population of more than 700,000.

“What matters is how creative you are,” he said.

“We work hard to fund our police force,” he said. “I’ll never forget the day I was riding with a deputy, and we were riding in a school zone. He said he and his wife loved the community but could not afford to live there.”

Gravell said later he asked himself “What’s wrong with us?” The chief of police in Round Rock, Texas introduced Gravell to a police officer and his wife who had purchased 2 ½ acres in a part of town that no one else wanted.

“They began to build a tiny home community of permanent houses, two-story homes, 880-square feet, your own driveway to park in. They built 28 units on the space. They were leased in 48 minutes. Only police officers, teachers, grad students and paramedics could live there.”

During a meeting with other members of the NACo Housing Task Force, he told other county officials about the community. “And Sherry [Maupin] said ‘Judge, that’s hero housing.’

Since then, Gravell said he brought builders and developers together. “I’m proud to announce that we now have an association of home builders and developers in our area that have created a coalition called the Hero Housing Nonprofit. Their total capital investment is $65 million. By the end of next year, they’re putting 500 units on the ground.”

As a county leader, do not think you cannot drive this train,” he said. “You don’t have to be a bully, you have to be a cheerleader. You have to get with the community and say ‘Hey, those cops who are protecting your subdivision, don’t they deserve to live in your subdivision? Those teachers teaching at your elementary school, don’t they have the right to be able to live in that community?’

Other creative ways of tackling the problem including purchasing unused county property, was discussed by Commissioner Rene Flowers of Rock, Texas introduced Gravell to the growing number of Baby Boomers who are retiring.

“The challenge is, what the next generation looks like,” he said. “If your community is like my community, as Baby Boomers leave the workforce, you’re going to have huge gaps in knowledge, but more than that, think what it’s going to do to our non-profits, volunteer fire companies, all of the corporations and the communities themselves. Our county boardrooms will have the same problem.”

Schoemann said “if we can’t solve this problem right now, do the math.” He noted that a young family in their 30s, making a combined income of $100,000 in his county only has 20 homes to choose from that are under $300,000 in a county with a population of 140,000.

“There’s nowhere for them to live,” he said.

Read about several of these counties’ housing efforts in the July 3 issue of County News, available at www.naco.org/news.

Find more information about housing affordability on the NACo website.
Public lands philanthropy hits the ground running

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

As it gets its bearings as the Bureau of Land Management’s philanthropic partner, the Foundation for America’s Public Lands has identified its three priorities — awareness, access and stewardship. The organization is addressing some of the funding disparities among federal land agencies, according to Interim Executive Director Gina Anstey, who noted that the bureau receives 79 cents of federal funding per visitor compared to $5.20 per visitor for the National Park Service. Anstey will make way this fall for newly hired CEO Ling Thompson.

The foundation is planning a multi-year campaign celebrating the value of public lands and waters while educating the public about the Bureau’s role safeguarding them. Anstey said. “An informed public will support and rally around the places and services that they understand, recognize and value,” she said. “Over time, this will build recognition and affinity for the agency and for those who help to manage those places through multimedia tools and educational assets.”

The group aligns the agency’s approach to outdoor recreation with the needs and desires of the community, enhancing the recreation opportunities on public lands while protecting them. The foundation is confident that restoration efforts will make meaningful headway on improving land and water quality and promoting sustainable land use practices,” Anstey said.

Emphasizing stewardship will mean stoking the flames of nostalgia and patriotism. “Our public lands are a national legacy handed down from generation to generation,” she said. “You all played a critical role in creating opportunities that determine the future of our public lands over the next year. We’re going to start having more of an outward facing public presence.”

To proceed while protecting enough of the remaining habitat for these species,” said Natural Resources Program Manager Melinda Mallia. The program provides a streamlined way for landowners to comply with the Endangered Species Act, while protecting high-quality habitat.

“What we’re really proud about with the habitat conservation plan is we were able to take an intractable problem — which was the fight between the environmental community to preserve the endangered species and the desire by developers to build homes — and I think what we were able to create is an enduring success story.

“If you talk to developers seeking permits to develop in areas adjacent to the preserves or endangered species habitat, I think they will all tell you our system works. We’ve been able to strike a balance that allows approvals [for development] and we’ve been able to preserve truly beautiful areas of our community.”

Permitting fee funds land acquisition for conservation

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Travis County, Texas is on year 27 of a 30-year conservation plan for Balcones Canyonland, a 50-mile square urban preserve. Launched in 1996 to protect eight endangered bird species, the 140 individual tracts managed by both public and private entities have contributed to the protection of seven still-endangered species and 27 species of concern.

Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea noted the revolutionary reassessment it would take to preserve endangered species.

“When I first moved to this community in 1988, there were people who were passionate about preserving the endangered bird species and other creatures and they were chaining themselves to trees and chaining themselves to the bulldozers and there was a huge fight between the environmental community and the development community,” she said.

The county’s conservation plan, “I think, is a tremendous example of a win-win. We’ve been able to both preserve incredibly beautiful land, which is treasured by this community, but still allow responsible development to take place.”

In addition, Shea said, limiting development in and around the preserve has helped slow the growth around the Austin area that has contributed to traffic long before the infrastructure has matched the demands.

“You think traffic’s bad now? Imagine what the traffic would be like in your area if all of this land around you were to get developed,” Shea said. “The county facilitates that by charging a fee for a permit to mitigate for the removal of habitat covered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the proceeds of which fund the purchase and management of land in the preserve.”

Since 1996, more than 1,200 private landowners and developers applied to develop more than 70,100 acres.

“The plan was simply to find a way to allow development that determined the future of our public lands over the next year. We’re going to start having more of an outward facing public presence.”

Permitting fee funds land acquisition for conservation

The foundation is planning a three-year campaign that determines the future of our public lands over the next year. We’re going to start having more of an outward facing public presence.”

“Anstey, who noted that the bureau receives 79 cents of federal funding per visitor compared to $5.20 per visitor for the National Park Service. Anstey will make way this fall for newly hired CEO Ling Thompson.

The foundation is planning a multi-year campaign celebrating the value of public lands and waters while educating the public about the Bureau’s role safeguarding them.

Anstey said. “An informed public will support and rally around the places and services that they understand, recognize and value,” she said. “Over time, this will build recognition and affinity for the agency and for those who help to manage those places through multimedia tools and educational assets.”

The group aligns the agency’s approach to outdoor recreation with the needs and desires of the community, enhancing the recreation opportunities on public lands while protecting them. “The foundation is confident that restoration efforts will make meaningful headway on improving land and water quality and promoting sustainable land use practices,” Anstey said.

Emphasizing stewardship will mean stoking the flames of nostalgia and patriotism. “Our public lands are a national legacy handed down from generation to generation,” she said. “You all played a critical role in creating opportunities that determine the future of our public lands over the next year. We’re going to start having more of an outward facing public presence.”

Public lands philanthropy hits the ground running

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

As it gets its bearings as the Bureau of Land Management’s philanthropic partner, the Foundation for America’s Public Lands has identified its three priorities — awareness, access and stewardship. The organization is addressing some of the funding disparities among federal land agencies, according to Interim Executive Director Gina Anstey, who noted that the bureau receives 79 cents of federal funding per visitor compared to $5.20 per visitor for the National Park Service. Anstey will make way this fall for newly hired CEO Ling Thompson.

The foundation is planning a multi-year campaign celebrating the value of public lands and waters while educating the public about the Bureau’s role safeguarding them. Anstey said. “An informed public will support and rally around the places and services that they understand, recognize and value,” she said. “Over time, this will build recognition and affinity for the agency and for those who help to manage those places through multimedia tools and educational assets.”

The group aligns the agency’s approach to outdoor recreation with the needs and desires of the community, enhancing the recreation opportunities on public lands while protecting them. “The foundation is confident that restoration efforts will make meaningful headway on improving land and water quality and promoting sustainable land use practices,” Anstey said.

Emphasizing stewardship will mean stoking the flames of nostalgia and patriotism. “Our public lands are a national legacy handed down from generation to generation,” she said. “You all played a critical role in creating opportunities that determine the future of our public lands over the next year. We’re going to start having more of an outward facing public presence.”
Workshops

Poll workers remain a must-have for election officials

by Charlie Ban
senior writer

Despite all of his worries about the pandemic and the vulnerable age of many of his poll workers in Williamson County, Texas, Election Administrator Chris Davis made it through 2020 successfully in a state where limited vote-by-mail options put pressure on in-person voting.

The aftermath, however, has been different.

"We were bracing at the onset of the pandemic for a real dent in our poll worker pool, but our poll workers were really responding to the duty as long as we could assure them that they'd be protected," from the coronavirus, Davis said.

"Then doubt in the way that our voting processes are carried out and the systems that our poll workers are very particularly trained on became pervasive in the media and at the dinner table, at the legislature," he said.

"That had as much, if not more, of a profound impact in our goals for our poll workers to come back and work for us," he noted. "Much, much more than any threat of a pandemic."

Recruiting and retaining poll workers is a challenge for most counties, and San Benito County, Calif. Supervisor Angela Carro said seniors are the key to making their operations, where she was once assistant clerk-recorder-registrar of voters.

"We took seniors who are retired and added some seniors in high school," she said. "I can't tell you how well that worked. I recruited my son and he recruited some of his friends and the retirees loved them. That combination of historic knowledge from our seniors with our youth was the most powerful thing we ever did in recruitment."

The various election officials agreed that paying poll workers was crucial, and U.S. Election Assistance Commission member Thomas Hicks said federal grant money can be used to pay poll workers for federal elections.

Durham County, N.C. pays poll workers $16 an hour.

"It really pulls folks in," said Derek Bowens, the county's elections director. "Of course, that's secondary to their desire to be socially responsible, but it is a really big part of it we find, that that drives a lot of our participation."

Bowens also credited the North Carolina Secretary of State's Democracy Heroes program, which debuted in 2020. Prospective poll workers indicate their interest via an online survey, which routes their contact information to their respective county elections office.

"For our county, it was substantial in 2020 especially, because we needed over 1,000 workers to staff 17 days of early voting at 57 polling locations throughout the county," he said.

But in Weber County, Utah, Clerk/Auditor Ricky Hatch has it comparable made in the shade. The hybrid mail/in-person voting system has revolutionized poll worker needs, because less than 5% of voters show up at voting centers.

