



Members of NACo and the National Council of County Association Executives meet at President George Washington's Mount Vernon estate in Fairfax County, Va., during the State Association Presidents and Executive Directors Meeting Jan. 7-9, held in Washington, D.C. Photo by Hugh Clarke

NACo Board approves legislative priorities for 2020

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

The NACo Board of Directors adopted 10 legislative priorities for 2020 and identified 36 policies it plans to target at its fall board meeting last month in Douglas County, Neb. The national policy priorities are:

Restore the balance of Federalism and optimize inter-governmental partnerships: NACo supports efforts that recognize and respect the unique roles and responsibilities of counties as essential partners

— not just stakeholders — in the nation's intergovernmental system of federal, state, local and tribal government officials.

Promote county infrastructure priorities: NACo supports efforts by the Administration and Congress to increase the nation's infrastructure investments to help promote economic development, public safety and overall mobility through a comprehensive infrastructure package, surface transportation reauthorization

See **PRIORITIES** page 3

Appalachian counties eye leadership role in opioid fight

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

In the years since opioid addiction started barreling through Appalachia on the way to becoming a national epidemic, local leaders there have licked their wounds with an eye on revenge.

As addiction treatment spe-

cialists, various social service providers, law enforcement personnel and county leaders have seen incident after incident, they've come away knowing their enemy a little bit better. And they want to be the ones that lead the rest of the country out of a mess of human and economic carnage.

A lot of the strategies for re-taking communities back from addiction were part of NACo's yearlong collaboration with the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), a federal-state partnership that includes all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states. The

See **OPIOIDS** page 2

Orange County, N.Y. brings filmmaking to county level

by **Rachel Looker**
staff writer

Keep calm and make movies. The phrase can be seen hanging on a poster in the entrance of Umbra Soundstages, one of five certified soundstages for filmmaking in Orange County, N.Y.

With films and shows in-

cluding the HBO feature "I Know This Much is True" with Mark Ruffalo; "The Irishman" directed and produced by Martin Scorsese; NBC's "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" and NBC's "Blindspot" shot in the county, Orange

County attracts filmmakers from across the country.

Located 50 miles north of Manhattan, Orange County has become a filmmaking hub using both its county and privately-owned

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Opioid addiction requires ‘whole of society approach’ for solution

From OPIOIDS page 1

two organizations presented their joint report at a Jan. 7 event in Washington, D.C. featuring two panel discussions among state and county officials.

“We know that top-down approaches are not going to work universally, if at all,” said Tim Thomas, the ARC’s federal co-chair. “I believe Appalachian communities can also lead the way in solutions.

“It’s critical that local leaders have the tools and the facts in hand because they are the ones making the policy decisions and directing the resources that are the most impactful on this issue,” he said.

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) acknowledged as much, pointing to the county genesis for several facets of the SUPPORT for Patients and

Communities Act.

“Our experience has been that the best solutions to the problem are from the group up, they’re not generated in (the Senate),” she said, noting Cabell County, West Virginia’s crisis response teams and Mercer County’s Handle with Care program, which prompts law enforcement to notify school administrators if a child’s home life is disrupted by a drug-related intervention.

“These are the kinds of solutions that we see coming from our different counties,” she said.

Panelists seized on the need for a holistic approach to recovery, not just around the person fighting addiction, but their entire community.

“Employment supports and sustains recovery, we have been told time and time again,” Thomas said.



Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.) discusses community solutions to opioid addiction with member of NACo and NCCAE members. Photo by Chris Wathen

“There are no easy or quick solutions to this epidemic, but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t confront it head-on,” he noted. “This challenge requires a ‘whole of society approach.’ What’s more, it requires folks working together in a more comprehensive way to form innovative partnerships, including treatment providers, nonprofits, universities, private businesses, civic groups and others.”

Mercer County, W.Va. Commissioner Greg Puckett agreed.

“We do a lot of education up front — we can reach the individual, and that’s not a problem,” he said. “We can do health fairs, we can get out and do curriculum in the schools, but it’s the environment that the individual lives in that dictates their personality and we know that without that good positive environment, we’re not going to be able to change the society.”

Puckett also echoed Thomas’ point about opening a front in war on diseases of despair by strengthening a county’s economic outlook to give people in recovery a chance at

gainful employment.

“A good job could change a lot, but unfortunately, we have to provide the environment where those jobs can effectively come in, especially in those rural communities,” he said.

Puckett also reaches out to his county’s housing authority to explain the circumstances many tenants with addiction problems are going through, in hopes of earning them some leeway during recovery.

It won’t always be a linear process. Although Commissioner Jeff Snyder saw his judge in Clinton County, Pa. react skeptically to the first of three treatment courts the county created, he gradually saw the judge match the needs of the people.

“When they come to court... they have to tell what they’ve been doing, they cannot lie. Even if they went backwards,” Snyder said.

“If someone does not have self-value, what do they have? He makes them feel like they should feel, as a human being,” he said. “We’re turning these individuals back into productive citizens.”

The NACo-ARC report con-

tains five recommendations for local action, along with key actions within each recommendation and county case studies. They include:

1. Exercise strategic local leadership
2. Create and strengthen preventive and educational initiatives
3. Expand access to addiction treatments
4. Implement a criminal justice response to illegal opioid sales and provide treatment and services to justice-involved individuals with opioid use disorders, and
5. Mitigate local economic impacts and consider new economic development strategies.

The battle against the stigma of drug addiction

The kind of leeway and second chances that are necessary to keep people in addiction recovery in their homes and jobs takes a change in attitudes from those landlords and employers when it comes to drug addiction, and battling

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SNAP/STATS

COUNTIES GDP

County Population	Median Real GDP
0-4,999.....	\$142 million
5,000-14,999	\$320 million
15,000-49,999	\$924 million
50,000-499,999	\$4.4 billion
500,000-plus	\$50.4 billion

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates from 2001 to 2018.

From OPIOIDS page 2

the stigma of addiction is a crucial step to getting there.

“Too often stigma can serve as a roadblock that hurts us as well as them,” Thomas said, noting that willing workers have less of an economic impact if they can’t get or keep jobs.

“It’s important that we treat addiction as a brain disease and necessarily not a cultural failing,” Puckett said. “As long as we understand that and try to educate our community better on that, we have a greater opportunity to overcome the problems related to stigma.”

“I think one of the silver linings of the opioid crisis is the fact that it didn’t discriminate,” said David Connor, executive director of the Tennessee County Services Association. “This is not a drug problem that was in that community or that group of people or the troubled youths or those teenagers, this is now an addiction problem that it’s (now) a farmer who fell off his tractor

‘Make sure your community knows you care, you’re out there and you’re working as hard as you care.’

and has back issues and he started on prescription pain medicine, that now he can’t get off of. It’s the guy who had an on-the-job injury or the former college athlete who’s dealing with aches and pains and they started on things that they trusted their doctors and pharmacists to say ‘yes, this will help you with your pain,’ and now you’re addicted.

“It hit every family, it hit across racial lines, across socioeconomic lines and everything else,” he noted. “I think it’s begun to change people’s attitudes toward addiction.”

The drugs themselves are changing. Although opioids have a pharmacological effect that differs from many other drugs, addiction doesn’t stop there. “We don’t have a drug problem,” Puckett said. “We

have an addiction problem.”

Even as counties figure out how to go on the offensive against addiction, the enemy changes. Snyder is seeing it already.

“We still have problems with alcohol, but now we’re seeing a swing from opioids to meth, bath salts and some things I can’t even pronounce,” he said. “It’s ever-changing, and the best thing we can do is stay flexible, keep in mind what the end goal is — keep working with the partnerships that we have and never give up.”

Puckett sees remaining vulnerabilities in southern West Virginia, as people addicted to prescription painkillers move onto heroin, for outbreaks of HIV and Hepatitis C. Cabell County, W.Va. has already seen a recent HIV outbreak in the intravenous drug community. Although needle exchanges are proliferating, they don’t serve everyone.

“Make sure your community knows that you care, you’re out there and you’re working as hard as you care,” he said.

