



# Legislative Conference

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## Proposed Interim Policy Resolutions

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National Association of Counties (NACo)

2024 Legislative Conference

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# AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AFFAIRS

## Proposed Interim Resolution on Securing Reimbursement for Rural Emergency Medical Services

**Issue:** Reimbursement rates to rural emergency medical service (EMS) providers from Medicare, Medicaid and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have failed to keep up with inflation and rising costs of medical care, causing rural EMS providers and the communities they serve to experience a shortage of care. Additionally, rural EMS providers are not compensated for other services, such as Treatment in Place (TIP) and Transport to Alternative Provider (TAP) services.

**Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports an increase in reimbursement rates for rural EMS providers from Medicare, Medicaid and the Department of Veterans Affairs to offset inflation and increasing medical costs, and the permanent implementation of COVID-19 era reimbursement to rural EMS providers for delivering Treatment in Place (TIP) and Transport to Alternative Provider (TAP) services.

**Background:** EMS serves as a crucial medical safety net for patients, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Unfortunately, there is a rural EMS workforce shortage, made worse by drastic underfunding. Declines in primary care and hospital services along with low reimbursement rates have created a perfect storm of challenges for rural agencies, all while consistently facing increased responsibility.

The Rural Health Research and Policy Center and the Maine Rural Health Research Center on Ambulance Deserts analyzed data for 41 states and found the following:

- Nearly 4.5 million Americans live in what's known as ambulance deserts. 2.3 million (52%) of them live in rural counties
- Four out of five counties (82%) have at least one ambulance desert
- Rural counties were more likely to have ambulance deserts (84%) than urban counties (77%)
- Eight states have fewer than three ambulances covering every 1,000 square miles of land area

Rural ambulance agencies are challenged by the following issues:

- Long distances and challenging terrain that prolong emergency response and transport times
- Insufficient payment by insurers to cover standby and fixed costs, compounded by inflation and skyrocketing costs for paid personnel with the federal government GAO itself having determined that Medicare payments do not adequately cover costs accrued by rural EMS providers
- A changing workforce that has historically relied on volunteers but increasingly must include paid personnel
- A lack of regional EMS plans to coordinate services
- Insufficient State and Federal policy coordination across oversight agencies. Per — *Characteristics and Challenges of Rural Ambulance Agencies (2021 Rural Policy Research Institute)*
- Declines in primary care and hospital service availability have created greater transport distances and delays in care

Currently, neither Medicare or Medicaid reimburse EMS providers for TIP and TAD. These reimbursements would provide much needed revenue for struggling rural agencies. Furthermore, they

1 would allow EMS agencies to provide treatment on-scene along with effective navigation to appropriate  
2 destinations. The current reimbursement model does not work in that EMS is not allowed to bill for  
3 services provided on site unless there is a transport to a hospital. EMS providers are reimbursed based on  
4 a flat rate fee schedule controlled by Medicare/Medicaid.

5  
6 Medicare/Medicaid billing consists of 4 core items: a flat rate for transport, a modifier based on the  
7 capability of the transport unit (ALS vs BLS), a geographic location modifier (to provide rural services  
8 more funding for longer transports), and a per-mile fee. With over 72 million patients enrolled in  
9 Medicare/Medicaid nationwide and government reimbursement making up the single largest payee for  
10 healthcare, Medicare/Medicaid sets the standard to which insurance billing in general is done in the EMS  
11 industry (Commonwealth Fund, 2019).

12  
13 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, CMS allowed waivers for ambulance  
14 services to be reimbursed for TIP and TAP. These waivers ended in May 2023. Data from the waivers  
15 indicates that TIP and TAP would save CMS around \$2 billion per year.

16  
17 **Sponsor(s):** Julie Ehemann, Commissioner, Shelby County, Ohio; Larry White, Commissioner, Escambia  
18 County, Ala.; Josh Pedrozo, Supervisor, Merced County, Calif.; Tammy Tincher, Commissioner,  
19 Greenbrier County, W. Va.; Kevin Paap, Commissioner, Blue Earth County, Minn.; Terry Wilbur, Clerk,  
20 Oswego County, N.Y.

21  
22 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Building Community Through Multi-County "Good Food For All"**  
23 **Initiatives**

24  
25 **Issue:** Empty grocery shelves during the pandemic underlined the need for well-resourced, regional-scale  
26 food supply networks that complement global supply chains.

27  
28 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges county-led, sub-regional “Good  
29 Food For All” initiatives to attract financial resources needed to (1) make locally produced, nutritious  
30 food more widely available; (2) promote community revitalization, and; (3) create jobs that can’t be  
31 outsourced. This policy responds to consumer demand that’s driving a marketplace redesign to shorten  
32 the geographic distance between farm and fork. A “Good Food For All” economy will supply consumer  
33 demand for products and practices that are healthy for the body, green for the planet, fair for farmers and  
34 workers, and affordable for all.

35  
36 **Background:** This policy will incentivize community-driven partnerships to advance many NACo Farm  
37 Bill goals—starting with (1) “increased funding for the Local Agriculture Market Program (LAMP)” and  
38 (2) “support...targeting new, beginning and underserved producers.” A key LAMP component is the  
39 Regional Food System Partnership (RFSP) program. National Association of Regional Councils (NARC)  
40 Executive Director Leslie Wollack says this “regional approach to agriculture and economic  
41 development” has the means to:

- 42 • Provide basis for leveraging private investment to grow local food & farm economies
- 43 • Open up opportunities for cities and counties to cross jurisdictional boundaries
- 44 • Align broader state policy with localized initiatives for tackling specific challenges

1 Sub-regional “Good Food For All” pilot projects will leverage public resources to spark larger pools of  
2 private resources to support the growth and development of healthy, green, fair and affordable food  
3 economies. A key obstacle is fragmented deployment of financial services. The Federal Reserve Bank  
4 recommends greater financial sector collaboration and coordination among grant makers, lenders and  
5 equity investors to leverage “The Power of Regional Food System Investments to Transform  
6 Communities.”

7  
8 USDA’s RFSP program responds to the trend, but lacks funding partnership requirements to deliver on  
9 Congressional intent to “leverage significant non-federal resources.” NACo can help by advocating for  
10 language in the next Farm Bill to encourage RFSP program grantees to secure matching funds from these  
11 identified potential RFSP “partner cohorts”—i.e. philanthropy, federal, commercial and Farm Credit  
12 System lending institutions.

13  
14 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Unite unconnected agri-food, nutrition and conservation stakeholders  
15 through comprehensive funding strategies that generate measurable improvements to soil health, water  
16 quality, public health and local economies.

17  
18 **Sponsor(s):** Judy Ogalla, Board Chairman, Will County, Ill.

19  
20 **Proposed Interim Resolution Supporting the Preservation of Agriculture and Natural Resources**  
21 **Viability and Sustainability in Areas of Proposed Alternative Energy Production**

22  
23 **Issue:** Alternative energy development and the maintenance of working agricultural lands are increasingly  
24 in competition with one another, with county land use and natural resource management authorities often  
25 coming under threat.

26  
27 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress, the U.S. Department of  
28 Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to pass laws and regulations that can  
29 encourage the adoption of alternative energy development siting practices that maintain working  
30 agricultural lands and protect local decision-making authorities regarding land use.

31  
32 NACo further urges Congress to acknowledge the intense competition for natural resources that these  
33 facilities pose to agriculture production and local municipal users, most notably for water, and take action  
34 to ensure that future alternative energy development takes place in accordance with wishes of the local  
35 community.

36  
37 NACo supports efforts that work to integrate alternative energy production into existing farming  
38 production practices which will promote the sustainability and long-term viability of American agriculture  
39 production and our rural communities which thrive by providing food to the world with pride.

40  
41 **Background:** Federal policies which aim to make the United States more dependent upon alternative  
42 energy sources such as solar and wind have come at great competition and cost to rural communities and,  
43 if left unaddressed, pose a threat to our nations’ food security and the global agriculture economy.

44  
45 The USDA projects that 2023 Net Farm Income will decrease by 20% compared to 2022. As farming  
46 becomes more costly due to inflationary increases to items such as fuel, supplies, labor and insurance

1 premiums, more farmers are looking to leave the industry and struggle with the decision to sell or lease  
2 their land to developers who can pay premiums above the amount another farmer could offer to realize a  
3 farming profit.

4  
5 Renewable energy developments placed in the hearts of our agricultural communities also compete  
6 directly with natural resources needed for rural and agriculture communities to thrive, most notably for  
7 water. While millions of farmers and municipal users have been waiting decades in some states to realize  
8 access to reliable water supplies for drinking water and irrigation, energy policies are prioritizing water  
9 use for solar and wind production facilities over the needs of the local residents and farmers.

10  
11 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** These actions will ensure the preservation of the natural resources required  
12 in agriculturally dependent communities to secure a long-term sustainable food supply for the American  
13 public and secure America’s global-leading agricultural economy.

14  
15 **Sponsor(s):** Amanda McKinney, County Commissioner, Yakima County, Wash.

16  
17 **Proposed Interim Resolution Encouraging Congress to Pass H. R. 5764 (“Support Water-Efficient  
18 Strategies and Technologies Act of 2023”), Which Will Amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to  
19 Increase Payments for Drought-Resilient or Water-Saving Practices and to Provide Additional  
20 Payments for Perennial Production Systems, and for Other Purposes**

21  
22 **Issue:** The WEST Act would support the agriculture practices more commonly used in dry areas for  
23 farmers to have resources available to continue growing the food necessary for our nation to prosper. The  
24 legislation will make perennial production systems eligible for supplemental payments within the  
25 Conservation Stewardship Program.

26  
27 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to pass the Protect the  
28 WEST Act (H. R. 5764) will amend the Food Security Act of 1985 to increase payments for drought-  
29 resilient or water-saving practices and to provide additional payments for perennial productions systems,  
30 and for other purposes.

31  
32 **Background:** The Support Water-Efficient Strategies and Technologies (WEST) Act allow the USDA  
33 Secretary to increase cost shares to 85 percent for Environmental Quality Incentives Programs (EQIP)  
34 practices that are water-conserving or drought resilient. The bill will strengthen the soil health program by  
35 allowing the Secretary to conduct outreach on the program and offer payments for soil testing.

36  
37 Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM), Congressman David Valadao (R-Calif.), and  
38 Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) introduced the Support the WEST Act to support agricultural  
39 practices in arid climates of the western United States. “For generations, farmers and ranchers in New  
40 Mexico have been conserving water and growing drought-resilient crops in arid climates. Their crops feed  
41 our families and are distributed across America’s tables. However, we learned during our ‘Farm to  
42 Congress’ conversations that USDA conservation programs are sometimes targeted for wetter conditions  
43 found in the East and Midwest. This bill will help these essential programs work better for Western  
44 farmers and ranchers.” Leger Fernández stated.