"In 2012, for 125,000 registered voters, we had 63 polling places and had to hire about 650 poll workers," he said. "In 2022, we had two polling centers and hired about 100 poll workers. We don't need as many; we really can pick the cream of the crop."

Hatch and Bowens stressed the importance of screening applicants. Bowens and his staff conduct video interviews. Hatch's staff vet applicants' social media accounts. "Not for any political affiliation, but we really look for extremism or an unwillingness to consider opposing points of view," he said. "That's something that we're really careful about."

Investing in anti-poverty programs helps decrease child neglect, abuse

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Counties investing in supportive services for low-income families greatly improves children's well-being and decreases neglect, according to national experts, county leaders and federal officials.

"It’s important to know that the provision of economic and concrete support is shown to reduce both child abuse and neglect and physical abuse,” said Krista Thomas, a senior policy fellow at Chapin Hall, a research and policy institute. "… It’s not that folks who are experiencing poverty aren’t well-qualified parents, it’s that poverty creates stressors that make it more difficult to solve problems."

Thomas and other experts spoke to members of the NACo Human Services and Education Policy Steering Committee meeting Friday at the Annual Conference.

Research shows that families who experience material hardship, like food or housing insecurity, are three times more likely to experience a child abuse investigation and four times more likely to experience a physical abuse investigation, Thomas said.

Kisha Russell, TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) regional program manager at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, highlighted non-recurrent, short-term benefits — emergency funds that don’t extend past four months and are designed to handle a specific crisis or need — as a way to use TANF dollars as a prevention program.

Some examples of how different states allow the benefits to be used include assistance in housing, domestic violence services, child care and transportation.

"In my line of work, I experienced a family where the father was able to receive a job and it was this job that was going to get this family out of needing assistance, but the day before he was set to [start], his tires blew out," Russell said.

... They needed help, it was something to where he was almost there, right there at the line, so we were able to help support this family with a non-recurring, short-term...
“Economic support reduces child abuse, neglect and physical abuse.”

Poverty creates stressors

From POVERTY page 10

payment. “We were able to help him get tires for his car, and he was able to go and start work and it kept the family off of the benefits, and I’m sure it eliminated a lot of frustration in the family due to economic hardship.”

San Diego County, Calif’s Family Income for Empowerment Program, which gives unrestricted cash support of $500 a month for two years to 485 families in the coun-

ty with children under 18 through Child Welfare Services Department referrals, is an example of what can be done at the local level.

The program is operating under the county’s new Child and Family Well-Being Department, which brings together the childcare system, Child Welfare Services and the First 5 Commission of San Diego to work collaboratively on offering support services to families in need before they experience crisis in an effort to keep families together.

“We know when there is caregiver substance abuse or mental health challenges, that that really impacts the family,” said Barbara Jiménez, community operations officer for San Diego County’s Department of Health and Human Services.

“But when you take into account the economic impact and really look at the county for that, that is really going to reduce the issues around it, so addressing poverty is key and this is an opportunity to do that.”

Building relationships with state representatives and the press is the way to ensure counties still have a seat at the table amid the national rise in state preemption bills, according to county state association directors.

In the past decade, there has been a drastic increase in states passing laws that preempt county authority and limit local policymaking. This year alone, more than 600 different preemptive laws have been proposed by legislatures.

“This is in fact going on everywhere,” said Ginger Delegal, executive director of the Florida Association of Counties. “... These new preemptive laws and bills are deregula-
tory and sweeping in nature — some of the academics call them ‘the nuclear bombs of preemptions,’ ” she said.

“And this is where you might have an example of a bill that says something like, ‘All cities and counties are expressly pre-empted from enacting or passing any measure that affects commerce.’ Well, commerce is a term of art and the truth is, in the governmental space, it basically means everything,” she added.

Delegal attributes the rise in preemption bills to four issues:

- Population growth, which in turn leads to diversity and a “less unified way of thinking”
- Counties asking for state and federal funding at unprec-
edented levels
- State governments expanding their capacity to provide services that were previously controlled by counties
- The erosion of the local press.

“Have you ever said to a child, or when you were a child was it said to you? ‘If you live under my roof, you live by my rules,’ “ Delegal asked. “That’s what this is about. Some of this is we are asking for a lot of mon-
ey, and you’re getting the mon-
ey because, let’s face it, we’re a rich country. So, we’re getting the money for great projects — storm water, beach renourishment, transportation, housing — all of these things come with strings attached, and some of these preemptions are the strings attached.”

“... Not having the local in-
dependent newspapers on the corners anymore is also contributing to this, because our stories are not being told — good, bad and indifferent. No one really hears about the work that is going on in local communities and in local gov-

ernment.”

Preemption bills, which Delegal called “partisan and ideological in nature,” are most common in states with a “trifecta” of power, like Florida and California, where one political party holds control in the gov-

ernorship as well as the state Senate and state House.

“They’re solutions in search of a problem,” Delegal said. “You ask state legislators or you ask committee staff when you see a bill of this nature, ‘Who in the world are you targeting?’ And they might say, ‘Well, it’s not happening here, but there was a story out of California, and we want to make sure that that doesn’t happen here.’”

Eric Bryson, executive director of the Montana Association of Counties, recommended building relationships with state representatives as the way to try to stay ahead of possible preemption legislation.

“As tough as that can be, that has to be one of your top layers,” Bryson said. “Because your as-
sociations and your lobbyists can only be as good as the re-
lationships that you build with those guys. We need to change the conversation — Democrat, Republican, doesn’t matter — we need to get to a point where we used to be, where we had sort of a joint goal and objec-
tive in providing our services for our constituents in the most economical manner possible.

“... The only way we’re going to get out of this is to try and get local government to not be the boogeyman anymore, and then we can fight facts with facts when we have these gar-
bage bills coming from nation-
al associations, rolling through places that try and expedite development in rural places like Montana that don’t have building codes. We spent an in-


ordinating amount of time with lobbyists to try and get just that education piece and the only way that works is by the rela-
tionships you guys can build as elected officials with your leg-

islators.”

Graham Knaus, execu-
tive director of the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), encouraged counties to establish relationships with local press as another tool in combating preemption. State and federal are the “what” and the “who,” Knaus said, in how CSAC is “reframing the narra-
tive” around tackling home-

lessness.

“The press is powerful when they want to be and if you can leverage your relationships and give them something, you’re effectively elevating your coun-
ty and association brand to be relevant,” Knaus said. “When you do that, you have an op-
portunity to impact conversa-
tions in policy that you would never be invited to the table for.

“And that actually is what generated our work on home-
lessness, because we were getting clobbered, and we did not have any real seat at the ta-
ble. And that began to change when the L.A. Times, the San Francisco Chronicle, The Sac-
ramento Bee … every single one of those did an editorial supporting our stuff, two of them put a link to our website in it and pushed on the gover-

nor and the legislature.

“That took a massive amount of effort on our part and rela-
tionships, but that more than anything we have ever done, in relationships with folks in the administration, whatever — that one focus has had by far the biggest return back.”
By partnering with human services, jails can stop revolving door

by Meredith Moran

At least one in four people who go to jail will be arrested again within the same year, so counties like Harris County, Texas and Hennepin County, Minn. are creating programming to address what are often the root causes of incarceration – poverty, mental illness and substance use disorder – in an effort to break the cycle.

Counties operate 90% of local jails in the country, and to best serve the criminal-justice involved population, local jails and law enforcement need to be partnering with human services organizations, said Henne pin County, Minn. Sheriff Dawanna Witt.

"The only way we’re going to do this, is do it together," Witt said. "There has to be collaboration from inside and outside the system, multidisciplinary teams if you will ... How many people are we losing between the gaps because we’re not overlapping? That phrase ‘Not my job’ – it’s all of our jobs.

Hennepin County’s HOPE (Helping Others by Providing Education) program offers incarcerated individuals educational programming and job training. The sheriff’s office partners with the county’s school districts, trade schools, Minneapolis’ Public Housing Authority and Hennepin County Behavioral Health to set inmates up with the necessary resources upon release in hopes of breaking the cycle of incarceration, according to Witt.

The Pew Charitable Trusts found that of the over 3 million people on probation right now in the United States, more than 600,000 experience mental illness, most of whom have a co-occurring substance use disorder, according to Tracy Velázquez, the organization’s senior manager of justice and safety.

‘People who are on probation are more likely to be arrested and booked if they have mental illness,’ Velázquez said. "And we saw that if people went to prison from probation, they either had a technical violation or a new conviction, they had more arrests, more terms of probation and had more times that they went to prison if they had a mental illness than people who did not."

Harris County is taking on an approach of early intervention and community care coordination with the Houston Recovery Center. Individuals who are arrested for public intoxication are diverted to the center, which pairs each person with a peer recovery specialist.

“We’re on the frontlines of the issues of mental illness, addiction and poverty and we should be addressing those through more of a public health lens and really try to go to the surface," said Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez. “... I understand the need for us to be tough on crime and law and order, obviously protecting our community, but also I’ve always said that we don’t have to check our compassion at the door.

“We can try and lift where we stand and make sure that we’re trying to help others along the way and during their temporary stay in our jail, how can we help make sure that we’re empowering those people to really receive the support that they need to hopefully transition successfully back into the community? Because how do you want us to return your neighbors back to you upon their release?"
Travis County helps tackle homelessness with small homes Community First! Village

by Mary Ann Barton

About 120 county officials boarded two buses July 23 at the Annual Conference to visit Community First! Village, a 51-acre master-planned community that provides homes for the homeless in Travis County.

The homes are permanent housing and a supportive community for disabled, chronically homeless in Central Texas. It started in 1998 with a church helping feed the homeless on the streets. The original food truck is still on the property. That led to helping homeless people get off the street and into an RV at a private RV park.

Alan Graham, founder and CEO of Community First! and Travis County Judge Andy Brown, were on hand.

By the end of this year, the village will have 500 homes, said Sarah LeNoir, a senior relationship officer at Community First! also a guide on the mobile tour. By 2025, Phase 3, which is located on another 51 acres across the street, is expected to be completed and will see 650 homes. Phase 4, located 15 minutes away, will have 750 homes on 77 acres.

LeNoir said by Phase 4, they hope to have 90 percent of Travis County’s chronically homeless population housed.

Plans are moving forward with some help from the county, which allocated $35 million in ARPA funds earlier this year toward helping build roads, utilities and home foundations to expand the small homes community. The $35 million will also build laundry services, restrooms, shower facilities and outdoor kitchens.