Like Connor, Puckett and Snyder said they saw something good come from how counties and regions have reacted to the opioid epidemic, noting the agencies, police and schools that have come together to train, communicate and collaborate on solutions.

Capito recounted fighting for \$50 million in appropriations that would enhance the paltry funding that smaller states like West Virginia (\$7 million), New Hampshire and Vermont would receive through formula funding.

“When I (ask) my large state friends ‘Is this fair?’ This is fair because if we don’t solve this problem in Appalachia and we don’t learn what works and what doesn’t work,” she said. “When it comes — because it will come to your state — you’re not going to have the solutions to fight this. That’s why it’s important to drive the funding where it’s needed the most.” **CN**

Access video of the panel discussions and read the NACo-ARC report at: <https://www.naco.org/resources/video/naco-arc-opioids-appalachia-capstone-event>



NACo President Mary Ann Borgeson welcomes NACo Board members to Douglas County, Neb., at the fall Board meeting. Photo by Hugh Clarke

NACo Board adopts priorities for 2020

From PRIORITIES page 1

and water resources bill.

Promote mental health and substance use treatment and address essential criminal justice reforms: NACo supports sensible measures that promote and advance the overall safety of the public and enhances federal, state and local partnerships to provide evidence-based treatment services to justice-involved individuals suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders.

Boost advanced broadband deployment and accessibility while preserving local decision-making: NACo supports the deployment and availability of emerging technologies, such as small cell 5G, to all areas of the nation to ensure equitable economic and educational opportunities for all.

Support full funding for Payments in Lieu of Taxes

(PILT) and the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) programs: NACo supports restoring full mandatory funding for the PILT program, which compensates public lands counties for untaxable federal land.

Establish a more effective definition of “Waters of the U.S.”: NACo believes that local streets, gutters and human-made ditches should be excluded from the definition of WOTUS under the federal Clean Water Act.

Promote workforce opportunities and supportive services for county residents in changing economies: NACo supports federal investments and policies that help advance and leverage both regional and local strategies to engage children, youth, adults and older adults in the development of a competitive and quality workforce.

Strengthen election integrity and safety: NACo

supports federal policies that provide flexibility for local decision-making and increased federal investments in the nation’s election system.

Enhance community resilience through regional and local disaster preparedness: NACo urges Congress and the Administration to provide increased federal resources to counties for disaster planning, mitigation and recovery.

Fully repeal the Cadillac Tax: NACo urges Congress to pass the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019 (H.R. 748/S. 684), which would permanently and fully repeal the 40 percent excise tax, known as the Cadillac Tax, on employer-sponsored health insurance plans. **CN**

For more information including other policies of interest, visit <https://www.naco.org/articles/naco-board-approves-national-policy-priorities>.

ON THE MOVE



NACo OFFICERS AND MEMBERS

- President **Mary Ann Borgeson**, Iron County, Utah Assessor **Cindy Bulloch**, Coconino County, Ariz. Supervisor **Liz Archuleta** and Utah Association of Counties CEO **Brandy Grace** marched in the Rose Parade alongside the float Pasadena Celebrates 2020 Celebrating The 100th Year Anniversary of The Passage of the 19th Amendment.

Deadline Jan. 29 to submit your interim policy resolutions

by **Zach George**

In preparation for the NACo Legislative Conference Feb. 29-March 4 in D.C., NACo members are invited to submit interim policy resolutions. The NACo resolutions process provides members with the ability to participate in national policy decisions affecting county governments. During the Legislative Conference, NACo's 10 policy steering committees and Board of Directors consider legislative and policy resolutions that will guide NACo advocacy until the NACo Annual Conference in July.

Interim policy resolutions provide an opportunity for members to address policy issues at the Legislative Conference that were not discussed at the previous Annual Conference. Interim resolutions may not overturn existing policy resolutions, and will expire at

the 2020 Annual Conference in Orange County/Orlando, Fla.

The American County Platform and the association's policy resolutions are carefully considered statements of the needs and interests of county governments throughout the nation. These policy statements serve as a guide for NACo members and staff to advance the association's federal policy agenda before Congress, the White House and federal agencies. Please refer to the comprehensive overview of NACo's policy resolution process here: <https://bit.ly/3a9xGok>

How to submit and format resolutions

When submitting resolutions and platform changes, please work with the appropriate steering committee to adhere to the following guidelines:

Interim policy resolutions will be considered at the 2020 Legislative Conference.

All resolutions and platform changes must be submitted electronically (preferably as a Word document) via email to resolutions@naco.org by Jan. 29. Submissions must identify the title and issue area in the email subject line (e.g. Social Services Block Grant, Human Services and Education). See a sample resolution here: <https://bit.ly/2ToeBZC>

Resolutions should be concise and no more than one page. The standard format includes:

- **Issue:** Short sentence stating the purpose of the resolution

and how the issue impacts counties

- **Proposed policy:** Concise statement specifying a position or action by NACo and/or other entities

- **Background:** One- to two-paragraph statement outlining the county interest in the particular issue

- **Fiscal/urban/rural impact:** Short statement addressing the potential impact(s) for counties in the specific issue area

- **Sponsor:** Name and contact information of NACo member sponsoring the resolution.

Important reminder: If you plan to submit a policy resolution, you (or a designated representative) must appear in person at the steering committee meeting at the 2020 Legislative Conference to introduce and explain the resolution.

Platform changes and existing resolutions

Platform changes are considered only at the Annual Conference. Interim resolutions cannot be used to overturn or modify existing resolutions or language in the platform

Questions?

Please contact NACo's Deputy Executive Director / Director of Government Affairs Deborah Cox at dc Cox@naco.org or the appropriate steering committee liaison with additional questions or concerns. See NACo's Legislative Department staff contact list here: <https://www.naco.org/advocacy/government-affairs-staff>.

CN

Zach George is a legislative assistant in NACo's Government Affairs Department.

NACo 2020

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SUBMISSIONS DEADLINE:

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NOTIFICATIONS OF ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS:

Week of April 27, 2020

NACo ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION:

July 17 – 20, 2020
Orange County/ Orlando, Florida

Store closures: Counties repurpose unused spaces

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

Sears, Toys R Us, Kmart, Macy's, Bon Ton, JCPenney — the list goes on for stores that have filed for bankruptcy or shut down locations.

As of mid-December 2019, 9,300 stores in the United States have closed compared to 5,844 store closures in 2018, according to a report from Coresight Research, a retail and technology research firm.

With stores closing and empty buildings becoming a common sight, counties are taking matters into their own hands to revitalize the spaces by leasing or purchasing vacant stores and abandoned malls.

In Broome County, N.Y., county officials passed a resolution to lease a portion of a former Sears building to relocate the county's Office of Employment and Training. With workforce development a top priority for the county, officials decided to move the office after their current lease in an older, dilapidated building expires to newly renovated space at the former Sears, according to Broome County Executive Jason Garnar.

Sears was one of the anchor stores at the Oakdale Mall in the county, along with The Bon-Ton, Macy's and JCPenney, all of which have closed their doors over the last few years at the mall location.

Broome County is leasing 35,050 square feet of the total 140,000 square feet at the rate of \$15.45 per square foot until December 2020. This includes taxes, utilities, snow removal and roof repairs.

The county will pay less for the new space compared to their current lease. Garnar said by the end of the move, the

county will be saving money.

"It's definitely a small cost savings, but to get a brand-new building at the same or a little bit less was immediately a win-win," he said.

In addition to the county leasing space at the former Sears, a local brewery will move to the 140,000 square foot space. Garnar said the county served as the catalyst for attracting businesses to come to the building.

"I think at the very least that's stabilized some of the stores that are there," he said. "I think what everybody was concerned about was at some point there would be so many stores that go black, they just turn the lights off and close everything down."

In Cape May County, N.J., the county recently purchased a former Kmart shopping plaza to move in offices for their Division of Aging and Disability Services, Veterans Bureau, Division of Community and Behavioral Health and Division of Social Services.

Part of the reason for the move, according to Cape May County Freeholder Director Gerald Thornton, was the expense of leasing their current building for social services offices, which cost the county \$660,000 per year.