1 The bill is supported by the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau, Rocky Mountain Farmers Union,  
2 New Mexico Food and Agriculture Policy Council, Western Landowners Alliance, Agri-Cultura, Farm to  
3 Table, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts, New Mexico Black Farmers and Ranchers,  
4 NM Healthy Soil Working Group, New Mexico Acequia Association, FoodCorps, and Farmington  
5 Municipal School Food Service.

6  
7 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Authorizes \$50 million for states, municipalities, water systems, and Tribal  
8 nations to implement water-efficiency upgrades and establish programs to repair leaks, especially in areas  
9 experiencing severe drought and in low-income communities.

10  
11 **Sponsor(s):** Anna Hansen, Commissioner, Santa Fe County, N.M.; Darlene Vigil, Commissioner, Taos  
12 County, N.M.



1                                   **COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

2  
3                                   **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Expanding Work Authorization Process**  
4                                   **for Asylum Seekers**

5  
6   **Issue:** Individuals that are seeking asylum in the United States are subject to a 150-day waiting period  
7 after submitting their asylum claim to apply for an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) (also  
8 referred to as a work permit). During this waiting period, many asylum seekers must rely on counties and  
9 non-profits within their communities to provide their basic needs as they are legally unable to work.

10  
11   **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the administration  
12 to take actions to shorten the current waiting period for asylum seekers who are applying for an EAD. By  
13 shortening this arbitrary waiting period, asylum seekers will be able to contribute more quickly to the  
14 workforce, local economy, and assist businesses that are struggling with workforce shortages.  
15 Furthermore, it will reduce the need for them to rely on supportive services from counties and lessen the  
16 chances of these individuals working in illegal and underpaid settings.

17  
18   **Background:** The U.S asylum process allows individuals fleeing persecution to seek residence in the  
19 U.S. The asylum system is currently heavily backlogged, which means it typically takes years for a case  
20 to be adjudicated. While asylum seekers are protected from deportation during this time, they are not able  
21 to work until they get authorization. This generally takes at least half a year but typically more than a  
22 year. This places a burden on asylum seekers, sponsors, local communities, and the economy as a whole.  
23 However, legislative solutions would be more enduring and comprehensive. Counties have an interest in  
24 ensuring that our employers and industries of all types can hire and retain a qualified and legal workforce  
25 that meets their needs and helps to strengthen local economies not only in areas like construction and  
26 agriculture but in every facet of our economy.

27  
28   **Fiscal/Urban/Rural impact:** Asylum seekers help build and maintain small and large business operating  
29 locally, as well as give them the means to become self-sufficient more quickly. The changes would lessen  
30 the burden on the budgets of communities hosting asylum seekers – and therefore the larger economy - by  
31 permitting such individual to obtain employment.

32  
33   **Sponsor(s):** David Stout, Commissioner, El Paso County, Texas; Luis Alejo, Supervisor, Las Animas  
34 County, Calif.; Jani Hitchen, Council Member, Pierce County, Wash.; Heidi Henkel, Council Member,  
35 City and County of Broomfield, Colo.; Ashley Stolzmann, Commissioner, Boulder County, Colo.; Lena  
36 Fowler and Jeronimo Vasquez, Supervisors of Coconino County, Ariz.; Mary Ann Borgeson,  
37 Commissioner; Douglas County, Neb.; Wendy Jacobs, Commissioner, Durham County, N.C.; Bruce  
38 Bracker, Supervisor, Santa Cruz County, Ariz.; Jenny Wilson, Mayor, Salt Lake County, Utah; on behalf  
39 of the NACo Immigration Reform Task Force.

40  
41                                   **Proposed Interim Resolution on FY 2025 Appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and**  
42                                   **Urban Development**

43  
44   **Issue:** Support Fiscal Year 2025 appropriations for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban  
45 Development (HUD).

1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to support the following  
2 levels of funding for core U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) programs in the  
3 Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies  
4 Appropriations bill: no less than \$4.2 billion in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) formula  
5 funding; no less than \$2.5 billion in formula funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships Program  
6 (HOME); \$3.5 billion for Homeless Housing Assistance grants, including at least 20% of funds directed  
7 to ESG as allowed by statute, plus an amount to fully fund expiring supportive housing and Shelter Plus  
8 Care rent subsidy contracts; expansion of the Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program in addition to  
9 full funding for existing project-based and tenant-based contracts; \$50 million for HUD-Veterans Affairs  
10 Supportive Housing (VASH) and \$500 million in Section 108 Loan Guarantee authority.

11  
12 **Background:** The CDBG and HOME programs have been model federal block grant programs for  
13 improving the nation’s aging infrastructure, expanding affordable housing opportunities, and undertaking  
14 neighborhood revitalization. Despite the success of these programs, federal funding for CDBG has fallen  
15 by over half a billion dollars since FY 2010 and HOME has faced unreasonable fiscal constraints since  
16 being woefully underfunded in FY17. Decreased funding over the years has severely hampered local  
17 governments’ ability to foster sustainable and economically resilient communities.

18  
19 Local governments use CDBG funds for critical community development activities, including  
20 infrastructure improvements such as roads, water and sewer systems; expanding homeownership  
21 opportunities; eliminating slum and blight; employment training; business and job creation; transportation  
22 services; services at libraries, community centers, adult day care and child after school care facilities;  
23 homeless housing assistance; and crime awareness programs. According to HUD, every \$100 million in  
24 CDBG funding directly creates or retains more than 17,000 jobs, and CDBG program resources have  
25 created over 450,000 jobs. This important infrastructure and community development program has been a  
26 catalyst for economic growth and has helped local officials leverage funds for community needs. CDBG  
27 allocation continues to decline, however, at a time when the nation’s infrastructure is ailing and is in dire  
28 need of improvements. It is more important now than ever to increase CDBG funding to give  
29 communities the ability to address their infrastructure and economic development needs at the local level.  
30 For counties across the nation, the HOME program is vital to increasing home ownership and expanding  
31 the availability of affordable rental housing. Since 1992, over 1.34 million units of housing have been  
32 produced with HOME funds. HUD indicates that each dollar of HOME funding leverages an additional  
33 \$4.49 in other public and private funding. Every \$1 billion in HOME funding creates or preserves more  
34 than 33,000 jobs. According to HUD, an estimated 16.5 million renter and homeowner households now  
35 pay more than 50 percent of their annual incomes for housing. It is imperative that the HOME program is  
36 strengthened and expanded to help American families access affordable housing.

37  
38 Greater funding is needed to keep up with the rising costs of construction and the increased needs of  
39 communities. Local governments are becoming more efficient and creative with these important funds,  
40 but in order to create effective public-private partnerships using these programs, more public resources  
41 are needed. CARES Act funding has helped through emergency needs, but these programs need to be  
42 maintained.

43  
44 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Funding of HUD's core programs is crucial to state and local governments  
45 that provide services to communities at the grassroots level.

1 **Sponsor(s):** Mary Keating, Director of Community Services, DuPage County, Ill.; NACCED  
2 Representative to the NACo Board of Directors.

3  
4 **Proposed Interim Resolution on HOME Reauthorization**  
5

6 **Issue:** Support the reauthorization of the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) in order to  
7 strengthen county production of affordable housing for rent or homeownership.  
8

9 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to pass HOME  
10 reauthorization legislation and allow for increased federal funding assistance to support affordable  
11 housing development.  
12

13 **Background:** The HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) provides formula grants to states  
14 and localities to fund a variety of activities including building, buying, and/or rehabilitating affordable  
15 housing for rent or homeownership or providing direct rental assistance to low-income people. The  
16 flexibility of this program allows state and local governments to use HOME funds for grants, direct loans,  
17 loan guarantees or other forms of credit enhancements, or for rental assistance and security deposits.  
18 These funds are often used in partnership with funds from local nonprofits and private investors.  
19

20 Greater funding is needed to keep up with the rising costs of construction and the increased needs of  
21 communities. Local governments are becoming more efficient and creative with these important funds,  
22 but in order to create effective public-private partnerships using these programs, more public resources  
23 are needed.  
24

25 Since 1992, over 1.34 million units of housing have been produced with HOME funds. HUD indicates  
26 that each dollar of HOME funding leverages an additional \$4.49 in other public and private funding.  
27 Every \$1 billion in HOME funding creates or preserves more than 33,000 jobs. According to HUD, an  
28 estimated 16.5 million renter and homeowner households now pay more than 50 percent of their annual  
29 incomes for housing. It is imperative that the HOME program is strengthened and expanded to help  
30 American families access affordable housing.  
31

32 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** The reauthorization of HOME is crucial to meet increasing fiscal needs of  
33 state and local governments that provide housing development to communities in need.  
34

35 **Sponsor(s):** Mary Keating, Director of Community Services, DuPage County, Ill.

1 ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & LAND USE

2  
3 Proposed Interim Resolution on Groundwater Resource Assessment

4  
5 **Issue:** Groundwater depletion is a significant issue, but available data and analytical tools are insufficient  
6 and coordination among agencies is inadequate to inform policies necessary to serve the public’s needs.  
7 Counties need better data to inform local decisions about development planning, land management,  
8 infrastructure investments, and support for agriculture and drinking water supplies.

9  
10 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Federal Government agencies  
11 with responsibilities to research and assess groundwater availability and sufficiency for public purposes  
12 (including the United States Geological Survey, Bureau of Reclamation, National Air and Space Agency  
13 and Environmental Protection Agency) to:

- 14  
15 • Significantly increase coordination among themselves and with state agencies with like  
16 responsibilities  
17 • Quantify and characterize available groundwater nationwide inclusive of fractured rock systems  
18 and predict likely supplies (water access data); and  
19 • Develop more robust modeling and analytical techniques and identify gaps in available data to  
20 better inform policies necessary to ensure continued availability and sufficiency of water  
21 necessary to support public health and food production.

22  
23 NACo also calls on Congress to ensure funding is available to support programs for individuals and  
24 communities to voluntarily monitor well water availability and for those whose wells run dry to secure  
25 water resources until such time as they develop alternate sources of supply.

26  
27 **Background:** Given the importance of ground water as the source of substantial proportions of drinking  
28 water and water for agriculture in the United States, it is clear we need to have good data on locations,  
29 quantities and qualities of such water and good analysis of that data. Estimates of the total amount of  
30 drinking water sourced from groundwater range from slightly over one-third (United States Geological  
31 Survey, USGS) to 38 percent (National Groundwater Association) whether from public systems or private  
32 wells. Agriculture accounts for about 53 percent of the groundwater pumped for human use in the United  
33 States according to USGS. Available data indicates that in some areas of the country, particularly in arid  
34 and semi-arid regions, groundwater withdrawals exceed the amount of water available to recharge the  
35 groundwater systems, resulting in serious problems of groundwater mining or “overdrafts.” Excessive  
36 groundwater mining in some parts of the nation is already leading to declining rates of production as  
37 farmers turn to dryland farming, relying on rain instead of irrigation. Moreover, water quality is declining  
38 in some parts of the country as aquifers are drained and lower quality water is introduced, such as  
39 saltwater intrusion in coastal areas or higher levels of arsenic contamination in the San Joaquin Valley in  
40 California. Available data on these critical water sources is insufficient to inform policies at the national  
41 or local levels. We need better coordination among appropriate agencies and better tools of analysis.