The people who live there pay rent and must obey rules that are similar to an HOA. Residents pay rent and must obey rules that are similar to an HOA.

Community police come over to have pizza with the residents. Community First! is opening a resource center for the Travis County Sheriff’s Department “so they have a rest spot to fill out paperwork, go to the bathroom.”

How do you determine who gets to move in? one county official asked. The application process, through the group ECHO (Ending Community Homeless Coalition) takes about six to nine months.

Most of the residents have lived on the streets, on average, for nine years prior to moving into the village, LeNoir said. The average age is 57 years old in the village.

“When people move in, everything is fully furnished to your liking and they have a full week of groceries and cleaning supplies,” she said. Homes are decorated with the resident in mind.

“And the neighbor care teams spend a lot of time during the first 30 to 90 days to make sure they acclimate properly,” she said.

The community has a “club house” called the living room that features a movie room, a game room and a small computer lab for residents’ use. The community also offers services such as healthcare navigation for physical and mental health care and help with working opportunities. Public transportation is available throughout the day.

There are 18 different styles of homes and “every custom builder in the region has been out to donate their time and resources,” she said. “So, we really are blessed to have the community rally around us.”

As county officials toured a small home, LeNoir pointed out that “architecture-wise, these come fully manufactured from a company in east Texas. These are the easiest sort of ‘plug and play,’” she noted.

Many of the small homes have front porches that face other homes so people can get to know their neighbors. A landscape team is on staff to take care of the neighborhood and some residents have their own gardens as well as participate in a community garden.

Since 2005, this transformative residential program has been a staple of Mobile Loaves & Fishes and has become the largest community-based model in the country lifting homeless men and women up off the streets into community and home.

For more information, visit the Community First! website at: https://mlf.org/community-first/

Maui Nui Strong collects funds

From MAUI page 2

several hours ahead on the phone.

Her experience watching residents in year two of awaiting reimbursement for mudslides resulting from a 2021 rainfall storm has motivated her.

Though she was part of county government during two other emergencies — the partial shutdown after 9/11 when she worked in the economic development office and during the COVID-19 pandemic as a councilmember, in comparison to the fires, the earlier events better resembled economic hibernations. While the fires are far from an extinction-level event, the scars will last for years, or even decades, even though that scarring destroyed historic homes in the process.

“Our history will remain, this will be a chapter of it,” she said.

An online, centralized hub called Maui Nui Strong designed to respond to the impacts of the Lahaina and Kula wildfire disaster was launched at mauinustrong.info. The County of Maui site offers information on how to donate, volunteer, offer services and look for support. It is administered through the Office of Economic Development and will be utilized by multiple county departments, nonprofits and grassroots efforts to connect people to resources and services.
MOU offers access for Clark County, protection, investment for Lincoln County

From CAMP page 1

a lot to Higbee to see it find a renewed purpose, and one close to his heart. One that inspires him to add his efforts, partially out of muscle memory, to make the camp a success.

“I need to get out and cut that hay,” he said looking out from the porch of the events center in May 2023, the last day of operations for the JFDI Ranch before it changed hands. “That was alfalfa over there when I was a kid — we could grow alfalfa like you wouldn’t believe.

We leased this from my cousin on my dad’s side. I remember cutting this back then.

“Yeah, it’s a little different out here.”

That’s what Higbee and Kirkpatrick are aiming for — giving a new experience to children who don’t usually get to leave their urban neighborhoods. An hour and 15 minutes on a bus can change their perspectives and blow their minds, and that’s before they even arrive at the 72-acre camp and see the 17-bedroom, 17,000 square-foot building that may soon support overnight trips that can give kids their first view of a full night sky. The route to Alamo passes through the habitat for hundreds of species of birds, petroglyphs and a gypsum mine.

“I don’t know how many of them have seen a pond before,” Higbee said.

Day trips have been going on all summer, and Don Deever, Lincoln County’s Extension educator, has noticed the effect the place has on the 2,000 kids who have visited so far.

“The kids turn in their phones when they arrive, so they are immersed in the natural world,” Deever said. “What blew me away was that these kids got it — they knew what we were trying to do and they didn’t put up a fight. They’ve never known a world like this, and they totally get why this is special.”

It has already passed muster with Kirkpatrick’s grandchil-
dren.

“They tell me that Alamo has the biggest and best insects,” she said.

Deever has lent his botan-ical knowledge to a lot of programming, but when the camp is fully engaged, the better-staffed Clark County office will provide more support.

Lincoln County’s entire staff includes just Deever and a part-time colleague.

The union will also reflect Clark and Lincoln’s history when both were Lincoln County. Since they split in 1909, Clark is now the 11th largest U.S. county and Lincoln County is so sparsely populated that the Census Bureau classifies it as “frontier.”

“This is helping to heal the divide between urban and rural counties, just by exposing urban kids to rural life,” Kirkpatrick said.

The Nevada Three-Step

What started as a complication — Clark County’s inability to own land in another county — ended up building a complex but beneficial arrangement.

“Initially, Lincoln County didn’t want to own it, because of the liability involved,” Kirkpatrick said. “We did the due diligence and figured out what maintenance costs would total over eight years and what the property tax revenue would be if a private entity owned it and figured that all into the lease.

Lincoln County will actually make money off of it.”

A pair of memoranda of understanding will allow Clark County to use the camp for one-third of the year, while a three-way agreement between the counties and the university would force the counties to turn their keys in at the same time if the university wanted to end the agreement.

“Everyone has skin in the game, that’s why it will work,” Kirkpatrick said.

When Clark County isn’t using the camp, Lincoln County is free to book its own events, including continuing a relationship with its former owner.

Like miners digging different directions about to converge on a lode of diamonds, Deever has been working the same problem as Kirkpatrick, and his prep work helped expedite the deal. With the state’s other 4-H camp more than seven hours away at Lake Tahoe, he was looking for an option in Southern Nevada.

“Most of the funding for 4-H statewide comes from Clark County property taxes, yet they are getting almost none of the benefits,” he said.

While he originally eyed a location in northern Lincoln County, the ready-made situation in Alamo was too good to pass up and was more geographically aligned with the state’s population center. And it will benefit the county beyond the revenue for the camp.

“Lincoln County is a place with the highest unemployment and the lowest wage,” Deever said. “If you have something that comes in and creates just one new job, that’s big news. This camp has created two jobs so far — a manager and a sales person — and we’ll need a caretaker and a cook, so that’s four jobs. It’s huge.”

Higbee said the nature of the jobs, mostly part-time, will appeal to local residents who want to supplement their income.

He’s excited about some of the activity options that will be available when the camp is fully operational — a rifle range, an archery range, a climbing wall and a new high ropes course. His main regret is that the property’s prominent pond is for the building’s fire suppression system and won’t accommodate swimming or boating.

“Remote control boats are fine,” he said. “We’re hoping to use the facility for robotics competitions.”

It’s part of what Kirkpatrick says will be an effort to modernize 4-H for her constituents.

“The mission of 4-H needs to pivot sometimes to reflect the needs of our kids,” she said. “Agriculture is definitely something Clark County kids can learn about, but there are some tracks they could benefit from, like learning about Mexican culture and traditions, because it’s such a prominent part of our community. If we can hold a state robotics competition here, that will really show the range of what this place can be for kids. Outdoors or high tech.”

Part of the buildout includes additional bunk rooms, expanding on the camp’s 50-person overnight capacity, with additional investment in equipment from Clark County.

“Part of me wishes I could have found somewhere in Clark County for this, but it’s better this way,” Kirkpatrick said. “This is teaching our students so much more about the rest of Nevada and offering them an experience they’ll remember forever.”

Clark County campers roast marshmallows at the Lincoln County 4-H camp. Photos courtesy of Clark County
Fixing homelessness is about more than just putting a roof over someone's head

From HOMELESS page 1

through American Rescue Plan Act dollars.

Along with temporary, and in some cases permanent, housing subsidies, the rapid rehousing program provides supportive services — including mental healthcare, food assistance and job training and placement — acknowledging that housing itself sometimes isn’t enough to keep people out of experiencing homelessness.

“We know that for any of us humans, having a roof over our heads,” said Joli Robinson, president and CEO of Housing Forward. “But we also need support and additional assistance when it comes to finding and navigating the library system, getting connected to health care, job training or certifications… So, for people to be successful, it’s not just about getting them housed, it’s ‘How do we provide those wraparound services and supports so that they can remain housed?’”

The funding allowed for Housing Forward to invest in more case manager positions, making supportive services immediately available to those enrolled; the addition of encampment decommissioning, which engages people living in encampments, connecting them to housing and the creation of a landlord engagement team to find available units with landlords who accept housing vouchers to increase placements.

Each person enrolled in the program goes through an assessment to determine their individual needs and is assigned a case manager.

“They may need a full 12 months of case management, they may need a full 24 months, some may only need six, some may need nine, right?” Robinson said. “So, it’s not a cookie cutter operation — it’s about how are we serving and meeting the needs of an individual?”

The program was formulated out of discussions with Housing Forward, the City of Dallas, Dallas County and the Dallas Housing Authority.

“This model, it allowed us to leverage potentially this one-time tranche of funding, because of COVID that we haven’t seen before and that we may never see again,” Robinson said. “So, it was, ‘How do we work collectively in a way, so that one person doesn’t have one program and then over here have another program, but how do we have a system-wide approach, utilizing and maximizing the dollars and resources, so that we can have direct service providers that are funded in a way so they can provide case management and we can build the landlord engagement team?’

“Because prior to this work, case managers had to go one-sies, two-sies trying to find landlords to engage. The unique beauty of this process is ‘How do we build a system that really works more effectively and efficiently together to get people housed faster? And to get a large number of people housed?’ So it’s not everybody working in their individual silos, but we’re really working very well together.”

Dallas County Commissioner Theresa Daniel serves as the vice chair of the Dallas Area Partnership to End and Prevent Homelessness Local Government Corporation and also created the Dallas County Housing Work Group, which brought together local governments, non-profits, developers and shelters to determine how the different groups can best work together to curb the county’s housing crisis.