The plaza, which includes a former Kmart and other small businesses, was appraised at \$10.4 million. The county pur-

chased it for \$5.75 million after winning the final bid during a bankruptcy auction.

"It was very beneficial to the county and to that area because this whole thing would have laid vacant for many, many years," Thornton said.

The county has the option to lease the unused spaces through long-term lease agreements. According to Thornton, after 15 years, the leases would pay off the initial investment of purchasing the plaza and the county would see approximately \$2 million per year in revenue.

In addition to the county offices, the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to rent space at the plaza for a veterans outpatient clinic. Additionally, the state of New Jersey is going to rent space to move in Workforce New Jersey, a jobs program, Thornton said.

"Especially for younger veterans, they'll go down there and almost have a one-stop shopping between the veterans department and the veterans clinic and they can walk right next door and see what jobs are available throughout the county," Thornton said.

He added that retail shops are seeking space at the plaza, which will be called "County Commons." Tractor Supply Company and a family entertainment facility have plans to also lease space.

"It's because of the county and the investment we're making that has been the catalyst for these private corporations wanting to move in there and enhancing the entire area of the county," he said.

Knox County, Tenn., Commissioner Charles Busler has noticed the trend of counties purchasing vacant stores and has proposed Knox County purchase the Knoxville Center Mall, which is closing at the end of January.

His proposal involves using the space for county offices including the clerk's office, the register of deeds, the sheriff's department and the public works department. He also said the facility could be used to establish a Career Technical Education training facility to prepare students for high-demand jobs, offices for health systems and even space for Knox County school system offices.

Busler said the county would benefit from the purchase because it offers county employees free parking options, provides the option for county space to expand and would allow the county to sell portions of the facility to pay for departmental needs.

"The big thing is it makes the government come to the people instead of the people having to go to the government," he said.

In Fairfax County, Va., the

Board of Supervisors is tackling another problem caused by fewer shoppers at brick and mortar stores by approving a new minimum parking rate for large shopping malls to repurpose empty parking lot spaces.


Before the change, the minimum parking requirement for large shopping malls in the county was four spaces per 1,000 square feet. Now, the rate is 2.5 spaces per 1,000 square feet.

Nelson/Nygaard, a consulting firm, completed a parking analysis in Fairfax County that revealed no more than 70 percent of available spaces were occupied during peak holiday shopping seasons at two of the malls in the county.

"I think that's what's good about us reducing the parking rate, is it provides opportunities for people to rethink how they use their property," Fairfax County Supervisor Kathy Smith said.

The new parking rate allows mall owners to use the space differently and fill empty parking lots and empty buildings.

To Broome County Executive Garnar, these efforts to revitalize abandoned stores creates optimism in local communities.

"You can see really cool places where people have worked to repurpose malls and we're hopeful that we're moving in that direction," he said. 



Broome County Office of Employment and Training Director Bob Murphy observes the renovations at the former Sears building in Broome County, N.Y., which will house the county's Office of Employment and Training. Photo courtesy Broome County

Filmmakers flock to New York county, boost local economy

From FILMS page 1

soundstages, landscapes and proximity to New York City to promote filmmaking.

Last year, Orange County acquired the Orange County Film Office, which was previously a private entity. The office now falls under the umbrella of the county's tourism department.

"It's really important to have a film office that can basically be that one-stop shop for production companies, film scouts and the like to come in and be that resource to get filming done in the county," said Amanda Dana, the director of tourism for Orange County and the executive director for the Orange County Film Office.

The goal of the county's film

office is to streamline the production process and promote the county by referring businesses, locations and services to filmmakers. The office works with local agencies, such as the police and sheriff's departments, to establish protocols and contracts for filming.

Orange County has five certified soundstages including Umbra Soundstage, Michelson Studio and the county-owned gymnasium in the Orange County Jail. While not certified soundstages, many county-owned sites have been used as filming locations including the county-owned emergency services center, the former county courthouse and a fire training center, among others.

The certified soundstage in



Tony Glazer and Summer Crockett Moore, managing partners of Choice Films and co-managers of Umbra Soundstages, Film Specialist Nora Martinez and Executive Director for the Orange County Film Office Amanda Dana, view Stage 1 at Umbra Soundstages in Orange County, N.Y. Photo by Rachel Looker

the gym at the county jail offers production companies large spaces for equipment, set-building, craft services and parking, according to Nora Martinez, Orange County film specialist. The operations of the jail are not disrupted during filmmaking and funds from using the facility go directly to the county.

Martinez helps productions through the permit process and responds to filmmakers to coordinate available locations.

"If we give them an answer very quickly, that means the difference between the production landing in Orange County or another county," she said.

Martinez views lists of developing productions each week to see if sites in Orange County may be used as a location. She sends out "location-of-the-month" newsletters, creates location databases and sends producers location packages.

"Even if I don't find them locations for that particular show or film, usually their experience with us is so great that they want to come back," Martinez said.

Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus described the film office as the "front door" for any production interested in filming in Orange County. He added that the county's economy benefits when talent and crew spend money in restaurants, catering halls and hotels.

"We already have the pre-determined locations. We already have established relationships," he said. "It makes it a lot easier for anyone who is scouting and

coming to look for a location."

Filmmakers in Orange County can also take advantage of the New York State Film Tax Credit Program. The program offers commercial production tax credits with as much as 40 percent on labor and 35 percent on qualifying post-production projects.

"The tax incentive makes us very competitive and appealing to any of these big film crews," Neuhaus said.

Umbra, one of the certified soundstages in Orange County, is co-managed by Summer Crockett Moore and Tony Glazer, who both serve as managing partners of Choice Films, a production company. Choice Films moved its base to Orange County from New York City.

Crockett Moore, who is also an actor and producer, has filmed all over the country and said she discovered filmmaking in Orange County when she searched online for a place close to Manhattan that offered the 40 percent tax credit.

"I feel that the infrastructure and all the support in the local community just helps us reach so much further than we were able to in Manhattan," she said.

Umbra Soundstages has two soundproof main stages. The facilities include a 6,000 square-foot scenic shop for constructing sets on-site. The space includes a cafeteria, dressing rooms, wardrobe rooms, costume shops, production office space and ample parking.

Glazer, a writer, director and producer, said Orange County

offers filmmakers a wide variety of locations, a crew base, lodging and catering options to accommodate a crew. Martinez works with Crockett Moore and Glazer to create a tag-team relationship to bring filmmakers to Orange County.

"The Orange County Film Office is a godsend for us," Crockett Moore said. "The film office is the first call I make when I learn that a project wants to come here."

Crockett Moore and Glazer described a collaborative effort in the county among production companies, the film office, and the local government.

"The county at large... has been incredibly accommodating and just really open to sort of tailoring each film production's film experience to what they need," Glazer said.

The accommodations extend beyond the services of the film office. County residents become engaged when a film production is in their community.

"There's something about a downtown when they know there's a film being filmed there and there seems to be magic in the air," Dana said.

Crockett Moore said when it is easy to film somewhere, the "domino effect gets out and word gets out very quickly."

"More people are talking to each other about how far your dollar can go in Orange County and how easy it is to work here," she said. "I think this explosion, this film bubble that we're seeing is only going to continue to grow." **CN**

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May 27, 2020

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mitchellhamline.edu/dri/collectivebargaining

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- Future of Work
- Protecting Your County's Election System
- County Workforce Development
- 2020 Census
- Justice Reform



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County priorities front and center in FY 2020 spending agreement

by Valerie Brankovic

Nearly three months after the start of FY 2020, President Trump signed into law a sweeping two-part spending deal last month to fund the federal government through Sept. 30. Combined, the two bills (H.R. 1965 and H.R. 1158) total approximately \$1.37 trillion and represent the highest level of appropriations funding for the federal government in nearly a decade.

As passed, the spending agreement includes several key wins for county governments, including full funding for the Payments-in-Lieu-of-Taxes (PILT) program and new investments in disaster relief, election security and opioid response efforts. The bill also includes multiple tax policy changes, extends key safety-net programs and makes a legislative fix for counties implementing child welfare reforms.