42  
43 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Small and rural communities are disproportionately dependent on  
44 groundwater, but some large communities have been forced to take action as groundwater supplies are  
45 depleted. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 128,362 of the country’s 143,070 water  
46 systems are largely dependent on groundwater. Many of those water systems are located in rural areas of

1 the country, but large urban areas are also negatively impacted. Arizona has instituted a policy that limits  
2 new housing development that relies on groundwater. This action is expected to increase housing prices  
3 in some areas of the state such as Phoenix and Scottsdale. During periods of drought in other, mostly  
4 Western states, individual and small community wells dry up and owners/operators are forced to seek  
5 alternate supplies, affecting not only availability of drinking water, but also housing prices.

6  
7 **Sponsor(s):** Rosemarie Smallcombe, Supervisor, Mariposa County, Calif.; Christopher Stohr, PhD,  
8 Commissioner, Champaign County, Ill.; Cindy Wolf, Council Member, San Juan County, Wash.

9  
10 **Proposed Interim Resolution Requesting the Department of Energy to Develop a New Grant**  
11 **Program, Based on the U.S. Department of Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot Program**

12  
13 **Issue:** The operation of Department of Energy (DOE) facilities creates housing, transportation, and  
14 related infrastructure and workforce stressors on counties throughout the country which require additional  
15 funding resources. These stressors also affect the ability of the DOE facilities to meet their missions.

16  
17 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the DOE to develop a new grant  
18 program, based on the Department of Defense (DOD) Community Infrastructure Pilot Program (DCIP),  
19 which would:

- 20 1) Define eligible infrastructure projects that directly benefits the operations and/or workforce of the  
21 DOE facility;
- 22 2) Includes but is not limited to transportation, affordable, workforce, and other identified housing  
23 and housing infrastructure, K-12 and higher education, fire, emergency response, water,  
24 wastewater, telecommunications, electric, gas, or other utility projects;
- 25 3) Require the applicant to detail the specific stressors resulting from the proximity of the DOE  
26 facility to the community, including environmental, workforce, traffic, transportation,  
27 gentrification and inequity that will be addressed directly through the project, and;
- 28 4) Be applicable to impacted county, municipality, and tribal governments that surround DOE  
29 facilities.

30  
31 **Background:** DOE has facilities in at least 39 states, with 17 laboratories in 14 states, affecting hundreds  
32 of counties across the United States. The operations include a wide variety of activities. For most  
33 communities that host these facilities, the additional workforce and taxes can be a boon. However, for the  
34 host community and surrounding communities, there is often additional stress on infrastructure and  
35 workforce. Just as DOD facilities require additional support from communities around the country, DOE  
36 facilities require much of the same. The DOD has initiated the Defense Communities Infrastructure Pilot  
37 (DCIP) program, which has provided grants over \$200 million in the last four years to address this issue.  
38 A similar program for DOE communities would alleviate the additional requirements from the high level  
39 of traffic, housing, personnel and other needs of these facilities, thereby furthering national goals.

40  
41 Two language changes from the DCIP in this policy proposal are meant to ensure that regional  
42 cooperation and coordination is taking place and to alleviate a tendency toward broadening the meaning  
43 of national security. In the DCIP, the base commander is required to approve the eligibility of the grant  
44 project and the project must directly serve the national security mission. By identifying a project as  
45 benefiting the operations and workforce of a DOE facility, the definition of national security is no longer

1 an issue. By requiring that the applicant identify the specific stressors, it ensures that the grant directly  
2 applies to the issue generated by proximity to the DOE facility.

3  
4 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** For a host community and all neighboring communities, but particularly for  
5 rural areas that have few if any other major industry, a DOE Community Infrastructure Grant Program  
6 would have tremendous impact on their ability to provide housing through additional infrastructure,  
7 ensure safety and manage the amount of service and maintenance needed as a result of their proximity to  
8 DOE facilities.

9  
10 **Sponsor(s):** Randall Ryti, Councilor and Danielle Duran, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, Los  
11 Alamos County, N.M.; Anna Hansen, Commissioner and Justin Greene, Commissioner, Santa Fe County,  
12 N.M.; Ernie Carlson, Commissioner and James Bowen, Commissioner, Eddy County, N.M.; Jerome  
13 Delvin, Commissioner, Benton County, Wash.; Megan Labadie, Director, Natural Resources and Federal  
14 Facilities, Nye County, Nev.; Cattaraugus County Commission, N.Y.

### 15 16 **Proposed Interim Policy Resolution Supporting Beach Nourishment Bill**

17  
18 **Issue:** The Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) policy requiring perpetual public access and use  
19 easements on private property in order to be eligible for federal participation in Congressionally  
20 Authorized Storm Damage Reduction Projects. This policy decision puts public and private infrastructure  
21 at risk, impacts local economies, and negatively impacts critical environmental habitats for federally  
22 endangered species. Additionally, this policy results in the loss of tens of millions of dollars in cost-share  
23 to local governments and endangers future eligibility for disaster-related funding.

24  
25 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports the inclusion of a provision int  
26 the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) Section 103(d) of the Water Resources  
27 Development Act of 1986 (33 U.S.C. § 2213(d)(1) to clarify Army Corps policy is consistent with the  
28 law concerning the provision of land, easements, rights-of-way, relocation, and dredged material disposal  
29 areas by a non-federal project sponsor (e.g., county) and ensure the Army Corps' policy fulfills the goals  
30 of storm damage reduction projects in Florida and other impacted states.

31  
32 **Background:** Hurricane risk reduction and coastal storm risk management (CSRSM) projects are crucial  
33 tools for mitigating the impacts of storm surge on coastal communities across the country. The projects,  
34 which frequently include sand nourishments, also have great economic benefits for water-based local  
35 economies.

36  
37 Recently, the Army Corps has interpreted Section 103 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA)  
38 1986 (33 U.S.C. 2213) in a manner that requires a local project sponsor to secure perpetual public access  
39 and use easements from all upland private property owners within an authorized project's footprint before  
40 that project can commence, even in cases when access to a property is not necessary or federal funds have  
41 never been used to improve the private shores. Due to concerns of federal overreach, property owners are  
42 sometimes reluctant to agree to provide these perpetual easements. The apparent justification for this  
43 requirement is related to Army Corps policies to not conduct nourishments that are solely to the benefit of  
44 private property owners. However, in 1996, the Army Corps declared the minimum estate necessary for  
45 shore protection projects was the perpetual storm damage reduction easement but allowed local  
46 governments to acquire less-than-perpetual easements and pay for 100 percent of sand placement

1 landward of the Erosion Control Line, which is the boundary between public and private land, for those  
2 parcels not covered by an easement. This approach is consistent with the Project Coordination  
3 Agreements signed by both the local governments and Army Corps and 33 U.S.C. 2213. Further, Army  
4 Corps has not acknowledged that Florida, since 1970, has implemented regulations requiring public  
5 access and use for all nourished beaches which fully meets the requirement for public access and use. A  
6 one-size-fits-all approach to public access and use of nourished beaches does not reflect diversity of  
7 communities participating in CSRМ projects and has created a barrier to the delivery of successful  
8 projects.  
9

10 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Would ensure federal funds are made available for shore protection projects  
11 to mitigate damages caused by storms as well as supporting local economies, protected and endangered  
12 species, and public recreational opportunities.  
13

14 **Sponsor(s):** Kathleen Peters, Commissioner, Pinellas County, Fla.

1 **FINANCE, PENSIONS & INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

2  
3 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Reduced Federal Spending**

4  
5 **Issue:** Federal debt continues to rapidly grow due to high spending. In fiscal year 2023 alone, the deficit  
6 was close to \$2 trillion, which is up from the \$1.4 trillion added in 2022. Interest ONLY costs soared to  
7 \$659 billion in fiscal year 2023, and if spending stays on its current trajectory, interest payments alone  
8 may exceed \$1 trillion per year by 2033. This pattern of spending is unsustainable and if not addressed  
9 will lead to the country defaulting on its obligations.

10  
11 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to work in a bipartisan  
12 manner to meet the country’s financial obligations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, while also finding ways to  
13 reduce government spending, so that fiscal support to counties can be sustained.

14  
15 **Background:** Since 2001, the federal government’s budget has run a deficit each year and now the  
16 national debt stands at roughly \$34 trillion dollars. On June 3, 2023, President Biden signed the Fiscal  
17 Responsibility Act into law which suspended the limit on federal debt through January 1, 2025, to avoid  
18 default. While the legislation includes discretionary funding caps for FY2024 and FY 2025 and  
19 discretionary spending limits for FY 2026 through FY 2029, the budget remains on an extremely unstable  
20 foundation.

21  
22 In an article by William McBride (Tax Foundation), dated October 12, 2023, while tax revenue has  
23 increased by about 28 percent since 2019, spending has increased by roughly 46 percent. During that  
24 timeframe, the yearly addition to the overall annual deficit has more than doubled to \$2 trillion and is on  
25 track to cross the \$3 trillion threshold within a few years.

26  
27 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** If the United States were to default on its debt, Americans would feel an  
28 immediate impact. Government operations, national defense, and social services would all have to be  
29 drastically reduced. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid beneficiaries, and others dependent on  
30 government programs, may lose their fiscal support or have it drastically reduced.

31  
32 Counties rely on federal funding to meet the needs of their communities. If Congress does not do more to  
33 cut spending, every county (big and small) will eventually feel the impacts associated with the higher debt  
34 load. Most counties and states have statutory balanced budget requirements. Families need to balance  
35 their checkbooks as well. We are not asking the federal government to do anything more than what most  
36 other governmental agencies and families do to stay fiscally sound.

37  
38 As revenues and debt growth have continued, spending reductions must be part of the solution. Without  
39 this correction, funds earmarked for counties will be increasingly diverted away to pay interest and other  
40 obligations and subsequently harm communities across the nation.

41  
42 **Sponsor(s):** Stan VanderWerf, County Commissioner, El Paso County, Colo.



1           **Proposed Interim Resolution on Protecting Local Control and Fiduciary Responsibility**

2  
3 **Issue:** There is an ongoing coordinated national effort by special interest groups to restrict and eliminate  
4 local control over pensions, municipal bonds, and government funds by passing anti-local control and  
5 anti-free-market legislation and resolutions at the national and state levels. These policies threaten county  
6 governments' ability to deliver services to meet their own community's needs by restricting access to  
7 essential data and regulating local government.

8  
9 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration  
10 to oppose anti-local control and anti-free-market policies such as the Fair Access to Bank Act 2023 and  
11 H.J. Res.30 2023. The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration  
12 to support policies that provide for local governments' ability to invest and borrow as they self-determine,  
13 which must include continued access to free capital and credit markets. Furthermore, NACo urges  
14 Congress and the Administration to oppose legislation and policies which don't support free enterprise  
15 and restrict local governments from fulfilling their elected duties to act as careful stewards of taxpayer  
16 resources.