“If 60% of your income is going toward just rent, that makes it very difficult to actually survive and you’ll get bumped out and end up having to move to…

See HOMELESS page 29
County officials tour STAR Flight, the Travis County public safety aerial emergency program. Photo by Bob Daemmrich

Los Angeles County Supervisor Holly Mitchell speaks with David Martin in an interview for “The Good Government” podcast. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

"Governing on the Ground: The Past, Present and Future of County Government" contributors (l-r) Gary Moore, Cathrene Nichols and Ricky Hatch pause for a photo with Travis County Commissioner Ann Howard. Photo by Denny Henry

NACo officers welcome newcomer J.D. Clark of Wise County, Texas to the stage after his election as 2nd VP. Mary Hamann-Roland, Dakota County, Minn. commissioner and Latifah Faisal, Story County, Iowa commissioner
Conference attendees volunteer to stuff school back packs for needy children.

(B-r) Travis County Commissioner Ann Howard, Travis County Commissioner Brigid Shea and state Sen. Sarah Eckhardt, former Travis County judge, pause for a photo.

Travis County Commissioner Jeff Travillion discusses the conference at a press conference, with (l-r) Andy Brown, Denise Winfrey, Larry Johnson and James Gore. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Woody Cline (Gila County, Ariz.), Rex Bohn (Humbolt County, Calif.), Ned Coe (Modoc County, Calif.) and Dwayne McFall (Fremont County, Calif.) chat between workshops.

Bike ride participants gather early Saturday, July 22 in front of the Austin Convention Center before heading out on a bike ride. Photo by Denny Henry
Davison County, S.D. Auditor Susan Kiepke gets a signed copy of Joan Lunden’s book.

NACo past presidents gather for a photo on stage with NACo President Mary Jo McGuire (in red tennis shoes) after the Annual Business Meeting (l-r): Denise Winfrey, Larry Johnson, Glen Whitley, Mary Ann Borgeson, Sallie Clark, Gary Moore, Colleen Landkamer, Roy Charles Brooks and Greg Cox. Photo by Denny Henry

Carolyn Marinan (far left), Hennepin County, Minn. and Schyler Harding (left), Association of County Commissioners of Georgia (both of NACIO) chat with Fulton County, Ga. Commissioner Bridget Thorne and Past President Michael Hightower.

Walter Daniels & the Del Valle Trustees play a set on The Badillac art car during the Exhibit Hall opening. Photo by Leon Lawrence III

Newton County, Ga. Commissioner Alana Sanders enjoys the reception July 24 at Austin City Limits. Photo by Bob Daemmrich
AUGUST 21, 2023

Then-NACo President Denise Winfrey congratulates student Raina Ford, the David Davenport Memorial scholarship winner.

LaSonya Hall, deputy chief administrative officer, Shelby County, Tenn. and Dorcas Young Griffin, director, Shelby County Division of Community Services, Shelby County, Tenn. Photo by Bob Daemmrich

Travis County Judge Andy Brown (center), wife Sara (far left) and children; Commissioners Ann Howard (left) Brigid Shea and Austin Mayor Kirk Preston Watson. Photo by Bob Daemmrich

AWARDS

Denise Winfrey (left) and Jay Dick of Americans for the Arts present Ashley Kierkewicz of Hawaii County with the Public Leadership in the Arts Award.

Members of the Women of NACo gather for a photo at the Annual Conference during their meeting. Photo by Leon Lawrence III
THE ROAD AHEAD FOR COUNTY PRIORITIES

The NACo Board of Directors approved 43 new policy resolutions to be added to the American County Platform throughout 10 policy steering committees during its July 24 meeting. In addition to several platform changes, steering committees set forth their priorities ranging from the upcoming farm bill, the availability of commercial insurance, public lands management, the development of EV charging stations and much more.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Key County Priorities in the 2023 Farm Bill

ISSUE: The U.S. Farm Bill helps counties make critical investments in infrastructure, economic development, workforce training, nutrition and conservation within some of our nation’s most underserved communities. Preserving the law’s programs is key to the strength and stability of our local, regional, state and national economies. With Congress hard at work to reauthorize the 2023 Farm Bill, counties must identify and advocate for key county priorities in this critical legislation.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo supports the following priorities for the 2023 Farm Bill:

1. Improve ease of access and flexibility of Farm Bill Programs – Streamline application processes and reporting requirements for Farm Bill programs, along with adopting a more equitable funding award structures for rural counties by using competitive grants over loans. Provide long-term certainty for communities seeking to utilize federal resources authorized in the Farm Bill adopting multi-year funding terms for Federal funding. Along with this minimize or eliminate local matching requirements.

2. Maintain and expand support for farmers – Agriculture is the backbone of the American economy and subsequently has a huge impact on counties. Programs particularly important to counties include the Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) Program, the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) Program, the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP), the Livestock Forage Disaster Program (LDFP) and the Federal Crop Insurance Program (FCIP).

3. Provide stronger support for small mid-size producers – Small farms constitute almost 90 percent of the nation’s farms. These producers play a crucial role in rural economies. Counties support reauthorizations of the Farming Opportunities Training and Outreach (FOTO) program and increased funding for the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP). Counties also support maintaining and improving farm safety net programs targeting new, beginning and underserved producers.

4. Maintain and expand Farm Bill conservation programs – The protection of the Nation’s ecosystems starts with the conservation efforts of our Rural Communities whether by the American Farmer, Rancher or Forester. Counties support the reauthorization of producer-led voluntary conservation programs administered by USDA, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP). Counties also support increased funding and long-term funding for NRCS Watershed programs.

5. Invest in the capacity of rural counties – 70 percent of America’s Counties are rural. Robust investment in the expertise and capacity of rural counties will empower rural policymakers to plan and execute local-led community development strategies. Counties call on Congress to include at least $1 billion dollars in mandatory funding for grants-based rural capacity-building programs into the 2023 Farm Bill. Counties also support extending eligibility for the Community Facilities Direct Loan & Grant Program to rural governments to provide financial assistance to county operated facilities. In turn, population thresholds should be increased where possible when considering eligibility for rural development programs, while inserting language that would prioritize low-population counties.

6. Invest in high-speed internet access – According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) 14.5 million Americans lack quality broadband internet access. Counties support authorizing the ReConnect Program through the Farm Bill. Counties also support reauthorizing the Distance Learning & Telemedicine Program, which would increase the quality of life and help rural America thrive. Finally, counties support reauthorizing the Community Connect Grant Program, which will continue to invest in community oriented connectivity which will support economic growth and help with education, healthcare and pub-
From RESOLUTIONS page 20

9 Strengthen the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Counties are on the front lines for the development, implementation and administration of food and nutrition programs that combat hunger at the local level through partnerships with the federal government. Counties support maintaining and enhancing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), including increasing the options available to state and local governments to streamline SNAP applications and administrative processes, combat food insecurity among active-duty service members by excluding the Basic Allowance for Housing from income eligibility and supporting the promotion of healthy diets by offering incentives and the infrastructure to encourage more fruit/vegetable production and consumption.

Amend Classification Criteria for Small Meat Processing Plants

ISSUE: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has proposed new regulations regarding effluent discharge from small meat processing facilities defined by the EPA as employing fewer than 1,000 workers.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges the EPA to amend the classification criteria for meat processing plants to more accurately reflect the multitude of different size and type of meat processing operations and consider regulatory actions that are sustainable for all of the business model sizes and types.

Commodity, Economic and Workforce Development

Family Emergency Shelter

ISSUE: Federal support for counties ensuring emergency shelter to families.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges the federal government to incentivize counties to provide emergency shelter to families in crisis. NACo further urges the federal government to remove existing and prevent future financial penalties and disincentives that discourage or prohibit families in crisis from seeking and securing emergency shelter when facing homelessness.

WIOA Reauthorization and Increased Investment

ISSUE: The current landscape of workforce challenges necessitates the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA), increased investment in workforce development programs, comprehensive reforms and increased support to meet the evolving demands of the job market.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo supports the reauthorization of WIOA and urges increased investment to address the dynamic needs of our counties and promote economic prosperity for all. When pursuing comprehensive reforms, NACo calls on Congress and relevant agencies to: foster collaboration between workforce development programs and entities that have demonstrated success; focus on high-growth sectors; revisit qualifications for youth and opportunity youth; increase opportunities for and enhance access to education and training; strengthen connection to support services such as housing, transportation, and healthcare; and establish data infrastructure that identifies job opportunities and required skills, enabling counties to align training programs with industry needs and jobs of the future.

Disaster Recovery Reform

ISSUE: Critical need for long-term federal funding and support for communities and residents impacted by natural disasters, which are occurring more frequently and intensely.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo strongly supports permanent reauthorization of the Community Block Development Grant for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR), specifically through "The Reforming Disaster Recovery Act" to ensure collaboration between federal, state and local entities to streamline the process of accessing and distributing disaster recovery funds, increasing efficiency and effectiveness of resource utilization. NACo further encourages HUD to provide direct CDBG-DR allocations to CDBG Entitlement Communities, thus ensuring funds are deployed to disaster-impacted counties as expeditiously as possible.

Adjust the Basis for Establishing Affordable Housing Program Income Limits

ISSUE: To calculate Area Median Income (AMI), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) utilizes U.S. Census Bureau data based on Median Family Income. Median Family Income is higher than Median Household Income figures. To determine eligibility for assistance HUD requires that we base eligibility on household income and not family income.

According to the Census Bureau American Community Survey 1-year data, family income typically runs 20-24 percent greater than household income in all geographies. By using Median Family Income as the data point, it is then used in part to determine the rents allowed by HUD’s Multifamily programs, which has resulted in higher income limits and higher maximum allowable rents.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo supports encouraging HUD to review its method of calculation of Area Median Income and con-
Consider revising the methodology to use Median Household Income, instead of Median Family Income. This adjustment would provide income limits that would more accurately reflect the population’s actual median income, and better serve those targeted for assistance through affordable housing programs. This would provide added funding for those populations with the greatest need while addressing the affordable housing crises nationwide.

Land Ports of Entry Modernization Trust Fund Act

ISSUE: The bipartisan Land Ports of Entry Modernization Trust Fund Act is an effort to act on trade and commerce opportunities presented at the U.S. southern border while strengthening border management capacity. From machines to agriculture, trade with Canada and Mexico supports jobs in all 50 states.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO urges Congress to pass the Land Ports of Entry Modernization Act which will strengthen border trade and management. The legislation establishes a trust fund to construct new ports of entry, expand and improve existing ports of entry, procure technology for inspecting and processing traffic passing through ports of entry and hire U.S. Customs and Border Protection staff. From machines to agriculture, trade with Canada and Mexico supports jobs in all 50 states.