On Dec. 24, NACo released a comprehensive analysis of the FY 2020 spending package and funding for programs important to counties, and key highlights are outlined below.

Disaster relief

The spending agreement extends the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) through September 2020 to provide Congress additional time to negotiate a longer-term reauthorization bill for the program. A key county priority for disaster recovery, NFIP provides flood insurance coverage to homes and businesses in more than 90 percent of counties throughout the country. The program has operated under a series of short-term extensions since 2013.

In addition to extending NFIP, the FY 2020 omnibus makes additional investments in disaster recovery resources important to states and localities, including a \$5.2 billion increase for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Disaster Relief Fund

(DRF). State and local governments that have declared states of emergency under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act can tap DRF funds to respond to natural disasters.

The legislation also boosts funding for Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) to \$355 million in FY 2020 – the first funding increase in a decade. A long-standing county priority, EMPG helps support disaster prevention, protection and mitigation efforts at the local level.

Election security

As federal, state and local governments look ahead to the 2020 election, the FY 2020 omnibus makes critical new investments in election security activities.

For FY 2020, the spending package provides \$425 million through the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) to states for election security improvements, with an emphasis on developing best practices in cybersecurity. The bill also requires a 20-cents-on-the-dollar match by states that receive election security money — an increase from the 5 percent match required under the FY 2019 omnibus.

In addition to the \$425 million, the legislation increases base funding for the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) to \$15.1 million in FY 2020. The EAC is an independent, bipartisan commission charged with developing guidance to help jurisdictions, including counties, meet requirements established under the HAVA legislation.

Repeal of the “Cadillac Tax”

The FY 2020 spending bill includes a full and permanent repeal of the 40 percent excise tax — known as the “Cadillac Tax” — on employer-sponsored health insurance plans. Annually, counties provide



benefits —including health insurance — to our nearly 3.6 million employees nationwide. By including a full and permanent repeal, counties will now have the budget certainty to know the health insurance benefits we offer employees will not be taxed.

Opioid response efforts

The FY 2020 omnibus makes new investments in key health care programs important to counties, with special emphasis on opioid response efforts.

The legislation boosts funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to \$8 billion for FY 2020, a more-than \$600 million increase above the FY 2019 level. CDC provides federal funding for approximately 2,800 local public health departments — two-thirds of which are county-based — and supports preparedness and responses activities, chronic disease prevention and a range of public health programs.

Of this total, \$475 million is included for opioid overdose research, efforts to enhance states' addiction prevention activities and a directive for federal agencies to collaborate on education and training for medical providers on the frontlines of the opioid epidemic.

Important to county behavioral health authorities, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) receives \$5.9 billion for FY 2020 and includes funding for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) block grant and the Community Mental

Health Services (CMHS) block grant. Both grants support county efforts to address substance use disorders in our communities. The legislation also allocates \$1.5 billion in FY 2020 for the Opioid State Target Response (OSTR) grant, first created under the 21st Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255).

Safety-net programs

In addition to major new investments in health and human services programs, the omnibus includes funding extensions for health safety-net programs important to counties.

The spending bill extends funding for Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments through May 22, 2020. Medicaid DSH payments help local hospitals treating disproportionate shares of low-income and uninsured patients make up for uncompensated care costs.

Key community health programs are also extended through May 22, 2020, including the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) and Community Health Centers (CHC). The NHSC program, which is level-funded at the FY 2019 level of \$310 million, provides financial and other support to primary care providers in exchanges for their service in underserved communities. Like NHSC, Community Health Centers (CHC) are also level-funded through May 2020. Approximately 1,200 CHCs provide primary health services for over 25 million people in counties across the country, primarily in underserved areas.

PILT, SRS

The Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program is fully funded for FY 2020, receiving \$515 million. PILT is a major legislative priority for public lands counties and helps offset costs for service delivery in counties that are not able to collect property taxes on fed-

eral lands.

The Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program is reauthorized for two years — 2019 and 2020 — under the spending agreement. Across the country, 720 federal forest counties and 9 million school children depend on these payments to make up for lost timber revenues from federal public lands.

SRS payments keep teachers in the classroom, police officers on the beat and road crews working to construct and maintain county infrastructure.

Reauthorization of SRS has long been a top priority for counties until we can fully transition local economies and implement productive forest management practices.

Next steps on federal funding

With FY 2020 spending bills complete, Congress and the White House are now looking ahead to the FY 2021 appropriations cycle. To kick off this process, the White House is expected to release its FY 2021 budget proposal this February, which outlines the administration's spending priorities for programs and services across the federal government.

Once this happens, congressional legislators will begin negotiating appropriations levels for the next fiscal year beginning on Oct. 1, 2020, taking into account prior year spending levels and projections around the national deficit.

The Committee for a Responsible Budget (CRFB) estimates the spending package will add approximately \$500 billion to the national debt, as a result of tax policy changes and new funds for disaster relief efforts.

To view NACo's comprehensive analysis of the FY 2020 omnibus, please visit www.naco.org. **CN**

Valerie Brankovic is a legislative associate in NACo's Government Affairs department.

White House summit explores mental health treatment

by **Mary Ann Barton**
editor and senior writer

More than 11 million Americans had a serious mental illness last year and one third of those went untreated. “We’re way behind on mental health in our country,” President Trump told an audience of mental health stakeholders, including county officials, at a White House meeting last month.

“My administration is strongly committed to helping Americans suffering from mental illness,” the president said. “We have to take care of our mentally ill.”

About 400,000 of the mentally ill, at any given time, are in prison or jail, Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar said. Calling it “one of the most neglected aspects of our healthcare system,” Azar and others discussed ways to meet the challenges of treating the mentally ill.

In Chatham County, Ga., like many counties around the country, about 20 to 25 percent of the jail population

suffers from a mental disorder and/or substance abuse, Commissioner Helen Stone told the audience. “The reality of this is very painful.”

“Our sheriffs are not set up to run a mental health hospital,” she said.

“It’s a terrible burden to them. Not to mention the fact that the people who work there are not trained mental health professionals.”

“When someone comes in for an assessment, they may not know what medication they’re on, what medication they need to be on,” she said,

“they’re just shooting in the dark and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t.”

Stone told audience members that the county has created a group called “Breaking the Cycle,” patterned on NACo’s Stepping Up initiative. Others considering starting a similar group should ask six basic questions, Stone said:

1. Is our leadership committed?
2. Do we conduct timely screenings and assessments?
3. Do we have baseline data?
4. Have we conducted an inventory of our services?



Chatham County, Ga. Commissioner Helen Stone discusses improving mental health treatment at a White House summit.

5. Do we practice policy and funding improvements?

6. Do we track the progress?

Through the NACo task force with the National Sheriffs Association, “we’re trying to call attention to the jail inmate Medicaid exclusion.”

“Here’s the problem: If an inmate is booked into jail, they’re going to lose their rights to Medicaid. These are pre-trial detainees. Why are their rights being stripped before being proven guilty? All it is, is a cost-shift measure... And it’s not right.”

“They can’t get those services reinstated, what do you think is going to happen?” she asked.

“They’re going to be right back. And think of what it’s costing. It needs to be corrected. It’s not fair to the individual, it’s not fair to the taxpayer and it’s certainly not fair to the sheriff.”

Chatham County has created a new diversion center opening in May, she noted, that is especially critical for those who would lose their benefits if they can’t post bail.

“I applaud your center,” fellow panelist Sheriff Ben Wolfinger of Kootenai County, Idaho, said.

“We have a 24-hour center, a drop-off center in my county. It’s law-enforcement friendly. We figured in the last quarter we reported, we saved the hospital \$500,000.

People who would normally report to the emergency room went to the crisis center. That’s real money.” Wolfinger also noted the challenges to rural counties of funding mental health professionals for jails.

Of 44 counties in Idaho, there are 36 jails and only two have mental health professionals, he noted. One solution would be to forgive student loans in exchange for having health professionals dedicate time to serving rural counties.

“We need resources in our rural communities,” he said. “Dealing with the mentally ill is a huge, onerous responsibility that we had to take on because nobody else will do it. We’ve got to get our hands around this problem.”