17  
18 **Background:** In 2023, 165 anti-free-market pieces of legislation were introduced across 37 states that  
19 sought to weaponize government funds, contracts, and pensions to prevent companies and investors from  
20 considering basic, common-sense risk factors. Such pieces of legislation manipulate the market to favor  
21 select industries. Implementation of anti-free-market legislation in several states across the nation have  
22 cost American taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, ruined government projects, restricted  
23 competition, and put the pensions of hard-working public employees at risk. Experts estimate that these  
24 policies will cost the taxpayer billions of dollars and threaten free enterprise. Several banking associations  
25 and chambers of commerce across the nation have come out against anti-free-market legislation.

26  
27 County Treasurers are elected by their constituents to make smart financial decisions and to spend tax  
28 dollars wisely. Anti-free-market policies and efforts prevent elected officials from doing their duty with  
29 which the public entrusted them. The United States has historically benefited from a self-regulating free  
30 market where competition thrives, not restrictions that benefit dark money and special interest groups.  
31 The American system of government functions best when County officials have the freedom and trust to  
32 make responsible, risk-adjusted investment decisions without reckless restrictions and unreasonable  
33 burdens to best meet local community needs. County officials have legal duties to fulfill that are enforced  
34 by states. Federal legislation as mentioned in this resolution would upset long-standing, well established  
35 norms of our economic system.

36  
37 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Policies that disrupt or preclude local investment decisions will raise costs  
38 on local governments and taxpayers, risk pension fund returns, and make local elected officials vulnerable  
39 to litigation. It would also ensure that local elected officials are not restricted by big government in  
40 compliance with their elected duties.

41  
42 **Sponsor(s):** Sarah Benatar, Treasurer, Coconino County, Ariz.

1 **HEALTH**

2  
3 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Ensuring Timely Death Certificate Signatures by U.S. Department**  
4 **of Veterans Affairs Clinicians**

5  
6 **Issue:** Delays and refusals by VA doctors to sign their patient’s death certificate is preventing veteran  
7 families from planning funerals, receiving member benefits, timely cremation or burial, and accessing  
8 appropriate financial records and assets.

9  
10 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration  
11 pass legislation directing VA primary clinicians or other clinic providers to sign death certificates within  
12 72 hours for veterans in their care whose deaths do not fall under the medical examiner/coroner (ME/C)  
13 jurisdiction. This policy should direct VA clinicians who are uncertain about cause of death to use their  
14 best medical judgment to certify a reasonable cause of death or contact the health district physician  
15 director in the district where the death occurred to obtain guidance in reaching a determination as to a  
16 cause of death and document the same. Failure to comply with this directive should result in a fine of  
17 \$5,000 and/or temporary suspension of medical license.

18  
19 **Background:** The ME/C is charged with investigating sudden or unexpected deaths and deaths that may  
20 be due to non-natural causes. When deaths occurring outside of the hospital or nursing home are  
21 investigated and deemed natural, it is the responsibility of the decedent’s primary clinician (doctor, nurse  
22 practitioner or physician assistant) to sign the death certificate. If an individual is not under the current  
23 care of a clinician or clinic, it falls to the ME/C to sign the death certificate.

24  
25 When a VA clinician fails or refuses to sign a death certificate for a veteran, it creates undue burden on  
26 the medical examiner system by forcing the forensic pathologists to assume duties of a primary care  
27 clinician, including burdensome records requests. These medical record reviews are time-consuming and  
28 exacerbate the shortage of just 700 forensic pathologists across the country. As a result, veteran families  
29 are prevented from planning funerals, receiving survivor benefits, timely cremation or burial, and  
30 accessing appropriate financial records and assets. Additionally, Medical Examiners do not have access to  
31 information about secondary conditions that should be listed on the death record that outline duty-specific  
32 exposures, without which families are not eligible for potential VA benefits. Federal action is needed to  
33 ensure that VA clinicians in counties across the country are held accountable to uniform standards for  
34 their responsibility to sign death certificates in a timely manner.

35  
36 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Requiring VA clinicians to sign death certificates in a timely fashion may  
37 help reduce the workload of forensic pathologists in rural counties, which are feeling the impacts of the  
38 ME/C shortage most acutely.

39  
40 **Sponsor(s):** Julie Jeppson, County Commissioner, Anoka County, Minn.

41  
42 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Federal Funding for Doula and Social Support Services**  
43 **and Training**

44  
45 **Issue:** Health and Human Services officials and stakeholders reported that the Covid-19 pandemic  
46 worsened factors contributing to maternal health disparities, like access to care, cardiovascular problems

1 and other underlying conditions, which contributed to a 78% overall increase in maternal mortality rates  
2 in the U.S. between 2000-2020. The maternal death rate for Black or African American (not Hispanic or  
3 Latina) women was 44.0 per 100,000 live births in 2019, then increased to 55.3 in 2020, and 68.9 in 2021.  
4 In contrast, White (not Hispanic or Latina) women had death rates of 17.9, 19.1, and 26.1, respectively.  
5 According to a 2021 report from the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists, “continuous one-  
6 to-one emotional support provided by support personnel, such as a doula, is associated with improved  
7 outcomes for women in labor. Doulas can provide individually tailored, culturally appropriate, and  
8 patient-centered care and advocacy; however, only about 6% of women who give birth receive doula care.  
9

10 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the Federal Government and  
11 Congress to assist counties by providing funding for 1) Increased Doula services and training and  
12 certification; 2) Support community-based organizations in building and diversifying the doula  
13 workforce; 3) Increase education/technical assistance to encourage counties and states to implement  
14 Medicaid coverage for doulas and sufficient reimbursement rates to ensure expanded access to Doula care  
15 for Medicaid enrollees, along with the extension of Medicaid postpartum coverage; to ameliorate maternal  
16 health outcomes for all women and address racial disparities in maternal health, mortality, and morbidity.  
17

18 **Background:** In 2021, the U.S. had one of the worst rates of maternal mortality in the country's history  
19 going back to 1965. 1,205 people died of maternal causes in the U.S. in 2021, which represents a 40%  
20 increase from the previous year, and the U.S. rate for 2021 was 32.9 maternal deaths per 100,000 live  
21 births, which is more than ten times the estimated rates of some other high-income countries, including  
22 Australia, Austria, Israel, Japan and Spain which all reported between 2 and 3 deaths per 100,000 in 2020.  
23

24 As stated, the maternal death rate for Black or African American women was 44.0 per 100,000 live births  
25 in 2019, then increased to 55.3 in 2020, and 68.9 in 2021. These results are appalling and occur regardless  
26 of income or education levels. A person’s race should never determine their health outcomes, and  
27 pregnancy and childbirth should be safe for all. Our country deserves top quality maternal care, and  
28 adding the benefit of doulas will benefit us all, mothers, babies, and future generations of U.S. Citizens.  
29 NACo urges the federal government and congress to increase funding and work with states and local  
30 governments to fund and assist in the provision of more robust doula services, and education and training  
31 campaigns.  
32

33 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** According to the CDC, cardiovascular conditions such as pulmonary  
34 embolisms, uncontrolled bleeding and problems emanating from hypertension are the leading cause of  
35 pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. and most, up to 91% are preventable and more than half of such  
36 deaths occur 60 days after someone give birth. 7 million women of childbearing age live in counties  
37 without access or with limited access to maternity care and they are giving birth to more than 500,000  
38 infants a year. Doula services not only are shown to improve maternal health outcomes, but are a way of  
39 reducing costs associated with maternal mortality and morbidity due to less dependence on pain  
40 medication; shorter duration of labor-less time in the hospital; fewer operative deliveries, such as C-  
41 section episiotomy (a cut on the vagina to facilitate birth); higher APGAR (newborn) scores; decreased  
42 infant mortality; and decreased maternal mortality. Obstetric hemorrhage, often associated with operative  
43 delivery, is a major cause of maternal mortality. Operative delivery and NICU admissions are two of the  
44 largest cost drivers for Labor and Delivery units.  
45

46 **Sponsor(s):** Donna Miller, Commissioner, Cook County, Ill.

1 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Tricare Reimbursement Adequacy**

2  
3 **Issue:** For counties with a strong military presence and a high number of retired military, most are  
4 dependent on Tricare for their health insurance. Tricare reimbursement levels and supplemental funding  
5 opportunities directly impact community access to care and significantly impact local health capacity and  
6 resiliency.

7  
8 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports federal legislation and health  
9 financing reform to provide adequate funding to support access, continuity of care and direct provision of  
10 health care services for military members, retirees and their families; as well as needed support to critical  
11 access hospitals who serve this population.

12  
13 **Background:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports local healthcare delivery systems  
14 and access to all. We expect insurance companies, especially those participating in public programs to  
15 extend coverage into both urban and rural areas and to contract and coordinate with local providers.  
16 Furthermore, we expect public payors, such as Medicaid, Medicare and Tricare, to contract at  
17 reimbursement levels that do not discourage providers from accepting patients. According to a study by  
18 Penn State College of Medicine, “More than 180 rural hospitals throughout the United States have closed  
19 since 2005. Nearly 1,000 more are at risk of closing, according to the study.”

20  
21 In addition, the military has been steadily closing military hospitals and health clinics, shifting the burden  
22 and responsibility of care on to local health systems. According to a report released in March 2022, the  
23 combined military Defense Health Agency is moving ahead with plans to close some 50 hospitals and  
24 clinics following a pause that began at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

25  
26 We also recognize the need for the Department of Defense to communicate with their personnel more  
27 proactively to fully inform them on their options for health care and how to pay for it outside the military  
28 system. The Department of Defense should address these issues at the system level rather than leaving  
29 that burden of communication at the local government and local hospital level.

30  
31 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Tricare pays approximately 32 cents on the dollar in total for the care  
32 received, yet also makes up a significant percentage of the patient load in local health facilities causing a  
33 significant fiscal burden on county health facilities. Reforms to reimbursement will provide needed  
34 support to local health facilities, particularly critical access hospitals who are reimbursed by Tricare for  
35 providing health care services for military members, retirees and their families.

36  
37 **Sponsor(s):** Hon. Janet St. Clair, Commissioner, Island County, Wash.; Hon. Wendy Root-Askew,  
38 Supervisor, Monterey County, Calif.; Hon. Robert Gelder, Commissioner, Wash.; Hon. Jani Hitchen,  
39 Councilmember, Pierce County, Wash.

40  
41 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Enhancing the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of**  
42 **2008**

43  
44 **Issue:** Mental health and substance use treatment providers are critical resources for county government  
45 and enhancements to existing federal policies would improve the commercial payer environment while  
46 expanding coverage for older Americans.

1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports efforts to add Medicare-  
2 delivered services to be subject to the payment parity intent of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction  
3 Equity Act (MHPAEA).