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY AND LAND USE

Reduce Local Match Requirements for Federal Environmental Restoration Projects

ISSUE: Federal environmental restoration grant programs generally require 50 percent matching funds from the applicant agency. Federal transportation grant programs more often require a 20 percent match from the local agency partner. Reducing match requirements for environmental restoration projects to 20 percent would bring these programs into alignment with transportation programs and enable local agency partners to put more and larger projects on the ground more quickly.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO encourages the Executive Branch to reduce match requirements for federal environmental restoration programs from 50 percent to 20 percent.

Property Assessed Clean Energy Financing

ISSUE: Counties can create voluntary assessment programs, such as Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing, that allow homeowners to borrow funds from the county for specified improvements and repay the funds through an assessment on the property. These programs support important local policy objectives. A Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) proposed rulemaking (Docket No. CFPB-2023-0029) would subject counties that operate PACE financing programs to the consumer creditor laws and regulations set forth under the Truth in Lending Act (TILA) and Regulation Z as though they were a for-profit lender originating home mortgages. This would create a costly and unnecessary burden on counties and infringe on long-standing constitutional principles that reserve the administration of property taxes and assessments to state and local governments.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO opposes the application of Regulation Z on PACE financing provided directly by counties without the use of a private PACE company and strongly urges CFPB to revise its proposed regulations to exclude county-operated PACE financing programs. By excluding county-operated programs CFPB would acknowledge that counties are government entities with legitimate public policy objectives, not for-profit lenders.

Efficient Siting and Permitting

ISSUE: Investment is necessary in the nation’s electric grid to maintain the reliability and resilience of the system against extreme weather conditions, increasing security threats and to support renewable energy technologies as they are brought online. Additionally, many renewable projects are in remote and rural counties that lack ready or cost-effective access to existing electrical transmission, limiting their ability to benefit from these projects.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO supports federal policies to streamline the permitting process to expedite projects necessary to ensure the reliability and resilience of the electric grid. These policies must include the need to support and protect local economies while maintaining the critical role of county governments in siting and permitting decisions.

Water Resources Sustainability

ISSUE: Security of potable water resources is an historical and recurring cause for concern for many western states but is becoming a cause for concern for midwestern states.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO urges the additional funding of water resources [quantity and quality] management and planning throughout the United States and Territories to insure sustainable supply for individuals, families, agriculture, commerce and industry.

Act in these key areas: geographic and geophysical investigations of groundwater aquifers, water chemistry testing, economic forecast for sustainable use for foreseeable future, at least 250 years. NACO urges Congress to authorize increased funding through the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to states as grants in support of research, state water plans and regional water authorities which govern at least one county and archiving of water data.

Innovative Water Management Support

ISSUE: Extreme weather is increasing the need for counties to have the opportunity to utilize innovative water management tools such as Forecast Informed Reservoir Operations (FIBO) and seasonal (S2S) weather research forecasting.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO urges the strengthening, through additional funding of Congressional appropriations directed toward the implementation of FIBO initiatives, improvement of S2S weather research forecasting and real-authorization of the Weather Act.

Complete the Central and South Florida Flood Resiliency Study

ISSUE: Encourage the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to fund and complete the C&SF flood resiliency study.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO supports a USACE budget and timeline waiver to continue the Section 216 study authorized by Water Resources Development Act of 2023.

Authorize the Water Resources Development Act

ISSUE: Support authorization of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA).

ADOPTED POLICY: NACO supports a two-year authorization of the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) that will address county interests related to ports, inland waterways, levees, dams, wetlands, watersheds and coastal restoration. As owners, users and regulators of water resources and infrastructure, counties are directly impacted by the policies and funding authorized through WRDA authorizations. Any water infrastructure legislation should address the needs of counties, including: allocating federal matching funds for local governments to plan for and implement projects that reduce flood damage risks and address habitat restoration, connectivity and resiliency, ensuring counties are consulted prior to the federal government undertaking water resource projects within county boundaries, and strengthening the federal-state-local partnership in the decision-making process for water projects.

Sand Acquisition, Nourishment and Development Act of 2023

ISSUE: Support the SAND Act.
From RESOLUTIONS page 22

**HEALTH**

**Women’s Cardiovascular Health**

**ISSUE:** Strengthening county programming that supports cardiovascular health among women.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to encourage counties to promote cardiovascular health among women. That includes but is not limited to primary care, public health promotion, financial eligibility under government health programs like Medicaid, and providing technical assistance to community-based organizations aligned with county health and human services programs.

**System of Care**

**ISSUE:** Providing federal incentives for System of Care models in health care delivery.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to update federal health care financing (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, Affordable Care Act Health Insurance Exchanges) to incentivize, reward, and underwrite collaborations among various providers of health care. That includes but is not limited to primary care, mental health, substance abuse treatment and support, public health, dental health, geriatric care/services and housing. NACo further urges the federal government to work directly with counties that seek to implement System of Care pilots.

**HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION**

**Streamline Administration of Federal Benefit Programs**

**ISSUE:** Streamlining and standardizing federal means-tested programs would better serve families and reduce county administrative costs by making it easier for families and case-workers to understand and apply uniform standards across multiple benefit programs.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports federal legislative and regulatory efforts to streamline and standardize means-tested federal benefit programs, including income thresholds. Such efforts will make it easier for families and individuals to understand and apply for benefits and for county caseworkers to administer them, freeing up more time for county employees to focus on supporting families rather than filling out multiple forms for individual programs. Additionally, administrative simplification would assist counties in targeting already scarce administrative funds to support consolidated program operations which may save taxpayer dollars and improve fraud detection and accurate determination of benefits.

**Establish a Federal Office of New Americans**

**ISSUE:** Without a National Immigrant Inclusion Strategy led by a Federal Office of New Americans, counties find themselves without the support and resources necessary to support the civic, social and economic inclusion of newcomers.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress or the President to establish a Federal Office of New Americans that is charged with a National Immigrant Inclusion strategy to promote and support immigrant and refugee integration into, and inclusion in, the civic, social and economic life of the United States. This office would function to coordinate the efforts of federal, state, county and local entities to support such integration and inclusion. It would also ensure that the federal government and federal agencies promote the pursuit of United States citizenship among immigrants and refugees. Additionally, the Office would work with counties and other local entities to improve access to workforce development programs, social services and education, by ensuring that such programs meet the demand and the unique language, training and credentialing needs of immigrants and refugees. And finally, through a robust stakeholder engagement strategy, the Office would provide consultation and leadership to federal government officials on the challenges and opportunities facing such entities with respect to immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion.

**Create Financial Incentives to Assist Individuals in Paying for Out-of-Pocket Health Care Costs**

**ISSUE:** Health care costs continue to outpace inflation. As the population of the United States ages, the need for health care and its associated costs will increase. Creating tax-advantaged health care savings accounts is one way of assisting individuals to plan and pay for future health care costs.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports federal legislative and regulatory efforts to create tax-advantaged health care savings accounts so that individuals and families may be better able to pay for a variety of health care costs, including but not limited to: co-pays, prescription drugs, Medicare premiums and long term care.

**FINANCE, PENSIONS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**Extend Deadlines on American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds**

**ISSUE:** Counties are unable to meet expenditure deadlines on projects utilizing funds from the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo supports legislation and/or federal regulatory changes that extends obligation and expenditure deadlines on SLFRF funding set by the American Rescue Plan Act and the U.S. Department of Treasury.

**Preserve Federal Benefits Eligibility for Participants in County-Led Income Support Pilots**

**ISSUE:** Counties across the nation are investing local dollars in pilot programs to provide direct income support to vulnerable residents. However, receiving assistance at the local level may interfere with participants’ eligibility for other important federal health, nutrition, housing and anti-poverty programs, disincentivizing and penalizing pilot participation.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges the federal government to ensure individuals participating in county-led income support pilots do not lose eligibility for other federal assistance programs.

**Grant Veeder of Black Hawk County, Iowa, delivers his traditional limerick to the NACo Board.**

**See RESOLUTIONS page 24**
Policy Impacting
Local Government

ISSUE: Rep. Bennie Thomp- son (D-Miss.) introduced legis- lation in 2023 to mandate local training as part of the Emergenc- ty Management Performance Grant requirements. He was ap- parently unaware that the grant does not include a pass-through requirement to local govern- ment, and therefor represents an unfunded mandate. FEMA policy and strategy include a concept for coping with the rising cost of major disasters and emergencies and the lim- ited capacity of the agency to adequately manage all emer- gencies. The FEMA strategy es- tablishes partner relationships with the states, but does not, however, detail any partnership between FEMA and local gov- ernment in the policy, preven- tion, planning, response, and mitigation and recovery realms. This despite recognizing that all disasters are local, and their short- and long-term impacts, as well as community recovery are locally coordinated and as- sisted.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges the President to require the Fed- eral Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to involve local and state Emergency Manage- ment subject matter experts in the development of future nec- essary changes to the Public As- sistance eligibility calculations, Individual Assistance program changes and to consider the im- pact on local government when developing strategic plans. This involvement must be during the formation of the proposed policy rule change if the change requires local and state govern- ment to significantly change their operating methods or fis- cal responsibilities in disasters.

Mental Health Funding for All Emergency Management Response System Staff and Volunteers

ISSUE: The complex threat landscape and increased cadence of emergencies occur- ring throughout the country has highlighted that there is a critical need to provide proac- tive mental health support to all emergency response and recov- ery responders and volunteers. Used in this instance, “respond- ers” include fire and emergency medical services personnel, law enforcement, emergency man- age ment, public works, public health, 911 dispatchers, 988 op- erators and national nonprof- its in emergency response and recovery. While many organi- zations provide resources like Employee Assistance Programs, these initiatives fall short of adequately providing support where and when needed. Fol- lowing a distressing event, it is not reasonable to expect the impacted responders, support staff, or volunteers, to advo- cate for themselves for mental health support when they are processing trauma and emo- tional stress.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo en-courages the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Manage- ment Agency to encourage and support the development of mental health support pro- grams for emergency manage- ment program members who are required to support commu- nity response and recovery to both declared and local emer- gencies. NACo asks that mental health support programs via the following avenues:

• Federal policies created or amended to encourage and support counties to provide re- silience and self-care technique training for any individual who participates in the county’s emergency management pro- gram in the fields of fire and emergency medical services, law enforcement, emergency management, public health, and other personnel who par- ticipate as part of the county’s emergency management pro- gram.