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Capitol Roundup

BEHIND THE SEAL

PERSON COUNTY, N.C.

The Person County seal became the official seal in 1981 after Madeline Eaker, who represented the Person County Historical Society, went before the Person County Board of Commissioners and presented the seal designed by Hal Dickerson, a county native and local resident. The art department at Hunter Publishing produced the seal for the county's historical society.

The seal represents the agricultural roots of life in Person County as well as its industrial base, education and churches.



The right side of the seal depicts a tobacco plant.

The left side of the seal represents other crops grown in the county.

In the background, the seal features a tobacco barn, a church and Piedmont Community College.

If you would like your county's seal featured in "Behind the Seal," contact Rachel Looker at rlooker@naco.org.

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County Executive Mark Poloncarz of Erie County, N.Y., testifies Jan. 15 before the House Budget Committee on how federal financial uncertainties affect local governments' ability to plan their budgets and serve residents. Photo by Frank Cadle

A LOOK AT KEY ACTIVITIES IMPACTING COUNTIES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL.

Substance abuse

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration is accepting applications for \$10 million in FY 2020 grants to expand substance abuse treatment capacity in adult treatment drug courts, adult tribal healing to wellness courts or family treatment drug courts. The purpose is to expand treatment services in existing drug courts. Learn more about this opportunity here: <https://www.samhsa.gov/grants/grant-announcements/ti-20-003>

Toxic chemicals

The House passed the PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) Action Act of 2019, H.R. 535 Jan. 10. The 12-bill package addresses toxic chemicals known as PFAS. The bill includes language requiring the EPA to consult with local governments while the agency develops rule guidance and orders the EPA to establish a grant program to aid communities affected by PFAS. Read more about it here: <https://www.naco.org/blog/us-house-vote-comprehensive-package-address-pfas>

Opportunity Zones

The Treasury Department released final rules last month for implementation of the Opportunity Zone program, which encourages private investment and economic development in distressed communities.

The new regulations provide clarity for investors and guidelines on how much funding they must provide to receive tax benefits and regulations on development of vacant properties. The rules outline performance metrics to determine whether participants are meeting requirements. Guidelines take effect Feb. 17.

For more information, visit: <https://www.naco.org/blog/treasury-department-releases-final-regulations-opportunity-zones>

Trade agreement

The House passed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement Implementation Act last month to replace NAFTA.

If enacted the trade deal could impact counties including new supports for small

and medium-sized enterprises, updates to the rules of origin, intellectual property rules and potential impacts on housing affordability. Read more here: <https://www.naco.org/blog/us-house-approves-usmca-trade-agreement-potential-impacts-counties>

SALT deduction cap

The House recently passed the Restoring Tax Fairness for States and Localities Act, H.R. 5377, which would suspend the \$10,000 cap placed on state and local tax (SALT) deductions for 2020 and 2021, in addition to providing relief for married couples filing jointly in 2019 by doubling the cap to \$20,000.

For more information, see: <https://www.naco.org/blog/us-house-passes-legislation-repeal-salt-deduction-cap-two-years-focus-turns-senate-efforts>

County veteran service officers

Sens. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisc.), Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Steve Daines (R-Mont.) recently introduced

legislation dedicating new federal resources to county veteran service officers. The Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach Act, S. 3020, would provide \$250 million in federal funding over five years to the Department of Veteran Affairs to increase the number of county veteran service officers across the country. For more information, read: <https://www.naco.org/blog/legislation-introduced-support-county-veteran-service-officers>

Farm labor shortages

The House recently passed the Farm Workforce Modernization Act of 2019 (H.R. 5038). It would provide relief to the agricultural industry's labor shortage by providing a path to legal status for seasonal and migrant workers, streamlining the hiring process through the H-2A Visa program and increasing the quality and affordability of housing for farm laborers.

For more information, see: <https://www.naco.org/blog/us-house-advances-bipartisan-legislation-address-farm-labor-shortages> **CN**

LEADERSHIP EDGE

Leading the Way with a New Framework for Economic and Community Development

by Shanna Ratner

A new approach to economic and community development is emerging. Instead of being about attracting companies that create jobs over which communities have no control, the emerging paradigm is about connecting the underutilized assets of place with market opportunity to grow assets that are owned and controlled by and for the benefit of low-wealth people and places. Assets include eight distinct forms of wealth - social capital, natural capital, political capital, built capital, individual capital, cultural capital, financial capital and intellectual capital. The healthier the stocks of all these forms of wealth the more robust, resilient, and sustainable the economy.

Today we allow our economy to be based on exploitation of some forms of wealth to create others. For example, many firms sacrifice the well-being of workers through excessive productivity demands, unsafe conditions, and/or capricious scheduling for the sake of accruing financial capital. Products are manufactured using processes and inputs that degrade water quality or other aspects of the natural environment. However, we cannot exploit our way to sustainability. Achieving sustainability will require rethinking not only what we produce, but how we produce it. This imperative offers an opportunity to revalue rural, urban and suburban people and resources and engage them in broader regional economies for mutual benefit by thinking and working with systems, not just individual enterprises.

One mechanism with a proven track record for building an inclusive and more sustainable economy from the ground up is the wealth creation value chain. A wealth creation value chain is a set

of relationships among the people and businesses whose skills and contributions are essential to produce and utilize a good and/or service. Wealth creation value chains are driven by the self-interests of producers and buyers and generate financial profits while contributing positively to various stocks of wealth. Wealth creation value chains have demand partners (wholesale buyers that have their fingers on the pulse of consumers), transactional partners (businesses that fulfill the functions required to produce and deliver the good or service), and support partners (organizations that make it possible for transactional partners to do business - think insurance, financing, recruitment and training, etc.). Wealth creation value chains operate within systems that often create bottlenecks (inefficiencies), gaps (missing functions), and underutilized resources. Wealth creation value chains, properly conceived and developed, have the proven potential to change the way business is done from the often wasteful, damaging and exclusive econ-

omy we experience today to a "new normal."

There are many opportunities present in our economy right now to improve economic and community outcomes and reduce dependence on subsidies, but they won't be realized without leadership. Today in most places it is no one's job to forge the connections based on identified self-interests that are required to explore, pilot, implement and institutionalize wealth creation value chains. Each organization is more concerned with their individual self-interests than they are in understanding the self-interests of others. Our siloes keep us from the very relationships that can open new opportunities. Wealth creation value chain coordinators are the lynch pins of this work. Coordinators hold the values of the chain, envision and hold the big picture of what the chain can be when it is built to scale, and facilitate its formation and implementation. Coordinators have the courage to go outside their "comfort zones" to understand what's possible. Sometimes, though

not always, the same organization that takes on coordination also serves a function as a transactional partner in the chain. Coordinators can come from the public, private or non-profit sectors, but will only be effective when the leadership of their organization understands that a wealth creation value chain is not a "project" of any single organization; it is a systems change endeavor with shared benefits and shared responsibilities. Coordinators are not single individuals: they are organizations with the capacity to engage more than one staff person in the work.

As Ryan Coffey Hoag, Extension Education at Michigan State University wrote of his experience co-coordinating a wealth creation value chain in the tourism sector, "The wealth creation value chain has been like a shot of adrenaline, fusing traditional economic development with community development, helping us to focus on various forms of community wealth. It has helped us to identify shared values across our region and engage non-tradi-

tional stakeholders, which have led to the development of additional chainlets. Our success implementing the wealth creation value chain has led us to integrate its framework into other systems change initiatives across our county, including the delivery of economic development services. This approach has helped us capitalize on the various forms of wealth across our region while empowering non-traditional stakeholders throughout the process."

County leadership can be instrumental in adopting the wealth creation framework and providing training and encouragement for wealth creation value chain coordinators in multiple sectors. NACO can be a terrific vehicle for shared learning across the country that will allow us to accelerate the transformation toward a more equitable and sustainable future. **CN**

Shanna E. Ratner is the principal of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. and the author of Wealth Creation: A New Framework for Rural Economic and Community Development.



BRIGHT IDEAS | LOS ANGELES COUNTY, Calif.