4  
5 **Background:** By many standards, payment by commercial insurers for behavioral health services  
6 compares poorly with payments for primary health care services in spite of parity laws established by  
7 Congress in 2008 (the MHPAEA). The Department of Labor is the primary regulator of MHPAEA and is  
8 responsible for overseeing 2 million group health plans covering 136.5 million individuals. Their  
9 enforcement efforts continue to evolve, and notably, Medicare is not subject to MHPAEA. This creates  
10 two important healthcare parity issues that counties are concerned with:

- 11 • Significant barriers to access for treatment of mental health conditions and substance use disorders  
12 for Medicare beneficiaries (those 65 years of age and above and those with long-term disabilities  
13 under the age of 65).
- 14 • Lack of consistency for commercial insurance reimbursement methodologies because those payers  
15 follow the categories of services that Medicare defines.

16  
17 County Governments struggle with community-wide behavioral health issues in a variety of ways,  
18 including service delivery for public health, public safety, economic development, and juvenile justice.  
19 Counties rely on both public and private providers and struggle to have adequate access to these resources  
20 due to workforce issues, capital development, and timely access to services. Each of these dynamics  
21 would be lessened if there were better payment parity between physical health care services and  
22 behavioral health care services. While Congress did address this issue by passing the Mental Health Parity  
23 and Addiction Equity Act in 2008, it excluded Medicare plans from meeting the parity standards codified  
24 by the Act. That exception means private insurance companies assert a high degree of latitude in defining  
25 a MH/SUD benefit under their terms of health coverage and Medicare plans are well documented in their  
26 shortfalls for behavioral health services compared to primary health care services.

27  
28 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Behavioral health care simply needs to be better resourced in the United  
29 States, and the lack of access to this care is felt in both urban and rural communities. In urban  
30 communities, demand rarely meets supply for care that is best provided immediately. In rural  
31 communities, that dynamic is exacerbated, with outcomes that can resonate through an entire community  
32 even when one individual struggles to find appropriate care.

33  
34 **Sponsor(s):** Pat Farr, Commissioner, Lane County, Ore.; Lane County, Ore.

### 35 36 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Studying the Relationship Between VA Benefits and Veteran** 37 **Suicide Prevention**

38  
39 **Issue:** Currently, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in its National Suicide Prevention  
40 Annual Report only analyzes how many veterans who die by suicide had recent interactions with the VA  
41 through medical or mental health appointments. However, suicide prevention goes beyond just mental  
42 health practices and can include economic and material supports. A more comprehensive understanding of  
43 the role that the full range of VA benefits play in preventing veteran suicide would inform better data-  
44 driven policy decisions to address this national crisis.

1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration  
2 to take legislative and regulatory action to study the upstream factors that best prevent veteran suicide,  
3 including examining the relationship between VA benefits and suicide outcomes. This includes veterans’  
4 use of disability compensation, education and employment benefits, home loans and foreclosure  
5 assistance, and housing assistance programs as part of its analysis in the annual suicide prevention report.  
6 The VA should analyze this data to identify which benefits have the greatest impact on preventing suicide  
7 and make recommendations for incorporating these findings into its ongoing suicide prevention strategy.  
8

9 **Background:** According to the VA’s 2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report, 6,392  
10 veterans died by suicide in 2021, an increase of 114 suicides from 2020. Suicide rates among veterans  
11 continue to far exceed those of their non-veteran counterparts. Suicide was the second-leading cause of  
12 death among veterans under age 45-years-old.  
13

14 Counties play an important role in ensuring access to VA benefits, particularly through County Veterans  
15 Service Offices in 29 states. Additional research by the VA will help build the case for expanding this  
16 work so that more veterans have access to upstream prevention via economic supports.  
17

18 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Veterans in rural areas die more frequently by suicide and additional data  
19 may help address the needs of veterans in these areas.  
20

21 **Sponsor(s):** James Zenner, Director, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, Los Angeles County,  
22 Calif. on behalf of the NACo Veterans and Military Services Committee.  
23

### 24 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Initiatives to Eliminate Hepatitis C**

25

26 **Issue:** It’s estimated that annually, local jails and prisons see about 30 percent of individuals infected with  
27 the Hepatitis C virus (HCV). While scientific advancements have enabled quick diagnosis, treatment, and  
28 cure of Hepatitis C, these benefits are not reaching a substantial number of justice-involved individuals  
29 who are chronically infected.  
30

31 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges legislative and regulatory action  
32 that 1. accelerates the development of point-of-care diagnostic tests to make it possible to test and treat  
33 HCV in a single visit; 2. Provides access to treatment for underserved populations including specifically  
34 justice-involved populations; and 3. Implements a comprehensive public health effort to engage, inform,  
35 identify, and treat people with HCV.  
36

37 **Background:** More than 2.4 million US residents are chronically infected with hepatitis C virus (HCV)  
38 but only an estimated 40% of those chronically infected with HCV are aware of their infection, thereby  
39 increasing the likelihood of transmission. The consequences of untreated HCV are severe: cirrhosis, liver  
40 failure, liver cancer, and death. HCV disproportionately affects individuals without insurance who have  
41 poor access to health care and who experience other chronic health and social inequities.

42 One of the most dramatic scientific achievements of the last few decades has been the development of  
43 direct-acting antiviral medications that cure HCV in more than 95% of people. This 8 to 12-week oral  
44 cure stops transmission, prevents liver cancer and liver failure, and saves lives but it is currently not  
45 reaching a significant percentage of chronically infected people, many of whom are housed in county

1 detention facilities. An estimated 30% of people infected with HCV in the US pass through detention  
2 centers and prisons annually.

3  
4 NACo supports 1. Accelerating point-of-care diagnostic tests to make it possible to test-and-treat HCV in  
5 a single visit; 2. Providing access to treatment for underserved populations including specifically justice-  
6 involved populations; and 3. Implementing a comprehensive public health effort to engage, inform,  
7 identify, and treat people with HCV.

8  
9 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Would provide new federal funds to counties and community-based  
10 organizations to diagnose and treat HCV for individuals in county detention facilities.

11  
12 **Sponsor(s):** Grace Philips, General Counsel, N.M. Association of Counties

13  
14 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Strengthening and Sustaining the Healthcare Workforce in the**  
15 **United States**

16  
17 **Issue:** Nationwide, the healthcare system faces a shortage of healthcare workers, including nurses  
18 and specialized doctors, which may jeopardize access to high quality, equitable care for patients and  
19 communities.

20  
21 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the federal government to  
22 work collaboratively with local and state governments to create a pipeline of healthcare workers to  
23 address the national shortage by (1) funding programs aimed at creating opportunities for high  
24 school and post-secondary students to explore career opportunities in the medical field, (2)  
25 designating scholarships and grants for students enrolled in degrees and licenses related to the  
26 medical field, including dentistry and mental and behavioral health, (3) outreaching to communities  
27 of color to encourage multi-lingual and diverse candidates from communities who typically do not  
28 have access to health care, and (4) identifying public funded medical systems throughout the nation  
29 to create a pipeline of healthcare workers with the goal of expanding and strengthening the health  
30 care workforce system.

31  
32 **Background:** According to the American Hospital Association, the United States boasts over 6,000  
33 hospitals, including rural, urban, and local and state government community hospitals. Hospitals  
34 alone service over 900,000 beds throughout the country. Unfortunately, hospitals, clinics, and  
35 medical centers face job vacancies for various types of personnel, including nurses and respiratory  
36 therapists. The COVID-19 pandemic left a profound toll on the mental and physical well-being of  
37 healthcare workers, with many suffering from burnout, stress, and mental health challenges. The  
38 number of nurses entering retirement coupled with the Great Resignation where over 47 million  
39 Americans voluntary quit their jobs – have led to unprecedented employee exits in the medical field.

40  
41 To address the shortages of medical professionals, many health systems have resorted to the use of  
42 staffing agencies to fill vacancies. Staffing agencies are very costly for counties to maintain in the  
43 long term. They are also difficult to manage while trying to fill permanent positions. Permanent  
44 employees report difficulties with having to onboard and train temporary employees and little  
45 opportunity to build workplace morale. Health systems throughout the nation need to employ  
46 permanent solutions to expand our healthcare workforce system, including an investment in

1 employees from communities where healthcare access is not readily accessible, thereby increasing  
2 diversity and trust in the field.

3

4 **Fiscal/ Urban/ Rural Impact:** Provides dedicated funding to health care systems and high school  
5 and post-secondary education to increase opportunities to expand and strengthen the healthcare  
6 workforce system throughout the United States, including urban and rural communities.

7

8 **Sponsor(s):** Alma E. Anaya, Commissioner, Cook County, Ill.



1 **HUMAN SERVICES AND EDUCATION**

2  
3 **Proposed Interim Resolution Supporting Social Security Administration Actions to Improve Access**  
4 **to Social Security Cards for Children and Youth in Foster Care**

5  
6 **Issue:** A lack of consistent process and record requirements in regional Social Security Administration  
7 (SSA) offices has resulted in significant delays in obtaining Social Security cards for children and youth  
8 in foster care.

9  
10 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges SSA to develop and distribute a  
11 standardized set of requirements for state and county child welfare agencies pursuing Social Security  
12 cards for children and youth in foster care and to provide a singular point of contact at each regional SSA  
13 office for issue resolution.

14  
15 **Background:** Currently there are over 391,000 children and youth in the foster care system.  
16 Approximately 20,000 youth are “emancipated” from care every year. Many of these young people face  
17 challenges related to homelessness, poverty, substance use disorders, and incarceration.  
18 Documentation is critical for a successful transition to adulthood for youth in foster care. Without  
19 appropriate documentation, current and former foster youth are unable to travel, pursue higher education,  
20 secure housing, and achieve other key milestones.

21  
22 In 2014, as part of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183)  
23 Congress required states to provide documentation such as Social Security cards, driver’s licenses, or  
24 birth certificates for youth emancipating from care.

25  
26 Many states have policies in place relative to obtaining Social Security cards for children and youth in  
27 foster care. California, for example, requires child welfare agencies to provide all children and youth in  
28 foster care with a Social Security card.

29  
30 However, reports from the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)  
31 reveal that caseworkers have called in advance of an in-person meeting to obtain a Social Security card for  
32 a foster child to determine the proper documentation only to be told upon arrival that the documentation  
33 was insufficient.

34  
35 Foster parents attempting to secure a Social Security card were also turned away even though they were  
36 specifically authorized by DCFS to do so on behalf of the youth in their care.

37 NACo supports policies that would reduce duplicative efforts by caseworkers and foster parents to  
38 facilitate better access to critical documentation for current and former foster youth.

39  
40 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Standardized requirements for state and county child welfare agencies to  
41 obtain Social Security cards for children and youth in foster care would reduce caseworker time and  
42 resources and contribute to improved outcomes for children and youth in foster care.

43  
44 **Sponsor(s):** Kathryn Barger, Supervisor, Los Angeles County, Calif.

## Proposed Interim Resolution on Combating Predatory Practices in Veterans Services

**Issue:** Veterans navigating the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits system should never bear the burden of paying for initial claim representation. In 29 states, counties realize this principle by using primarily local dollars to train and hire accredited CVSOs who are dedicated to helping veterans access their service-connected benefits free of charge. Unfortunately, in the wake of the PACT Act’s historic passage, non-accredited, for-profit businesses are increasing their efforts to prey on vulnerable veterans, using legal loopholes to charge exorbitant “consulting fees” for claims assistance.

**Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration to take legislative and regulatory action to protect veterans from predatory claims representatives, including reinstating criminal penalties for companies that charge fees for unsanctioned claims work and coordinating across agencies and levels of government to identify and prosecute predatory claims to the fullest extent of the law. Additionally, we call on our federal partners to authorize and fund resources to expand and develop the CVSO workforce to ensure all veterans can quickly access qualified assistance with their benefits claims.

**Background:** VA-accredited representatives are held to clear, statutory standards to ensure veterans and their families receive quality representation throughout the claims process. This assistance in preparing, presenting and prosecuting VA claims is a vital tool for ensuring our nation’s veterans access the full range of benefits they are owed for their military service. Federal laws and regulations prohibit anyone from assisting a veteran in the preparation, presentation, or prosecution of a VA benefit claim, or charging a fee for this assistance, without accreditation from VA’s Office of General Counsel.

However, VA and other federal agencies are limited in their ability to enforce these laws because explicit criminal penalties were stripped from statute nearly two decades ago. In the aftermath, the for-profit claims industry has proliferated. Common practices include charging exorbitant fees, false promises for upgraded disability ratings, binding arbitration clauses designed to compel payment, asking for sensitive VA user information, and charging veterans for future ratings decisions and benefits regardless of the company’s role in achieving those outcomes.

Counties play a critical role in helping veterans access their service-connected benefits, employing a workforce of more than 1,900 CVSOs in 29 states who offer accredited assistance free of charge. Our federal partners should invest in this existing infrastructure of accredited public and non-profit VSOs (as well as attorneys and accredited firms offering assistance for capped fees) to ensure that veterans are quickly accessing the assistance they need.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Veterans in rural areas may have more difficulty in accessing timely, accredited assistance with their VA benefits due to high caseloads for CVSOs and therefore may be more susceptible to predatory practices by for-profit firms. Additionally, for-profit firms siphon VA benefits away from veterans and the communities in which they reside.

**Sponsor(s):** Trista Martinson, Commissioner, Ramsey County, Minn. and Cat Nichols, Senior Director of Community Affairs, Spokane County, Wash. on behalf of the NACo Veterans and Military Services Committee.



1 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Both urban and rural counties would benefit from increased Veteran  
2 retirement compensation. This would translate to additional resources available for both the combat-  
3 injured Veterans and their families.  
4

5 **Sponsor(s):** Dan Klimisch, Commissioner, Yankton County, S.D.  
6

7 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Federal Funding for Social Media Safety Education and**  
8 **Training**  
9

10 **Issue:** The U.S. Surgeon General issued a warning on May 23, 2023, stating that “there are increasing  
11 concerns among researchers, parents and caregivers, young people, healthcare experts, and others about  
12 the impact of social media on youth mental health” with such concerns including anxiety, eating  
13 disorders, depression, and suicide. Social media is additionally used to facilitate cyberbullying, privacy  
14 invasion, fraud, human trafficking, sexual harassment, sexual predation, the sale of illegal narcotics, hate,  
15 and misinformation.  
16

17 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the Federal Government and  
18 Congress to assist counties by providing funding for 1) social media safety education to make youth and  
19 students aware, in an engaging and age-appropriate way, of some of the most serious social media-related  
20 dangers and how to protect themselves from these threats; 2) the provision of evidence-based educational  
21 outreach for parents and caregivers focused on raising awareness around the various social media-related  
22 dangers and providing practical steps parents can take to protect their children; 3) school administrators  
23 and parent associations to develop or enhance in-school and out-of-school social media safety policies and  
24 guidelines; 4) high-quality research regarding the evolving social media-related threats to the safety and  
25 welfare of K-12 students; 5) the provision of social media safety education and other interventions for  
26 foster youth, who may be at significantly higher risk for social media-related harms.  
27

28 **Background:** Social media can be a force for the greater public good, providing a means for beneficial  
29 entertainment, education, socialization, and advocacy; however, social media has also demonstrably  
30 caused significant and widespread harm to the public, especially children and youth.  
31

32 Studies have found that hate groups, terrorist organizations both domestic and foreign, left- and right-  
33 wing extremists, and street gangs are using social media platforms to recruit new members, threaten and  
34 harass individuals, incite violence, and post violent videos. They found that such groups further utilize  
35 social media as a way to communicate about and organize their activities including flash mobs and  
36 organized retail thefts. A University of Chicago Crime Lab Report noted that teachers and school  
37 administrators report that a large share of in-school conflicts originate in social media disputes.  
38

39 The statistics are alarming. About 64% of U.S. teens have encountered hate speech on social media;  
40 Approximately 46% of students report experiencing cyberbullying; Teenagers who use social media for  
41 more than 3 hours daily are more likely to experience mental health problems, such as depression,  
42 anxiety, and anti-social behavior; One in four young people see illicit drugs advertised for sale on social  
43 media.  
44

45 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** A comprehensive approach on social media that promotes best practices  
46 across education, public policy, and technology increases our ability to protect families from these threats.

1 It is vitally important to undertake efforts to mitigate and prevent current and emerging social media-  
2 related threats, provide guidance to those at risk, and bring awareness to the benefits and challenges of  
3 social media. The cost of social media harms on our economy and society are significant and increasing  
4 substantially. Educating the public to protect against the dangers that social media is causing or  
5 facilitating can help make social media safe for everyone by protecting against all social media-related  
6 dangers like cyberbullying, social media addiction, hate speech, and human trafficking.

7  
8 **Sponsor(s):** Donna Miller, Commissioner, Cook County, Ill.  
9

### 10 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Improvements to Federal Child Welfare Program**

11  
12 **Issue:** Federal law provides support to states and counties to serve families in the child welfare system.  
13 Some of that support is from programs funded under Title IV-B of the Social Security Act. While a  
14 relatively small amount of funding, IV-B programs do not have federal eligibility rules and may be used  
15 for a range of services, including child protection, supporting, preserving and reuniting families and to  
16 promote and support adoption. Title IV-B is pending reauthorization.

17  
18 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports a reauthorization of Title IV-B  
19 child welfare programs that increases funding and county flexibility by minimizing the different  
20 programmatic requirements to enable counties to blend and braid those funds with other programs to meet  
21 the needs of families in their communities. Those flexibilities would include eliminating or giving  
22 counties more ability to meet the even distributions requirements which must be spent in four service  
23 areas in the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program.

24  
25 NACo supports funding in Title IV-B to make new and sustainable investments in a high-quality child  
26 welfare workforce, including incentives to increase pay to fill worker shortages, boost retention, and keep  
27 caseloads manageable. To support those workers who operate in highly stressful environments, NACo  
28 also urges investments in mental health and wellbeing initiatives. Finally, NACo urges federal support to  
29 enable counties to replace their legacy IT infrastructure to better serve families and the caseworkers who  
30 depend upon the systems daily.

31  
32 **Background:** Federal IV-B funding totaled approximately \$ 710 million in FY 2023, compared to over  
33 \$7.6 billion for placement of children in federal IV-E foster care. IV-B funding is spread out among many  
34 initiatives, including the Court Improvement Program; monthly caseworker visits grants for children in  
35 foster care; kinship navigator grants; substance use disorder grants; child and family services research and  
36 more.

37  
38 According to a 2023 Congressional Research Service report, in FY 2020 public child welfare agencies  
39 screened allegations of abuse or neglect for 7.1 million children. They investigated or initiated other  
40 protective services responses involving 3.1 million of those children and provided follow-up services for  
41 about 1 million children.

42  
43 **Fiscal Urban/Rural Impact:** Additional federal funding and flexibility would provide more resources for  
44 counties to protect and serve families. To the extent that counties contribute financially to support federal  
45 foster care placements, those costs would increase to serve youth ages 18 to 21, but would likely be offset  
46 by savings in decreasing the costs of county-only child welfare programs and decreases in the costs of

1 incarceration, drug treatment and homelessness, long-term economic benefits to the youth and  
2 communities could include gainful employment and skills obtained through continued education.

3

4 **Sponsor(s):** Dan Makelky, Director, Human Services, Douglas County, Colo. on behalf of the National  
5 Association of County Human Services Administrators (NACHSA)

## JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

### Proposed Interim Resolution on Ensuring Equal Access to and Improving Retention for Veterans Court Treatment Programs

**Issue:** Veterans Courts operate in counties throughout the country to provide treatment and support to veterans struggling with substance abuse or mental health issues. There is a need for comprehensive data collection on the effectiveness of Veterans Court treatment programs, as well as ensuring that referrals to Veterans Courts are determined in a fair and equitable manner. Women veterans who are incarcerated, as well as racial and ethnic minorities, are too often overlooked within the justice system. Also, some veterans who otherwise would qualify for Veterans Court live in a jurisdiction where such a court has not yet been established, thereby denying them the ability to get the support they need to avoid incarceration.

**Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress and the Administration to take legislative and regulatory action to ensure that all veterans have equal access to Veterans Court treatment programs, or in areas where a Veterans Court program does not exist, another specialized program such as a Drug Court. NACo also supports incentive programs for local governments to improve retention rates in these programs along with improved data collection which can improve the effectiveness of these specialized courts.

**Background:** Veterans Court treatment programs are an alternative sentencing court for veterans charged with felonies or felony probation violations. Often times, these programs are multi-agency collaborative efforts within a county that provide a prison alternative program with individually tailored reintegration, case management and treatment plans that promote sobriety, recovery, stability, social responsibility, family unity, self-reliance, and reduced recidivism.

The Veterans Court is based on the Drug Court model, which combines intensive supervision, mandatory drug testing, positive reinforcement, appropriate sanctions and court-supervised treatment to address veteran issues. Veterans who have served in the U.S. military are entitled to benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse, sexual trauma and mental health issues related to their military service are eligible for referral to a Veterans Court.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics found that the number of incarcerated veterans who had seen combat who had also reported mental health disorders exceeded 60 percent.

Research shows that incarcerated women veterans often have higher rates of physical and mental health problems, from military sexual trauma to alcohol and drug abuse and relationship difficulties. Studies in California show that 73 percent of women veterans face sexual harassment, with 40 percent enduring sexual assault during their service. Sixty-seven percent of these women veterans did not report their assault, and 73 percent refrained from seeking medical attention.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** All veterans would benefit from specialty courts which recognizes the unique needs of our veterans, particularly women and minorities. Veterans in rural areas, which typically lack comprehensive treatment programs, would also benefit from an approach which responds to the needs of our military veterans.

1 **Sponsor(s):** James Zenner, Director, Department of Military and Veteran Affairs, Los Angeles County,  
2 Calif. on behalf of the NACo Veterans and Military Services Committee.

3  
4 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Preventing the Expiration of the AFG and SAFER Grants**

5  
6 **Issue:** Congress should act to prevent the expiration of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG)  
7 program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) program.