• Federal preparedness grants created or amended to allow lo- cal, state, tribal, and territorial grant recipients to develop their own mental health support pro- grams, emphasizing proactive outreach post-event.

• FEMA leadership to work with NACo leadership to ed- ucate counties on the impor- tance of mental health support before, during and after coun- ties experience a large scale emergency or disaster.

Disaster Relief Fund

ISSUE: The Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), managed by the Federal Emergency Manage- ment Agency (FEMA), is a crucial source of funding for disaster response and recovery efforts. However, the fund’s on- going liquidity issues have hin- dered its ability to adequately meet the escalating costs of nat- ural disasters, which have been increasingly severe and fre- quent in recent years. The DRF relies heavily on congressional appropriations, but the growing scale and intensity of disasters have strained its resources.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo joins with our partners at the Inter- national Association of Emer- gency Managers—USA Council (IAEM) in urging Congress to fund the DRF in a predictable way — as it was pre-COVID — to ensure adequate resources are available to support local governments when major di- sasters occur.

Availability and Affordability of Homeowners and Commercial Wildfire Insurance

ISSUE: As wildfire risk contin- ues to increase substantially in the West, homeowners, com- mercial businesses and spe- cial districts in wildfire prone areas face drastically higher insurance premiums, and in many cases, higher-risk com- munities located in the wild- land-urban interface (WUI), do not have access to insurance at all. While several programs exist for flood and earthquake (i.e. National Flood Insurance Program managed by the Fed- eral Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and California Earthquake Authority), there is no central regulatory agency or insurance program for wildfire disasters. Subsequently insurance surplus line and re-insur- ance carriers (non-admitted carriers) are only regulated in the insured’s home state (15 U.S.C. § 8202 — Regulation of non-admitted insurance by insured’s home State); thereby leaving little or no alternative to homeowners, businesses, and special districts at risk or loss of insurance.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges Congress and the administra- tion to study and identify po- tential solutions to address the availability and affordability of wildfire insurance, including but not limited to, the Senate Committee on Finance, House of Representatives Financial Services Committee and Fed- eral Insurance Office. Such an effort should also address the ability and role of various levels of government in pro- viding incentives for wildfire risk mitigation efforts and/or expansion of federal insurance program(s).

PUBLIC LANDS

Full Funding for State Wildlife Plans

ISSUE: While state wild- life plans are congressional- ly mandated, there is limited dedicated federal funding to implement these important conservation tools.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo sup- ports full funding of state wild- life plans.

Increase the Minimum Level for a 1099-MISC/1099- NEC Filing When Performing Wildfire Mitigation Activities

ISSUE: The Internal Revenue Service mandates the filing of a 1099 form for any work worth over $600, creating bur-densome paperwork for coun- try governments.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo en-courages the administration to increase the minimum lev- el for a 1099-MISC/1099-NEC form to be filed from $600 to $5,000 or create an exemption of any wildland fire mitiga- tion reimbursement funded by a federal grant. This is in line with H.R. 3937 that would dramatically increase the In- ternal Revenue Service (IRS) 1099 Form reporting thresh- old for services performed for individual contractors or subcontracts from $600 to $5,000.

Amendments to PILT Population Caps

ISSUE: Counties, boroughs, townships and parishes with populations of under 5,000 have monetary caps within the PILT formula that place them in an unfavorable position in relation to counties with populations greater than 5,000.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo sup- ports amending the PILT for- mula to extend the population multipliers to include addi- tional multipliers for counties with populations in the range of 4,000, 3,000, 2,000, and 1,000. The increase in the 4,000 mul-
tillator when compared to 5,000 population would have the same ratios as the difference in 50,000 and 40,000 population. The increase in the 3,000 multiplier when compared to 4,000 population would have the same ratios as the difference in 40,000 and 30,000 population. This will continue on for counties with populations of 1,000 or less. All counties with enough qualified federal land acres would have a minimum payment no less than the population cap of local governments of 1,000 population.

**Improve Efficiencies of the LWCF Program**

**ISSUE:** The National Park Service administers the Land and Water Conversation Fund Act (LWCF). Input from state, regional, county and local LWCF funding recipients to refine interpretation of LWCF will improve cost-effectiveness, efficiency, land stewardship and outdoor recreation.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo encourages the National Park Service to work with state, regional, county and local LWCF providers to define reasonable access, recreational development timeframe requirements and small acreage conversion requirements.

**Historic Routes Preservation Act**

**ISSUE:** Title to thousands of county roads in underserved and rural communities are disputed in costly and prolonged litigation with the federal government under R.S. 2477. Meanwhile, these roads are in poor condition and badly in need of repair and maintenance which has ongoing negative effects on rural economies, safety and connectivity.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** Pass the Historic Routes Preservation Act to create and mandate an efficient administrative process for the adjudication of county R.S. 2477 rights-of-way claims. This Act would require that the administrative adjudication process incorporates a judicial test established by the judicial system for R.S. 2477 determinations.

Such judicial test would grant jurisdiction over R.S. 2447 right-of-way claims to counties that met certain acceptance criteria including affirmative action by the county on or before October 21, 1976, a formal resolution or declaration of ownership, inclusion of the road in official map that reflects ownership or maintenance responsibility, construction, improvement, repair or maintenance of a highway by county governmental authority before October 21, 1976, or continuous use of the road by the public for a period of not fewer than 5 consecutive years end on a date that is on or before October 21, 1976.

**Efficient Hiring Practices and Adequate Sustainable Staffing Resources on Federal Recreation Public Lands**

**ISSUE:** For many years, the nation’s federal land management agencies - the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the National Park Service (NPS), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) - have lacked adequate personnel with associated sustainable staffing resources, suffered from large national centralized human resource bureaucracies that slow hiring onboarding, diminish local recruitment efforts, and in some cases jeopardize timely successful recruitment of seasonal workforce, specialized positions (i.e. archeologists), law enforcement and seasonal firefighters - all of which are critical to federal recreation public lands and associated outdoor recreation counties.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress, to provide ongoing federal funding and the necessary resources for increased staffing to USFS, BLM, NPS and FWS, and other federal agencies that provide access to, hold jurisdiction responsibility, provide public safety or other administrative or specialized service to federal recreational public lands and impact adjacent outdoor recreation counties. Furthermore, NACo urges the administration to review, evaluate and take the necessary actions to improve public administrative hiring practices that guarantee reasonable hiring timelines, minimize bureaucratic processes and promote the authority and accountability of local federal administrative control over hiring processes. In addition, NACo urges the administration to provide adequate workforce housing, including the acquisition, leasing of and use of public federal lands for workforce housing when applicable.

**Support Policy Updates that Require Early Engagement with County Governments with Ski Areas on Public Land**

**ISSUE:** Ski areas are no longer seasonal and no longer restricted to skiing and related activities. As such, existing policies are no longer adequate to address the ever expanding use of public lands at ski areas and the resulting pressure on adjacent communities. County governments are expected to provide taxpayer funded infrastructure and services to these year round resorts but have little opportunity to participate in decision making and revenue sharing.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the Forest Service to update Forest Service policies for ski area permitting to ensure ski resort management on National Forest lands best serves the public, is mindful of County government needs and responsibilities, and is consistent across all National Forests.

**High-Speed Internet Affordability**

**ISSUE:** Affordability remains a significant barrier to ubiquitous adoption of available high-speed internet. Federal grants, or other programmatic support, need to ensure that they address the three pillars – accessibility, reliability, and affordability – to best eliminate the digital divide.

**ADOPTED POLICY:** NACo urges Congress and the relevant federal agencies to require, as a condition for the receipt of any federal funding, that internet service providers 1) offer an affordable tier of service as the then-current Federal Communications Commission (FCC) defined acceptable speed minimum; and 2) participate in the ACP program.

**Facilitate the Nationwide Technology**

**Support a Permanent Federal Broadband Assistance Program**

**ISSUE:** Despite the establishment of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to subsidize internet access for eligible low-income households, concerns over the temporary nature of the funding, inefficiencies in the allocation of funds, and lack of affordability persist. The ACP also doesn’t require internet service providers (ISPs) to offer a $100 connected device discount, thus creating an equity gap.

From RESOLUTIONS page 24

Eileen Higgins, a Miami-Dade County, Fla. commissioner and chair of the Transportation Steering Committee, addresses the NACo Board.
Deployment of Next Generation 911 — Fund a Grant Program to Adequately Support the Implementation and Interoperability of NG911

ISSUE: No matter where a 911 call is placed, people expect a high-quality and standardized emergency response that meets their needs. As communications technology transitions from analog systems to Internet Protocol (IP) based systems, the means of accessing 911 must also transition. Technology exists for emergency communication centers to have access to multi-media data sources of information such as pictures, text, video, and telematics data; however, 911 systems across the country struggle to move from the analog systems built over 50 years ago to digital IP-based systems, known as Next Generation 911 (NG911). Once fully implemented, NG911 systems will process multi-media data that analog systems simply cannot. More importantly, NG911 networks provide greater security, redundancy and reliability than the aging analog 911 systems.

While 911 is the nationally recognized emergency number, its success lies in the basis that the technology is implemented locally to meet the specific needs of each community and provides a high-quality and standardized emergency response that meets their needs. As communications technology transitions from analog systems to Internet Protocol (IP) based systems, the means of accessing 911 must also transition. Technology exists for emergency communication centers to have access to multi-media data sources of information such as pictures, text, video, and telematics data; however, 911 systems across the country struggle to move from the analog systems built over 50 years ago to digital IP-based systems, known as Next Generation 911 (NG911). Once fully implemented, NG911 systems will process multi-media data that analog systems simply cannot. More importantly, NG911 networks provide greater security, redundancy and reliability than the aging analog 911 systems.

While 911 is the nationally recognized emergency number, its success lies in the basis that the technology is implemented locally to meet the specific needs of each community.

Yet is based on standards that enable the ability to share 911 calls and data with any jurisdiction. The migration from the legacy 911 system to NG911 is not a “flip of switch” migration and requires time, expertise and financial resources. State and local governments must not only support the costly implementation of NG911, but also must maintain legacy 911 systems during the migration. ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges Congress to pass H.R. 1784 along with an adequate funding resource, whether that be a dedicated spectrum auction revenue, or another source identified by Congress, to assist with the needed funding for technology and telecommunication training related to NG911 implementation and interoperability nationwide.