County Tests Online Child Abuse Reports

PROBLEM:

The Child Protection Hotline in Los Angeles County receives a large number of both urgent and non-urgent calls.

SOLUTION:

Establish an electronic child abuse reporting system to efficiently handle increased call volume and filter non-urgent calls.

by Rachel Looker
staff writer

In Los Angeles County, a pilot program has combined technology with traditional methods to improve the efficiency of reporting child abuse cases.

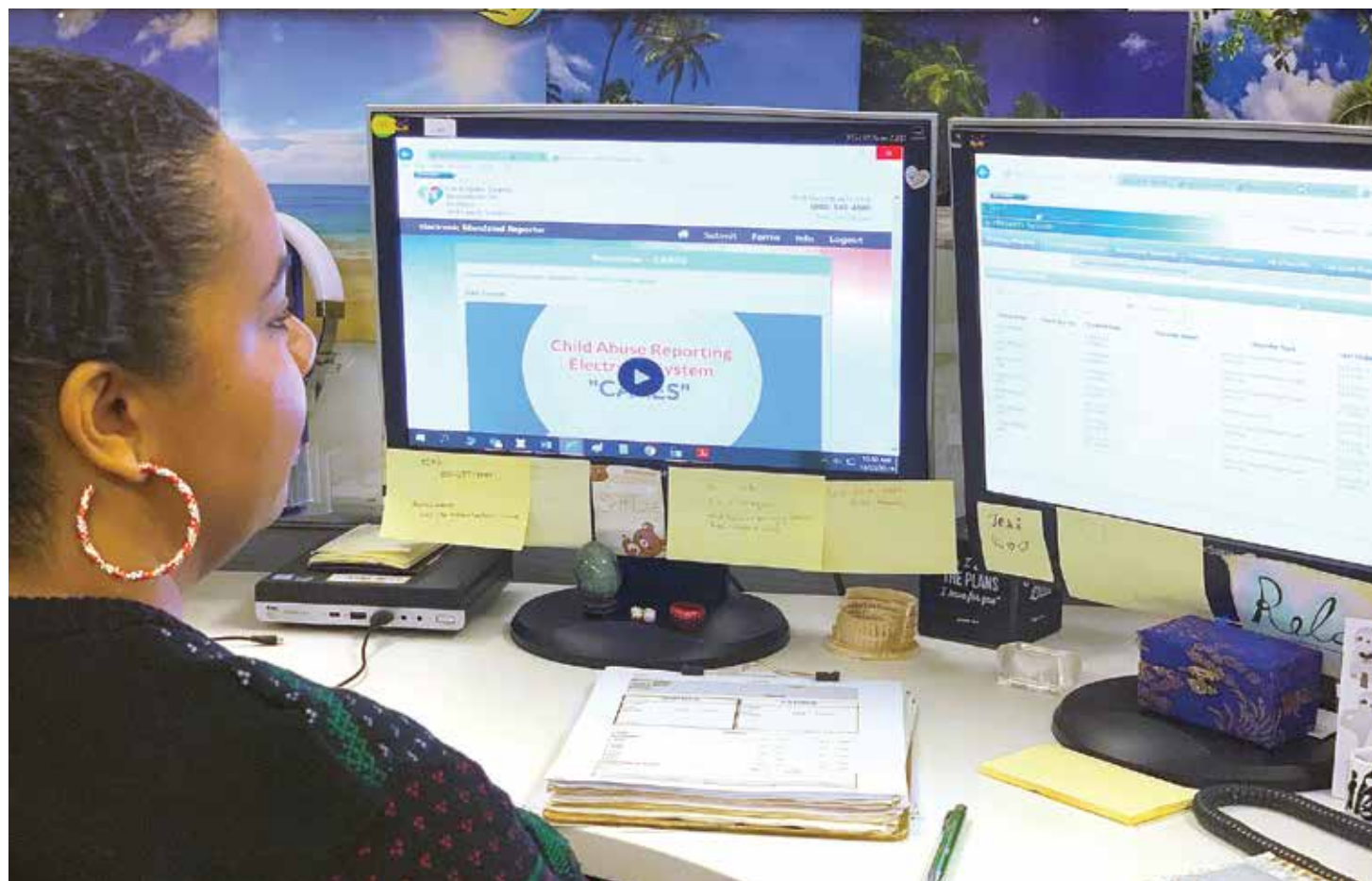
The Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES) is an automated, online reporting system for non-urgent suspected child abuse or neglect. The system aims to meet the increasing number of calls reported to Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Child Protection Hotline.

"This is 2019, where technology is so phenomenal," said Carlos Torres, acting division chief for the Child Protection Hotline. "That was the rationale — let's give people the ability to use technology to make these reports."

The county implemented CARES in November 2017 after then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed a Senate bill into law allowing counties to test the concept of an internet-based reporting system.

Los Angeles County's already-existing Business Information Systems division within the DCFS built the online system, according to Gary Burks, assistant regional administrator with the Child Protection Hotline. Los Angeles County is the only county in the state to pilot online reporting.

The selected group of mandated reporters includes county employees from DCFS, the Department of Mental



Lead Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES) Children Social Worker III Teri Johnson uses Los Angeles County's online child abuse reporting system. Photo by Didi Cottingham

Health, Probation, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Health Services and Public Health, school personnel, law enforcement agencies, medical professionals, the coroner and mental health clinicians. The CARES system allows users to save drafts of reports, use auto-save functions, view report history and receive confirmation emails after filing reports.

CARES expedites the process for non-urgent child abuse reporting, Burks said. The system decreases wait times for mandated reporters when making calls to the Child Protection Hotline, reduces call volume and allows social workers to focus on urgent calls. Additionally, mandated reporters who complete an online report rather than make a phone call are not required to submit a written follow-up report.

Burks explained how mandated reporters can complete reports at home because the system is accessible 24/7 online. If an online report is not completed within 24 hours,

users receive reminder emails prompting them to complete the report within 48 hours.

"It's a user-friendly system," Burks said. "You need very little training to utilize the system."

With more than 10 million residents in Los Angeles County, the Child Protection Hotline received over 225,000 calls in 2018, making it difficult for social workers to handle the call volume. Before the implementation of the online pilot, Burks said the majority of child abuse reports were made via calls to the hotline.

To ensure the system is for non-urgent reports only, CARES users are prompted to fill out a standardized safety assessment of 10 qualifying questions that redirect the reporter to file a report by calling the hotline if a situation is deemed urgent.

"We wanted to make sure that it was safe, that it was going to benefit our families, that it was going to save children's lives, save our staff time and save the callers time," Torres said.

Once an online report is completed, it is reviewed by Child Protection Hotline staff who select an outcome for each report which is then reviewed by a supervisor. These results are automatically emailed to the mandated reporter who filed the report online.

Torres said the numbers of online reports and CARES users are increasing. Burks added that other mandated reporters who are not in the designated group for the pilot are asking when they will have the option to use the online system.

Additionally, there has been a steady increase of online reports submitted since the project launched. Between the launch in November 2017 and November 2019, over 7,500 online reports have been submitted. In November 2019, over 600 online reports were submitted through CARES.

"These folks are able to use technology to get us the information, therefore freeing up the lines for other people who are actually making urgent calls, so it is basically changing

the law to allow technology to better serve kids and families," Torres said.

The CARES platform incurred no costs because it was established using the department's in-house staff. The project required an independent evaluator to assess the outcomes of the system. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) was selected as the evaluator and funded by Los Angeles County.

Burks said if the Senate Bill is made permanent, all mandated reporters will be able to use the system.

"We're hoping of course to make it part of actual law, no longer a pilot but it will be actual law," Torres said.

The pilot ends next year.

"We've seen tremendous changes since we've implemented the online system," Burks said. "It is worth having."

Los Angeles County's Child Abuse Reporting Electronic System (CARES) is the recipient of a 2019 NACo Achievement Award in the County Administration and Management category. **CN**

GET TO KNOW...