8  
9 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) supports federal legislation to extend the  
10 AFG and SAFER grant programs past a current statutory termination date of September 30, 2024.

11  
12 **Background:** Congress created the AFG program in 1999 to help local fire departments meet their  
13 baseline operational requirements. The program, currently administered by the Federal Emergency  
14 Management Agency, directly provides matching grants to local career, volunteer, and combination fire  
15 departments. The grants can be used to pay for equipment and training. The AFG program’s Fire  
16 Prevention and Safety grants pay for local fire prevention programs and research to reduce death and  
17 injury from fire for both the public and fire service personnel. The SAFER grant program was created in  
18 2003 to fund the hiring of career firefighters and the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters.

19  
20 NACo has been a long-time supporter of these programs because they provide irreplaceable assistance to  
21 help local counties. The AFG and SAFER programs help fire departments provide fire protection and  
22 response; emergency medical services; search and rescue; hazardous materials incident response; trench  
23 rescue; and wildland fire response to their communities. Overall, the AFG and SAFER programs have  
24 funded almost \$16 billion in federal assistance for local fire departments. Unfortunately, the programs  
25 face a statutory termination date of September 30, 2024.

26  
27 NACo urges Congress to support legislation to protect the AFG and SAFER grant programs. On April 20,  
28 2023, the U.S. Senate voted to pass the Fire Grants and Safety Act (S. 870), which would reauthorize  
29 funding for these programs and the U.S. Fire Administration and extend the sunset date for the AFG and  
30 SAFER grant programs to September 30, 2032. The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee  
31 reported its own version of the Fire Grants and Safety Act (H.R. 4090) on September 1, 2023, but it  
32 awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives.

33  
34 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** The Fire Grants and Safety Act would extend the authorizations of  
35 existing programs. If the AFG and SAFER grant programs, local counties would be deprived of  
36 approximately \$700 million each year in federal assistance for local fire protection.

37  
38 **Sponsor(s):** Dan Eggleston, Fire Chief, Albemarle County, Va.

39  
40 **Proposed Interim Resolution on Urging the Removal of Specific Ineligible Cost Language in FEMA**  
41 **Public Assistance and Program Guide**

42  
43 **Issue:** FEMA Public Assistance and Program Guide prohibits funding for projected loss of useful service  
44 life of a facility.



1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges FEMA to remove paragraph B of  
2 Section XXI of the Public Assistance and Program Guide.

3  
4 **Background:** In March 2016 Bossier Parish, Louisiana experienced a 1,000-year flood event in which 52  
5 parish roads were inundated and required significant repair. The Parish submitted a request for damages to  
6 the Federal Emergency Management Agency for \$25,072,336.00, for permanent repairs to the inundated  
7 roadways in the Parish. FEMA denied Bossier Parish's request for Public Assistance stating that Bossier  
8 Parish did not provide documentation which proved that the damage to the 52 inundated roadways in  
9 Bossier Parish were a result of the declared flood event.

10  
11 FEMA and the Parish went into arbitration in Washington, D.C., in March of 2020. After consideration,  
12 on March 18, 2020, a ruling was issued which stated that the parish had provided adequate documentation  
13 that flood inundation did, in fact, cause the damage to the parish roads. Since this ruling, FEMA added the  
14 following language to Version 4 of the Public Assistance Program and Policy Guide (PAPP), Section XXI  
15 – Ineligible Costs:

16  
17 **B. Loss of Useful Service Life**

- 18 • FEMA cannot provide PA funding for the projected loss of useful service life of a facility. For  
19 example, if a road has been inundated by flood waters for an extended timeframe, FEMA cannot  
20 provide PA funding for the value of projected loss of useful life of the road due to the long-term  
21 effects the inundation might have on the road. Similarly, FEMA cannot fund the value of the loss  
22 of landfill capacity due to incident-related debris.

23  
24 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Impacts all counties.

25  
26 **Sponsor(s):** Joe “Butch” Ford, Police Jury Administrator, Bossier Parish, La. on behalf of the Police Jury  
27 Association of Louisiana.

28  
29 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Codifying the Shelter and Services Program (SSP)**

30  
31 **Issue:** Counties across the country are managing the need for temporary shelter, food, transportation and  
32 acute medical care for migrants who are awaiting the results of their immigration proceedings. This can  
33 impose a costly burden on counties. The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) and  
34 U.S. Custom and Border Protection’s (CBP) Shelter and Services Program (SSP) is critical to offsetting  
35 the financial burden that is placed on counties as they assist with the safe, orderly, and humane release of  
36 migrants from short-term holding facilities.

37 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to pass legislation to  
38 codify the Shelter and Services Program (SSP) to ease the fiscal burden that is placed on counties  
39 receiving influx of migrants, and to ensure they can continue to provide vital services to migrants while  
40 maintaining the public welfare of their communities.

41  
42 **Background:** The Shelter and Services Program provides funds to non-federal entities that provide  
43 sheltering and other eligible services to noncitizen migrants who have been encountered by the U.S.  
44 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and released from custody while awaiting the outcome of their

1 immigration proceedings. The intent is to support CBP in the safe, orderly, and humane release of  
2 noncitizen migrants from short-term holding facilities.

3

4 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Multiple communities around the United States are currently experiencing  
5 influxes of non-citizens, straining support services. For example, El Paso County, Texas has received  
6 more than \$15 million to operate the Migrant Services Support Center, and multiple other local NGOs and  
7 agencies have received SSP support as well. The Shelter and Services Program is essential to helping  
8 receiving counties continue to assist federal agencies that are primarily managing migrant influxes while  
9 maintaining the public welfare of our communities.

10

11 **Sponsor(s):** David C. Stout, Commissioner, El Paso County, Texas and Chair of the NACo Immigration  
12 Reform Task Force

1 **PUBLIC LANDS**

2  
3 **Proposed Interim Resolution Supporting Required Infrastructure, Public Facilities, and its**  
4 **Maintenance with Sustainable Funding**  
5

6 **Issue:** In recent years and especially the post-pandemic era, use of public lands for recreational and  
7 tourism related activities has significantly increased exponentially, creating increased demand on aging  
8 infrastructure, personnel and land managers, and jeopardizing public safety which subsequently has  
9 increased demand on County resources to help mitigate negative impacts from increased visitation and, in  
10 some cases, subsidize applicable federal responsibility.

11  
12 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to prioritize required  
13 infrastructure, construction and maintenance of public facilities for the necessary resources to USFS,  
14 BLM, NPS, and FWS, and other federal agencies that provide access to, hold jurisdiction responsibility or  
15 other administrative or specialized service to federal recreational public lands that impact adjacent  
16 gateway communities from increased recreation and tourism related activities. In addition, NACo  
17 requests that Congress establish regulatory requirements and prioritize federal land managers to  
18 coordinate and create formal partnerships with local jurisdictional partners on mitigation, search and  
19 rescue and other public safety efforts on federal lands.

20  
21 **Background:** Four federal land management agencies (USFS, BLM, NPS, FWS) administer  
22 approximately 95 percent of all federal lands in the United States. The remaining federal acreage is  
23 managed by several other agencies, including the Department of Defense. Despite a significant increase in  
24 visitation, federal land management agencies continue to be plagued by aging infrastructure, inadequate  
25 staffing, and/or lack the necessary resources for facility upkeep that meet the demands of visitors. This  
26 has compromised their ability to comfortably run and manage the lands within their jurisdiction. At the  
27 same time, employees are being asked to do more than ever before, and in some cases, even without  
28 adequate workforce housing, leading to staffing shortages.

29  
30 NACo’s *The American County Platform for 2023-2024 Federal Land Management Section § M:*  
31 *Recreation and Tourism* acknowledges the value of the outdoor recreation economy as a \$700 billion  
32 contributor to the nation’s Gross Domestic Product, and that most of this recreation takes place on federal  
33 public lands. NACo already supports the Federal Lands Recreational Enhancement Act to allow federal  
34 land agencies to retain revenues from specific fee area to pay for upgrades, management and maintenance  
35 of Forest Service recreational areas. However, County officials continue to report increased negative  
36 impacts to local communities due to increased visitation on public lands. Currently NACo’s applicable  
37 Annual Policy Resolutions for 2023-24 include, but are not limited to: 1) Resolution to amend the Rec  
38 and Public Purpose Act to offer concessions operated by third-party vendors.; 2) Resolution to Direct  
39 America the Beautiful Initiative Resources to County and Regional Partnership; 3) Resolution Supporting  
40 Efficient Hiring Practices and Adequate Sustainable Staffing Resources on Federal Recreation Public  
41 Lands; 4) Resolution Supporting Policy Updates that Require Early Engagement with County  
42 Governments with Ski Areas on Public Land; and 5) Resolution to Support Full Funding of the Active  
43 Transportation Infrastructure Investment Program.

1 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Would provide federal funding, necessary resources and increase  
2 efficiencies in required infrastructure, construction and maintenance of public facilities to USFS, BLM,  
3 NPS, FWS, and other federal agencies that provide access and manage federal recreation public lands.

4

5 **Sponsor(s):** Hon. Heidi Hall, Supervisor, Nevada County, Calif.

# TELECOMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY

## Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of Reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority

**Issue:** The authorization for the FirstNet Authority is scheduled to sunset in 2027, and current authorizing statute does not recognize a different agency to continue the work of the FirstNet Authority. Without FirstNet Authority, the national broadband public safety network upon which counties and first responders have relied would no longer be authorized or funded by Congress.

**Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to pass H.R. 3366, a bill “to amend the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority”, which would remove the 2027 sunset date and re-authorize the First Responder Network Authority.

**Background:** The federal FirstNet Authority was established after the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The tragedies of September 11 revealed fundamental problems with communication systems used by our nation’s first responders. The lack of the ability for first responders to communicate between different agencies and different jurisdictions was staggering. The idea for the FirstNet Authority was born out of a recommendation from the 9/11 Commission and supported by NACo. Congress recognized the need for a dedicated network that included dedicated radio spectrum on which it needed to operate and decided to act. Ever since its establishment, the FirstNet Authority has been involved with numerous responses to major incidents, including active shooter incidents, wildland fires, earthquakes, volcanos, and hurricanes. More than 27,000 public safety agencies and organizations subscribe to FirstNet.

NACo urges Congress to remove the sunset date for the FirstNet Authority. This will ensure that our nation’s first responders stay connected for years to come. Congress must act so that first responders do not lose the dedicated broadband network that they fought so diligently to establish. The incidents to which the FirstNet is deployed can occur almost anywhere in our nation. By responding to a wide variety of incidents in a diverse set of metropolitan, suburban, and rural communities, FirstNet has a proven track record of technological resourcefulness.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** This legislation does not appropriate any additional funding for FirstNet. Rather, it ensures that the federal nationwide public safety broadband network will stay operational in perpetuity.