Provide a Limited Exception to the BEAD Program’s Letter of Credit Requirement

ISSUE: NTIA’s BEAD Grant Irrevocable Standby Letter of Credit requirement limits counties’ options to build broadband in rural unserved areas by discouraging small to mid-size broadband service providers from applying for BEAD grants, and thereby increases the costs of broadband deployment to un- and under-served communities.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to replace the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) grant program’s requirement of an Irrevocable Standby Letter of Credit requirement with a requirement to procure a Surety Performance Bond specifically for counties interested in directly applying or supporting a provider who is directly applying for BEAD grant funding to carry out an eligible use within the program.

TRANSPORTATION

Enact a New, Long-Term FAA Reauthorization with County Priorities

ISSUE: Counties directly support over one-third of America’s public airports that serve many more than our residents. To ensure the continued safe and efficient operation of these facilities, we require intergovernmental support from our federal partners at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to provide clear and reasonable guidance and rules around FAA grant applications, including preventing penalties and the claw back of federal funds should a private entity contracted by a state or local government using National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) formula funds or Charging and Fueling Infrastructure Program grant competitive funds fail to keep a station in operation or meet the operational minimum of 97 percent.

I Love My County Because...

Submit your artwork at NACo.org/ART

ART CONTEST

Recognizing the importance of public safety and environmental health in counties across the country where rail lines are located, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) must address key concerns around blocked crossings, freight train lengths and the routing of hazardous materials through local communities.

ADOPTED POLICY: NACo urges Congress and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in collaboration with local and other relevant stakeholders, to take immediate action to address delays that result in idling freight trains, which have harmful environmental impacts in our local communities, and create blocked-at-grade crossings, which adversely impact public safety and economic development. This should include recommendations on the strategic placement of grade separations, and mandating reasonable lengths of freight trains as determined by comprehensive federal studies and assessments that identify risks associated with long freight trains, including public safety impacts and any increased risks of derailment.

To enhance public safety and minimize the risks associated with the transportation of hazardous materials, NACo urges the FRA to undertake a study to determine safer, innovative methods of routing these materials through the country. Current practices have shown to be detrimental to our communities based on recent events. The study should incorporate: (1) a full assessment of railways in relation to critical infrastructure and explosive materials including fueling stations and gas lines, (2) an assessment of community communication with an emphasis on first responders, (3) a review of safety standards for rail cars and (4) should consider the use of advanced technology and risk assessment tools to determine the safest and most efficient routing options for hazardous materials. Additionally, increased funding should be provided for the placement of grade separations.
Number of years active in NACo: 11 years
Years in public service: 27 years in public office
Occupation: County Commissioner
Education: BA in Business Administration from the College of St. Catherine, a JD from Hamline University School of Law and an MA in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Making leadership appointments and choosing between great candidates and disappointing many in the process.

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., and Dolly Parton.

You’d be surprised to learn that I: Played hockey growing up.

My motto is: Be kind and have courage.

The last book I read was: “The Leadership Challenge” by James Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner.

My favorite movie is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

A DREAM I HAVE IS TO: Have a camper van and travel to every state visiting their national parks, state capitols, presidential libraries and roadside attractions.

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

My favorite movie is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

A DREAM I HAVE IS TO: Have a camper van and travel to every state visiting their national parks, state capitols, presidential libraries and roadside attractions.

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

A DREAM I HAVE IS TO: Have a camper van and travel to every state visiting their national parks, state capitols, presidential libraries and roadside attractions.

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

A DREAM I HAVE IS TO: Have a camper van and travel to every state visiting their national parks, state capitols, presidential libraries and roadside attractions.

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.

A DREAM I HAVE IS TO: Have a camper van and travel to every state visiting their national parks, state capitols, presidential libraries and roadside attractions.

My favorite meal is: Seafood, veggies and salads.

My pet peeve is: People talking, making noises or opening up wrappers during a movie or performance.

My favorite music is: “Mamma Mia”

My favorite U.S. president is: Abraham Lincoln, because he led us through crisis and held us together.

My county is a NACo member because: NACo gives us opportunities to connect and learn from each other and provides resources that we use every day. We know that when we work together as counties, our voice is much stronger.
PROBLEM:
Gwinnett County’s food insecurity increased during the pandemic.

SOLUTION:
The county teamed up with a food bank to create a mobile community market to alleviate food insecurity.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

Gwinnett County, Ga.’s mobile community market is helping bridge a county gap in food equity, providing fresh produce, shelf-stable items and other forms of assistance to families at no cost and with no strings attached.

The Mobile Food Distribution Program operates through a partnership with the Atlanta Community Food Bank and Volunteer Gwinnett, a county government department created as an engagement and outreach tool for different departments within county government to recruit volunteers for various services.

The mobile market concept came out of the county’s increased food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Muriam Nafees, Volunteer Gwinnett’s collaboration manager. About 77,000 people in the county are food insecure, an estimated 44,000 of whom are under the age of 18.

“Some of the pantries and the co-ops that were dealing with some of that food insecurity initiatives here in Gwinnett were struggling to be able to get enough supply and struggling to be able to feed the additional amount of families who were now having to stay home and take care of sick loved ones, or just the loss of jobs, all the kids being home, so obviously now you’re accounting for more food that you probably didn’t necessarily account for,” Nafees said. “A lot of what we kept hearing from our agencies here in Gwinnett was, ‘Hey, we’re unable to get the resources or unable to supply all these people or unable to process them.’

“Because one of the things that they have to do as agencies is they have more extensive processes they may have to do in order to vet the family and go through all the checks and balances before someone can participate, and at the height of the pandemic, it was really difficult to be able to go through all of those processes.”

“The program is unique in that it doesn’t require participants to already be on government benefits or provide any paperwork to receive the food and other items, which include hygiene/personal care items and pet food. The only information Volunteer Gwinnett asks of participants is how many people are in their household to ensure they’re providing an adequate supply of food, Nafees said.

“We want to make sure that we are serving all communities,” Nafees said. “We don’t want to collect any identification or addresses or make people feel vulnerable or make them feel any type of anxiety as they’re coming to collect, so just to kind of get rid of those feelings, we purposely do not collect any information ... We also encourage people who may be participating if they know of other families that they want to pick up for, whether it’s a neighbor who may not have access or a family member with a disability.

“We do not require anything from anyone which truly sets us apart from any other organization that may be in the food realm, because they do require a lot of the paperwork.”

Making the market mobile was another integral element to the program. Each box distributed has 40 to 50 pounds of produce and shelf-stable items, which feeds a family of five or six for between one and two weeks until the community market comes back to a given neighborhood within the county.

Nearly 1.6 million pounds of food items have been distributed throughout the county since the program launched in 2020, reaching more than 49,727 households.

“We did not want to just serve one area or stick to one area when so many areas were in need and were hurting and were dire for that help, so we definitely just wanted to make sure that we were moving around Gwinnett and circulating and going weekly, place to place,” Nafees said. “Unfortunately, a lot of the areas here in Gwinnett are food deserts and they may not have access to fresh produce, so intentionally, when we were requesting what type of food items we need [from the food bank], we intentionally make that request for fresh produce — that way we’re supplying families with something that is nutritious.”

Volunteer Gwinnett aims to make the mobile market a source of joy for the community, so the department brings entertainment to the events and tries to make it a fun atmosphere, Nafees said.

“I never want someone to feel like they’re in a line and they’re feeling like they’re a burden or already being very anxious to be in that line,” Nafees said. “Nobody wants to look like they need help. People want to feel normal and that they can function on their own without needing that extra assistance, so we’ll bring our DJs out, we really make it a fun day, so it’s not that you’re just necessarily getting the help.”

Gwinnett County’s program earned it a “Best in Category” NACo Achievement Award this year in the Volunteers category. With over 195 community partners, the mobile market’s use has expanded to offer a wide range of services including free flu/COVID vaccinations and HIV testing, car seat installations and early learning book distributions for families with young children.

“If people are food insecure, there obviously are other needs that they have as a family,” Nafees said. “And trying to realize what those needs may be and just making sure as county government that we’re providing all our resources possible, and not just making this a food event, but a full encompass resource event [is important].

Groups including emergency services and water resources will also come to the mobile market events to sign people up for smoke alarm installs and make sure people have access to the county’s water assistance program to fix leaks or necessary repairs.

“A family was actually saved because of it,” Nafees said.

“We were at a mosque, and we signed up a family for a smoke alarm install. They didn’t have any prior education to smoke alarms, they were immigrants. And so, they accepted fire to come out to their house and install the smoke alarms, and a few months later in the middle of the night, one of their heaters tipped over.

“The entire house was in full blaze and the only way that the single mom got out with her children was because of those alarms. The entire house was engulfed, and I actually got a call back from the fire department saying had those alarms not been installed, it’s very likely that that family would not have made it out.”

The market is run by volunteers, many of whom are from Volunteer Gwinnett’s 18,000-person database of active volunteers, while others volunteer through their places of worship or non-profits.

“We wanted to make sure that...
COVID increased food insecurity

From GROceries page 28

"We’re reaching all community members, whether they want to participate in the food or participate in helping get that food to the families," Nafees said.

"We’ve circulated through thousands of volunteers and continue to do so, and it’s just amazing to see volunteers come out, feel that positive impact and then go back and recruit other people, so the word of mouth goes around and our volunteers have now become recruitment officers really for us to be able to go and get other additional volunteers to come out or get corporations to come out.

"A lot of corporations have now started dedicating 10, 15 employees at a time and they have them as part of their corporate workday, so volunteers are not necessarily having to take time off for work and they’re able to give back to the community and that brings a sustainability piece to the organizations as well."  

Permanent supportive housing is what’s needed

From HOMELESS page 15

...some other place and then figuring out transportation to your job in Dallas County," Daniel said. "...We’ve been doing PIT (Point-in-Time) counts for eight years, so you could tell where the needs are, but it wasn’t until 2020 when the funding became available that we said, ‘Oh yes, we can do this, with bells on we can do this.’

About 60% of people experiencing homelessness in Dallas County are Black, a significant over-representation compared to the county’s Black population, which is 23.9%. Roughly 70% of people enrolled in the rapid rehousing program are Black, according to Housing Forward data.

“Racial equity is kind of the centralized tenant of the work that we do in our homeless response system, even outside of this program,” Robinson said.

"...It’s not only about the number of people that are enrolled in the program, but we even look at length of time to get people from ‘identified’ to ‘housed’ and are we seeing discrepancies in that?