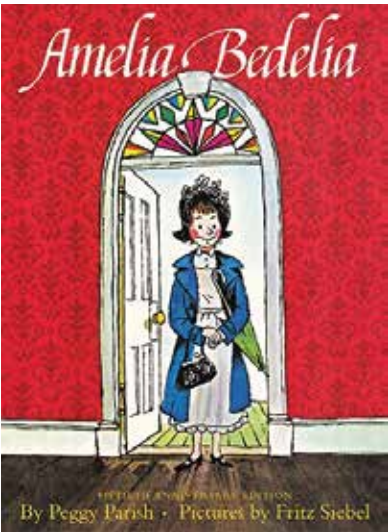
Clarendon County, S.C.



Welcome, Clarendon County, S.C.

Clarendon County is located in east central South Carolina and is named after Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon in England. The first settlers in the county were French Protestants who fled France to avoid persecution. The county seat, Manning, was initially chartered in 1861. It is the geographical center of the county and was named after John Laurence Manning, a former governor of South Carolina. The county includes areas of swampland such as Woods Bay State Park in the northern part of the county which is a swampy bay area where visitors can spot alligators. Lake Marion, the largest lake in South Carolina, borders the county on its southwest side and generates hydroelectric power. The Santee National Wildlife Refuge on Lake Marion is a popular spot for fishing.

The county has produced five governors of South Carolina. **Peggy Parish, the author of the “Amelia Bedelia” series of children’s books, was born in Clarendon County.**



PROFILES IN SERVICE

ROBERT HILL
Board Member
County Development director and emergency manager
Brookings County, S.D.



Hill

Number of years involved in NACo: 11

Years in public service: Twenty in the U.S. Army and 20 in county government

Occupation: County Development director and emergency manager

Education: MS in Geography from South Dakota State University

The hardest thing I’ve ever done is: Retire from the U.S. Army

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: My grandfather, my father and President Harry Truman

You’d be surprised to learn that: I have a traveling Korean War exhibit.

I’m most proud of: My two sons.

Every morning I read: Stars and Stripes newspaper, the digital edition.

My favorite meal is: Fried chicken

My motto is: “Show me.” I am originally from Missouri, so it works.

The last book I read was: *For Country and Corps: The Life of General Oliver P. Smith*

My favorite movie is: Forrest Gump

My favorite music is: Hank Williams Sr.

My favorite U.S. president: George H.W. Bush

My county is a NACo member because: It brings in a different perspective on how to do things.

WORD SEARCH

CASS COUNTY, North Dakota
Created by: Mary Ann Barton

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

BASEBALL: Residents watch the Fargo-Moorhead RedHawks pro baseball team.

COLD: Average high temperature in January in Cass County is 16 degrees.

COURTHOUSE: The first courthouse was built in 1874; the second was built in 1883. The current courthouse opened in 1906 after the first one burned in 1903.

EMPLOYER: The largest employer in the county is Sanford Health with nearly 50,000 employees worldwide.

FARGO: The county seat of Cass County and the largest city in the state.

FILM: The award-winning movie “Fargo” was not filmed in the county but mainly in Minnesota and in Pembina County, N.D.

LARGE: The county is 43 miles across and 41 miles from north to south.

MUSEUM: The Plans Art Museum includes Native American, folk and contemporary art.

NATIVE: More than 100 participants compete and dance each summer at the Kee-Boon-Mein-Kaa Pow Wow.

POPULATION: Cass County’s population is about 180,000, the most populous in the state.

RAILROAD: The county is named for George Washington Cass, president of the Northern Pacific Railway, which reached Fargo in 1872.

REFUGEES: The county welcomes refugees with open arms and has welcomed more than 6,000 since 1997.

RIVER: The Red River makes up the eastern border of the county. It’s one of the few rivers that flows north.

TOTS: The Boiler Room restaurant is known for its homemade Tater Tots.

ZOO: The Red River Zoo, located on the site of a former ranch, is home to 300 animals including meerkats and red pandas.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is:
Climb halfway up Mount Fuji in Japan.



NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ALABAMA

The statewide 2015 Alabama Prison Reform Act, which reduced crowding in state prisons by **relocating inmates to county jails**, has led to an increase in costs for counties, according to a report from the **ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONS OF ALABAMA (ACCA)**. The number of state inmates in county jails has tripled since 2014. Costs have increased by \$64 million since 2014 for operating the jails, according to the report. “Counties must seek relief from these growing costs,” ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield said. “Because the solution to the state’s prison crisis cannot again be to push more inmates down to the local level.”

ARIZONA

• **COCHISE COUNTY** launched a website to ask the public to nominate areas in the county that could be revitalized using a \$600,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Assessment Program. The website educates the public about the program and **brownfield sites**, which are areas where redevelopment may be complicated by hazardous pollutants or contaminants. The website allows county residents to apply to have a site considered for assessment. Submissions will

be prioritized for sites to be redeveloped.

• **MARICOPA COUNTY** is making changes to its **drug diversion program** to keep people out of jails. The program eliminates a \$630 fee to participate in the program, according to KTAR News. The county attorney’s office will pay the fee and the county plans to tweak the drug program to create a new felony diversion program for those charged with possession of controlled substances or other nonviolent crimes.

COLORADO

Farmers, producers, non-profits, businesses and local governments in **BOULDER COUNTY** are getting paid to create **environmental sustainability projects** on agricultural lands. The county’s grant program uses revenue from a sustainability tax approved by voters, according to the *Daily Camera*. Projects must relate to specific topics including regenerative agriculture, farm and farmer’s market infrastructure and sustainable local food, among others. Grants will range in amounts and county residents can apply online.

INDIANA

MARION COUNTY launched a temporary program to **help parents who fall behind on child support payments** get their driver’s licenses back, *The Indiana Lawyer* reported. Forty-three states suspend the driver’s license of any parent who owes child support. Parents who participated in the program worked with the prosecutor’s office to find an amount they could commit to pay. Once the payment was made, the prosecutor’s office would petition to renew the driver’s license. If the parent failed to pay three months of payments, the license was suspended.



CALIFORNIA

Libraries in **SAN MATEO COUNTY** launched a pilot program to allow library patrons to **rent bicycles** from one of the county’s branches. The Book-A-Bike program allows individuals 18 years and older with library cards to check out one of four bikes, KNTV reported. The bikes must be returned on the same day. The library has purchased helmets, bike lights and bike locks.



NEW YORK

• With the announcement of \$9 million in state funding, the nation’s largest **indoor drone testing site** could be operational by the end of 2020. The “sky dome” will be a 55,000-square-foot facility in the east bay of a hangar at **ONEIDA COUNTY**-owned Griffiss International Airport, the *Utica Observer-Dispatch* reported. The sky dome will support safe experimentation of drone technology and techniques that will help with applications such as emergency management services, damage assessment and recovery search and rescue.



FLORIDA

PALM BEACH COUNTY’s Victim Services Green Dot Program is aiming to **prevent violence** by encouraging individuals to speak out if they see violent acts, WPEC reported. The goal of the program is to prevent violence before it occurs. Palm Beach County has seen an overall decrease in cases since the program launched three years ago and is working to renew the effort by using billboards and bus advertising.

MARYLAND

Paramedics in **MONTGOMERY COUNTY** will now transport those with **non-life threatening injuries** without lights or sirens to allow drivers to keep driving instead of pull-

ing over to let an ambulance pass.

The “cold response” is for less critical patients who may be able to go to an urgent care center rather than a busy emergency room, WUSA9 reported.

This system is part of the county’s Alternative Destination Program. The goal is to protect the public and protect ambulance personnel from speeding down a busy road when it may not be warranted.

MINNESOTA

A **county-branded bus** in **CARVER COUNTY** is telling the county's story by showcasing key features of the county. The outside of the bus features county parks, its ranking as the nation's happiest county and its ranking as one of the top 10 healthiest counties in the country. The county partnered with South-West Transit, the public transit agency in the area, and the county's Community Development Agency to create the branding on the bus.

MONTANA

MISSOULA COUNTY is allowing county residents to title and **register their vehicles online**. The goal of the program is to reduce wait times in the Treasurer's Office where lines previously could take several hours, KPAX reported. Drivers can now complete and sign documents electronically. Once county residents pay invoices that are sent through email or text messages, the county will mail the plates.