"...We also say once people hit our system, there’s been a variety of systems that have probably already failed them in a very inequitable way. So, once you hit our system, we are trying our best to ensure that we have equity at the forefront, and that we are really poring over the data in a way that helps us understand, ‘How do we ensure that people are being housed at the same rate? How do we ensure that we’re identifying and engaging and doing appropriate outreach to our population in a way that is equitable as well?’

The program has 757 vouchers dedicated specifically for domestic violence survivors and families and individuals with chronic health issues.

Daniel pointed to other housing initiatives the county is working on that highlight the fact that homelessness is not a one-size-fits-all approach. The initiatives were created specifically for groups who are historically more vulnerable to homelessness, including veterans, the elderly and the LGBTQ+ community.

“It’s kind of interesting, because sometimes I rebel a little bit when we pull all of the main populations apart, thinking that [homelessness] is a problem for all of us, so why are we not addressing it that way?” Daniel said. “Except that it has turned out that it’s more difficult for some groups still to have their needs responded to if they are lumped in with everybody else, which does not seem fair, does not seem right, especially when there is such an awareness of what we’re doing and how we’re doing it.”

R.E.A.L. Time Rehousing is just one of the ways the county is trying to tackle homelessness; other projects in the works include an adoption of Travis County’s Community First! tiny homes village. Dallas County has purchased 75 acres of land for a similar project, and Catholic Charities is renovating a hotel purchased by the county into a 180-unit for supportive housing, according to Dr. Philip Huang, director and health authority for Dallas County’s Health and Human Services department.

“When we’ve been talking to Housing Forward and all the other partners, there are different needs,” Huang said. “It seems like our community is doing better for transitional housing, and so now the biggest need that’s been identified with the Point-in-Time survey and things is the permanent supportive housing.”

The subsidies for R.E.A.L. Time Rehousing will continue through 2024. The program has created necessary infrastructure for future homelessness initiatives, including the community dashboard, which tracks project enrollments, housing placements and racial equity analysis, Robinson said.

“The long-term impact is this has shown us that our system can work very well,” Robinson said. “And so, more than anything, it’s provided a very solid foundation of a changed system for anytime there’s dollars or opportunities to flow into our system.”

GEOTAB CONNECT
Secure your spot at Geotab Connect 2024!

Running February 14 - 16, 2024 in Clark County, Nevada, this is your chance to join fellow federal, state and local officials focused on digital transformation. Discover how actionable insights are impacting sustainability, safety, compliance and more.

Register Today
geotab.com/connect/public-sector
ARKANSAS
LOGAN COUNTY is aiming to fight substance use disorder in its incarcerated population and reduce recidivism through a peer recovery support program. Made possible through a partnership between the county jail and local non-profit The Guidance Center, the program recently received funding from the Arkansas Opioid Recovery Partnership. The funding will allow the county to hire a full-time peer recovery support specialist and invest in continued care for inmates upon release.

CALIFORNIA
SANTA CLARA COUNTY is adopting the Recovery Incentives Program to combat meth addiction with a new approach – gift cards. Participants in San Francisco’s pilot of the program are tested for stimulants once or twice a week and receive a gift card to Walmart or other retailer each time they test negative, starting off at $10 and increasing gradually with a maximum of $26.50 per test and $599 over the course of the program. The model has been effective for the Department of Veterans Affairs, which started using it in 2011 and has since engaged more than 6,300 veterans who have produced nearly 82,000 urine samples – of which more than 92% were negative for the targeted drug. According to the Santa Clara County Office of the Medical Examiner-Coroner, 70% of the county’s recorded drug deaths this year have involved meth.

GEORGIA
FULTON COUNTY’S Senior Companion Program aims to help elderly residents with tasks like paying bills or cleaning and provide them with emotional support or just someone to spend time with. The county is working with AmeriCorps to find volunteers for the program, which currently has 160 seniors and 40 volunteer companions. Volunteers must be over the age of 55 and go through a background check and specialized training to participate.

ILLINOIS
ST. CLAIR COUNTY has consolidated its voting precincts down from 190 to 149 ahead of the 2024 primary. As a result, the county will save an estimated $30,000-$40,000 a year from renting fewer polling places and staffing fewer election judges. About 25% of voters will have a new polling place for the primary election in March. The County Clerk’s Office is in the process of mailing out new voter registration cards to let residents know if their polling place has changed.

MINNESOTA
An OLMSTED COUNTY proposal would devote the majority of its opioid settlement funds to extend community outreach, and provide medication for treating overdoses and connect people to agencies when they’re ready to receive help for substance use disorder. The work is already being done on a small scale by community outreach specialist Teri Dose, who sets aside one day a week to reach out to local residents who have survived drug overdoses. Through those calls, 16 people this year have accessed pre-treatment beds, needing more time and resources to reach a larger number of residents.

MARYLAND
MONTGOMERY COUNTY is providing thousands of low-income residents with laptops as part of its “Montgomery Connects” program to bridge the digital divide. To be eligible, residents must already be enrolled in a benefits program as well as the Affordable Connectivity, Lifeline Internet or telephone discount program in addition to their household earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty rate. The program will distribute 34,000 Chromebook laptops, prioritizing residents ages 7 and older.
NEW YORK
● Long Island has a heck of a bullpen. NASSAU COUNTY Executive Bruce Blakeman expected to be hit by a few water balloons, but he wasn’t ready for the arm on 10-year-old Alexa Cardona. Stewart Manor’s 4th of July Parade is known for the good-natured pelting of local officials, but the 100-foot toss that struck Blakeman in the back of the noggins ended up turning a lot of heads when the world saw Cardona’s throw on a video shot by her father that went viral. A week later, once Blakeman saw the video, he tracked down her family, and contacted the New York Yankees, who invited the pair to batting practice. Their reputation among the players preceded them. “It was one of the best times of my life,” Alexa, a shortstop, told The Washington Post.

From NEWS FROM page 30
an early step to going through a recovery program. The proposal would add a program coordinator, licensed drug and alcohol counselor and peer support specialist to the outreach effort.

NEW JERSEY
● A partnership between HUNTERDON COUNTY and the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is providing free eye screenings for low income and uninsured individuals. More than 50 county residents have received eye exams through mid-July.

● A new small business program funded through $500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act money will help MERCER COUNTY entities raise funding directly. Businesses can raise money by issuing Small Business Bonds on the SMBX marketplace, an online hub connecting small businesses and everyday investors, instead of borrowing from a bank, and can pay them back monthly at fixed interest rates.

● Aiming to eliminate breeding grounds for mosquitoes, MONMOUTH COUNTY collected 2,156 car tires and 243 truck/tractor tires between July 10 and 15, totaling 46 tons. According to Monmouth County Mosquito Control, over 10,000 mosquitoes can inhabit a single tire.

In addition to helping our residents dispose of their tires, this event helped Monmouth County’s farming community dispose of truck and tractor tires often too big for other recycling venues,” said Commissioner Director Thomas A. Arnone, liaison to the Department of Public Works and Engineering.

NEW YORK
● WESTCHESTER COUNTY is helping the City of White Plains expand its composting operations with in-house food scrap composting. By using the county’s CompostED composting facility as a model, the city established a compost site at the Gedney Recycling Yard to eliminate trips to haul the scraps elsewhere.

County Executive George Latimer said the city’s adoption of the CompostED facility model was half of the goal in establishing the program — encouraging replication.

Pennsylvania ● What may seem like a technicality could mean important things for LAWRENCE COUNTY. When the U.S. Office of Management and Budget updated its definitions of metropolitan statistical areas in July, it moved the county to the Pittsburgh metropolitan area, away from the New Castle micropolitan statistical area — the county seat. Losing that name didn’t sting local officials, who recognized it as a promotion.

Commissioner Dan Vogler said the new designation makes sense and is a positive development for the county and would help consolidate enthusiasm for his favorite football team.

“The vast majority of us are Steelers fans, but there are still a handful of Browns fans here too,” he told the Tribune Review. “We look at ourselves to be part of the Pittsburgh region, and this helps to solidify that.”

★ NORTHAMPTON COUNTY’s new veterans court will partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other community partners to care for and support veterans in the program. Veterans’ court will follow in the path of recovery court and mental health court, which seek to reduce recidivism and help individuals who are charged with a crime return to their jobs and families and become productive citizens and is designed to address both diversionary and post-plea cases.

“Treatment courts are the most innovative solution for veterans who are charged with a crime and would help consolidate enthusiasm for his favorite football team. "The vast majority of us are Steelers fans, but there are still a handful of Browns fans here too," he told the Tribune Review. "We look at ourselves to be part of the Pittsburgh region, and this helps to solidify that." ★

Ohio ● The Northampton County Commission has recognized it as a promotion. “The Northampton County Veterans’ Court will connect veterans to the benefits and treatment that they have earned and deserve.”

South Carolina ● BERKELEY COUNTY’s Real Property Services Department’s new online application program aims to simplify the process for residents to apply for and track services with the department. The program allows residents to submit and track their applications’ status online for property appraisals and tax credits related to the 4% and 6% assessment ratios and more.

Virginia ● FAIRFAX COUNTY is working to create an entity that would facilitate the financing of clean energy projects.

The “green bank” would provide financial and technical assistance for energy efficiency, renewable energy and electric vehicle projects. It would operate independently as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, although the county would provide funding to get it started.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Meredith Moran. Does your county have news we should see? Contact cban@naco.org and mmoran@naco.org.
Your All-in-One Cyber Defense Partner

24x7x365 SUPPORT

Albert
CIS Network Monitoring and Management
Powerful, cost-effective IDS solution that identifies SLTT-specific malicious network activity.

CIS CyberMarket
Rigorously vetted cybersecurity solutions with negotiated pricing just for SLTTs.

CIS Endpoint Security Services
Get more capability with Spotlight add-on
Cost-effective endpoint protection and response solution with add-on offering real-time vulnerability data at your fingertips.

CIS SecureSuite
Optimize your use of industry-leading security best practices with benefits, tools, and resources available to SLTTs at no cost.

Malicious Domain Blocking and Reporting Plus
MDBR+
Customizable secure DNS service that blocks access to harmful web domains and offers real-time reports.

CIS Hardened Images
Securely pre-configured virtual machine images available to deploy from major cloud service provider marketplaces.

To learn more, visit www.cisecurity.org