NEW YORK

- When the Tooth Fairy leaves some money under a pillow in **ONONDAGA COUNTY**, the tooth's owner might want to save a little bit to plan for someday retiring the bed. The county's Resource Recovery Agency has added a \$15 charge for **mattress removal** because they are hard to bury in landfills or chop up.



OREGON

LANE COUNTY is hoping to **boost its recycling rate** by targeting apartment buildings and condo complexes. In addition to offering signs and informational materials to multi-family housing units, the county is surveying landlords and property managers on how the county can help

boost recycling numbers, *The Register Guard* reported.

PENNSYLVANIA

After a stretch of six consecutive days in December 2019 when particulate matter levels rose above federal standards, **ALLEGHENY COUNTY** is planning **new air quality regulations and upgrades to its weather forecasting tools**. A temperature inversion and light wind, coupled with a lack of wind, left a thick layer of smog along the Monongahela River over Christmas, which expanded throughout the Pittsburgh metropolitan area. The new policies may change the emission mitigation requirements for industry during weather-related pollution episodes. The health department's goal is to have emission reduction plans in place that could be implemented within 24 hours' notice from the health department, *The Tribune Review* reported.

TEXAS

The **HARRIS COUNTY** Commissioners Court members created a commission to advise the county on how to **preserve African-American culture and heritage**. Though the plan is pending formal review by the county attorney, commissioners and supporters expressed hope the commission could help protect sites important to local African-American history, such as cemeteries and churches, and preserve the character of historically black neighborhoods at risk of gentrification. The commission could also help expedite the creation of memorials and commemorative signage, the *Houston Chronicle* reported.

UTAH

SALT LAKE COUNTY Mayor Jenny Wilson has **required federal background checks** for anyone buying a firearm at the Mountain America Expo Center or any county-owned facility.

Although state code prohibits cities and counties from imposing any regulations on the ownership, possession, purchase, transfer or trans-

port of a gun, Wilson said the policy change is within the county's purview the owner and operator of facilities and the county's legal counsel has approved, the *Salt Lake Tribune* reported.

- Voters in **UTAH COUNTY** will have a chance to **change their form of government** this Election Day, when they vote on a mayor-council form of government. The new form of government plan establishes an elected county executive in the form of a county mayor and five elected county council members from respective geographical districts, *The Times-Independent* reported.

WISCONSIN

The **DANE COUNTY** Health Department approved a position statement calling for an end to the state's personal conviction waiver, which allows **unvaccinated children** to attend school. County health officials recommend that only medically necessary waivers be granted and if



Light pollution leaves a distinct impression at night up and down the Puget Sound I-5 corridor, as seen in this image provided by NASA.

WASHINGTON

Starting Feb. 1, the skies above **PIERCE COUNTY** will be a little darker following the implementation of **strict new light standards** for businesses and developers.

Under the new rules, all illuminated signs and outside building lights must be fully shielded, downward facing and otherwise designed to prevent "light trespass" into the sky and onto surrounding properties. Rear-lit panels, flashing lights and laser lights are also prohibited, the *News Tribune* reported.

there is an outbreak, unvaccinated children should be excluded from school and other extracurricular activities like sports, Wisconsin Public Radio reported.

News from Across the Nation is compiled by Charlie Ban and Rachel Looker. If your county has an item to consider, please contact cban@naco.org or rlooker@naco.org.



Chesterfield County Animal Services officers help Oscar out of his trailer. Photo courtesy of the Loving Acres Animal Sanctuary

VIRGINIA

When a **500-pound pig** needed a lift from Roanoke to a new animal sanctuary, **CHESTERFIELD COUNTY** Animal Services was there to help him on his journey. The three-year-old potbelly pig had grown too large for his family to care for him, so the Loving Acres Animal Sanctuary took him in. After arriving in Chesterfield County, Animal Services officers helped him get out of the trailer that ferried him across the state.

"Each of them could get on one side. I would go in the back and gave them less and less room and that's how we got him out," said sanctuary owner Rachael Loving.

Today is Jan. 20, 2020. In the blur of the recent December holidays and in the shadow of greetings of Happy New Year, it may take a moment to recall why today is a day on which people should greet one another with profound gratitude and appreciation.

This year, Jan. 20 marks Martin Luther King Jr. Day, also known as Civil Rights Day. The youngest person to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for civil rights, equality and dignity for African Americans; he spoke out against injustice, oppression and poverty, inspiring countless others to stand with him or, in the decades since his assassination, to follow in his footsteps.

Many of Dr. King's quotes are dedicated to service. This Jan. 20, 2020 is the 25th anniversary of MLK Day as a Day of Service, a call to action with the motto "Make it a day on, not a day off." What better way to celebrate the life and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. than to serve others, making our neighbors and communities stronger for all.

As public servants, we work each day to make our communities stronger, answering Dr. King's proposition, "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others." And while there are many, many ways that we in county government demonstrate our dedication to citizens and public service, let us be inspired by the dedication of Community Services, Health and Human Services, and Community Action Agency employees, as they work to eradicate poverty and strengthen communities through racial equity work.

According to communityactionpartnership.com, the vision of Community Action Partnership is "A nation that creates opportunities for all people to thrive, builds strong, resilient communities, and ensures a more equitable society."

Dr. King said, "All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and

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A Day On, Not a Day Off: A Day of Service

should be undertaken with painstaking excellence."

In our public service, we may be serving citizens directly or we may be indirectly serving citizens. Regardless of the nature of your public service profession, we are all able to find joy, purpose and reward through volunteering and service.

After the November and December seasons of thankfulness, take January to channel that energy into action for others. Grab a colleague or a family member and volunteer after work, during a lunch break or on a day off. Make that a recurring commitment and it will become part of your routine. There are so many charities

that may align with your passion to serve as well as your strengths and interests. The reward of volunteering is much greater than the commitment of time and you are certain to make new friends as you engage in volunteerism. As Dr. King stated, "The time is always right to do what is right."

Within your organization, at the beginning of a new learning academy or training cohort, ask each participant if they would like to use their lunch hour to complete a volunteer service project. Forming a new team or have a new member of a well-established team? Working together side by side, serving others, reduces stress, allows


individuals to focus externally and reminds them of their blessings. It creates a bond or shared experience between those working together. Volunteering with colleagues levels the hierarchy of positions and allows openness to learning about each other on an individual level.

Don't have the flexibility of a lunch service project and limited by afterwork availability? Hold a winter coat drive, a canned food drive, adopt a senior or send letters to our military troops. If you are coordinating a volunteering effort with work colleagues, remember it is best practice to make the volunteering opportunity 100 percent voluntary and not man-

datory, and not connected to any partisan or religious group. Dr. King said, "Everybody can be great because greatness is determined by service."

Want some inspiration to create something bigger and ongoing? Be inspired by children who have heard the call to help and are making a huge difference in their communities. Alex's Lemonade Foundation was started by Alex Scott when she was four years old to find a cure for childhood cancer. Alex passed at the age of eight, but her foundation continues to make a difference for children with cancer today and features childhood cancer heroes on their website, alexlemonade.org. Kids Saving the Rainforest was created by two nine-year old kids in 1999 and operates a wildlife sanctuary and rescue center in Costa Rica, kidssavingtherainforest.org. Dr. King said, "Anybody can serve... you only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

On this Martin Luther King Jr. Day, please take a minute to plan or coordinate a service activity for yourself, your family, your friends or your team. Then take another moment to watch Dr. King's "I Have a Dream," "I've Been to the Mountaintop" or Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, all of which can easily be found online. Be inspired to dedicate your time to others, to make someone's day brighter, and to improve your community for each person, one person at a time.

Our work makes our communities stronger each day, but not all of us are in a job where we get to see the impacts of that work on each family. Volunteering gives us that opportunity. Dr. King said, "Everyone has the power for greatness, not for fame but greatness, because greatness is determined by service." With great joy we wish you a Happy Martin Luther King, Jr. Day! 

Erika Philpot is the human resources director and Rose Winkeler is the deputy county attorney for Coconino County, Ariz.