**Sponsor(s):** Dan Eggleston, Fire Chief, Albemarle County, Va.

## Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of the Affordable Connectivity Program

**Issue Statement:** The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) is an essential component to ensuring that high-speed internet access is affordable and accessible for every county resident. The ACP’s current funding source is set to expire by May of 2024, and without a re-appropriation and reauthorization of the program, over 23 million households will lose access to this benefit and risk losing their broadband internet access as a result.

1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to pass The Affordable  
2 Connectivity Program Extension Act, a bi-partisan and bi-cameral bill, in order to continue funding the  
3 ACP without lapse to avoid the de-enrollment of 23 million households from the monthly benefit.  
4

5 **Background:** Internet access has become an essential component of modern life. The Affordable  
6 Connectivity Program (ACP), established by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law as an extension of the  
7 Emergency Connectivity Fund to support universal access to broadband services, has proven to be  
8 instrumental in providing financial assistance to eligible households so that they may afford a high-speed  
9 internet subscription and reap the social and economic benefits that broadband brings. The program is  
10 administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company, which is the entity that administers the  
11 Universal Service Fund under the direction of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).  
12

13 The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law appropriated \$14.2 billion to the Affordable Connectivity Program, and  
14 in the two years since its enactment, the ACP has exceeded 23 million household enrollees. By extending  
15 funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program through 2024, The Affordable Connectivity Program  
16 Extension Act recognizes the ongoing importance of closing the digital divide and acknowledges the  
17 program's success in fostering inclusivity. The additional funding will enable the program to reach more  
18 households in need, promoting equity in access to essential online services, remote learning, telehealth,  
19 and economic opportunities.

20 As the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical role of reliable internet access, it is imperative to  
21 sustain and strengthen initiatives like the Affordable Connectivity Program to build a more connected and  
22 equitable society.  
23

24 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** There is no anticipated fiscal impact to counties for extending funding for  
25 the ACP.  
26

27 **Sponsor(s):** Supervisor James Gore, Sonoma County, Calif; California State Association of Counties;  
28 Commissioner Tarryl Clark, Stearns County, Minn; Commissioner Shinica Thomas, Wake County, N.C.  
29

### 30 **Proposed Interim Resolution Opposing Legislation That Preempts Local Authority in Broadband** 31 **Deployment Initiatives and Cable Franchise Agreements** 32

33 **Issue Statement:** The U.S. House of Representatives introduced legislation in April of 2023, The  
34 American Broadband Deployment Act of 2023 or HR. 3557, which would enact a series of preemptions  
35 on local authorities pertaining to the rights-of-way, zoning process, and fee structure associated with  
36 broadband deployment initiatives which would cause undue financial burden. The legislation, if enacted,  
37 would also severely limit counties' ability to negotiate and enact new cable franchise agreements.

38 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges Congress to reject H.R. 3557 and  
39 firmly oppose any legislation that undermines the autonomy of local governments and their role in  
40 broadband deployment initiatives. It advocates for the preservation of local authority to make informed  
41 decisions about the deployment, expansion, and management of broadband infrastructure tailored to the  
42 unique needs of their communities.  
43

44 **Background:** Local governments play a vital role in understanding the unique challenges and  
45 opportunities of their communities, making them well-suited to determine the most effective strategies for

1 broadband deployment. Legislative proposals that seek to preempt local authority risk diminishing the  
2 ability of communities to address their specific digital infrastructure needs, potentially leading to one-  
3 size-fits-all solutions that may not be suitable for diverse local contexts.

4  
5 Local decision-making in broadband deployment allows for flexibility, innovation, and responsiveness to  
6 the evolving needs of residents and businesses. It enables communities to leverage their knowledge of  
7 local geography, demographics, and existing infrastructure, fostering more efficient and effective  
8 broadband expansion.

9  
10 In May of 2023, H.R. 3557 was approved by the Energy and Commerce Committee along party lines in  
11 the U.S. House of Representatives. Subsequently, the bill has been forwarded to two additional  
12 congressional committees for examination. In April 2023, NACo, in collaboration with the National  
13 League of Cities (NLC), the U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM), and the National Association of  
14 Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA), urged Congress not to entertain any legislation  
15 that might hinder counties' involvement in telecommunications infrastructure-siting decisions. NACo  
16 reiterated these concerns in a letter to bipartisan congressional leadership in September 2023.

17  
18 Efforts to centralize decision-making on broadband deployment may result in unintended consequences,  
19 including delays, inadequate infrastructure, and an overall failure to meet the unique demands of local  
20 communities. Preserving local authority is essential for fostering collaboration with local stakeholders,  
21 ensuring community engagement, and tailoring broadband initiatives to the specific requirements of each  
22 locality.

23  
24 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** There is no fiscal impact to counties by supporting this policy.

25  
26 **Sponsor(s):** Commissioner Gregg Weiss, Palm Beach County, Fla; Jay Uebel, Broadband Manager,  
27 Carroll County, Md.

28  
29 **Proposed Interim Resolution Urging Technical Support for County Adoption of Federal Web**  
30 **Policy Accessibility Standards**

31  
32 **Issue Statement:** Counties are committed to upholding premier web accessibility standards to allow all  
33 residents to fully access critical services and information. However, proposed federal requirements could  
34 impose penalties on local governments that are seeking to achieve web accessibility but lack the technical  
35 resources or staffing to meet timelines for compliance. As a result, counties could become subject to  
36 significant civil litigation in the absence of a supportive program to help local governments conform to  
37 requirements within a set period of time.

38  
39 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the Department of Justice to  
40 establish technical and financial resources dedicated to supporting under-resourced local governments  
41 who would like to achieve web accessibility conformity but lack the resources or funding to do so, and to  
42 issue an expanded waiver criteria to allow those counties, upon submission of a request documenting  
43 hardship reasons for additional time, be granted such time. NACo further urges the Department of Justice  
44 to apply the updated WCAG 2.1 Level AA standard to new content on county websites and digital assets,  
45 and to protect counties from civil litigation for a limited period while counties adjust to requirements  
46 pertaining to third party content hosted on government websites. Finally, NACo urges the Department of

1 Justice to enable free or low-cost federal audits of web accessibility for county government websites,  
2 which can be administered by the Department directly or by a separate federal agency or third-party  
3 organization in contract with the Department, to provide feedback and recommendations on a county-by-  
4 county basis.

5  
6 **Background:** Web accessibility is a critical component of ensuring that digital content and services are  
7 accessible to county residents with disabilities, promoting inclusivity and equal access. Despite the  
8 recognized importance of web accessibility, many counties encounter challenges in implementing these  
9 standards due to a lack of technical expertise, resources, and guidance. There are also a host of challenges  
10 with respect to ensuring third-party vendors and content providers are offering fully accessible content  
11 that may be hosted on a county website or embedded on county digital assets. Finally, county  
12 governments retain a vast collection of archived files and complex data files, such as maps and property  
13 assessment documents among others, where conforming to web accessibility standards may be  
14 exceedingly difficult to attain.

15  
16 To address these challenges, NACo is advocating for the need for a robust technical assistance program to  
17 comply with a proposed rulemaking by the Department of Justice with respect to Title II of the Americans  
18 with Disabilities Act. This program would provide counties with the necessary support, including  
19 training, guidelines, and resources to navigate the complexities of web accessibility standards. By  
20 collaborating with relevant stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-profit organizations, and  
21 industry experts, NACo aims to create a centralized support system that facilitates the understanding,  
22 implementation, and maintenance of web accessibility standards.

23  
24 Ensuring accessibility in digital content and services not only enhances the overall user experience but  
25 also aligns with principles of equality and inclusivity. As technology continues to evolve, it is imperative  
26 that counties stay abreast of the latest web accessibility standards and best practices, reinforcing the  
27 commitment to providing equal access to all residents.

28  
29 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** The proposed policy would deliver low or no cost resources to counties to  
30 help them conform to web accessibility guidelines, thus reducing costs of compliance for web  
31 accessibility standards and improving accessibility rates on local government websites.

32  
33 **Sponsor(s):** Commissioner Gregg Weiss, Palm Beach County, Fla; John Regula, Chief Information  
34 Officer, Bucks County, Pa; Commissioner Shinica Thomas, Wake County, N.C.





1 NACo advocates for funding allocation based on experienced traffic volumes, not just year-round  
2 population. NACo further encourages Congress to include dedicated transportation planning funds in the  
3 next infrastructure and/or appropriations bill to support the goals of RTPOs consistent with Title 23 CFR  
4 Part 450.

5  
6 **Background:** Rural counties throughout the West are facing increased visitation to major national  
7 recreation sites and lack sufficient federal funding for transportation planning and infrastructure. This  
8 affects economic growth, safety, and environmental stewardship. Discussions with counterparts in  
9 Wyoming, Arizona, Utah, and California emphasize the nationwide nature of this issue.

10  
11 *Inadequate Federal Funding:* Existing federal funding sources for transportation planning in rural areas  
12 are insufficient to meet the unique needs of high tourism areas. The remote location and limited  
13 population make it challenging to rely solely on traditional transportation funding mechanisms. States  
14 receive “State Planning Research” or SPR funds to use statewide, and Metropolitan Planning  
15 Organizations representing regions with 50,000 or more year-round residents receive Metropolitan  
16 Planning Funds (PL funds). However, there is no dedicated revenue source for rural areas that experience  
17 seasonal transportation impacts due to recreation and visitation.

18  
19 *Recreational Visitation Impact:* Unprecedented visitation levels by tourists engaged in outdoor activities,  
20 such as hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing, place immense pressure on local infrastructure, impacting  
21 the quality of life for residents and the ability of gateway communities to meet day-to-day needs. Workers  
22 and residents of all ages are faced with unexpected transportation delays throughout the year as  
23 transportation systems are rarely designed for the peak volumes that communities experience.

24  
25 *Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs):* While federal rulemaking allows for the  
26 establishment of RTPOs, these organizations lack dedicated funding, limiting their ability to improve  
27 transportation infrastructure and enhance connectivity. When RTPOs were authorized in Federal  
28 rulemaking, no funds were appropriated to support regions that chose to create one. NACo urges  
29 Congress to allocate funding to support RTPOs as defined in Title 23 CFR Part 450 and create a  
30 transportation planning formula funding program, based on traffic volumes instead of census population,  
31 that goes directly to Counties.

32  
33 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Insufficient funding hampers transportation planning in rural areas,  
34 impacting safety, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability. Allocations based on traffic  
35 volumes ensure fair distribution, supporting effective regional planning. Adequate funding is critical for  
36 rural economies dependent on tourism, and it safeguards natural resources and wildlife through improved  
37 infrastructure.

38  
39 **Sponsor(s):** Charlotte Frei, Regional Transportation Planning Administrator, Teton County, Wyo.

### 40 41 **Proposed Interim Resolution in Support of High-Speed Rail Funding**

42  
43 **Issue:** Current high-speed rail services are insufficient in the U.S and non-existent in the majority of the  
44 largest urban areas throughout the U.S. An increase in funding for high-speed rail infrastructure and  
45 transportation is necessary.

1 **Proposed Policy:** The National Association of Counties (NACo) urges the development of a more  
2 comprehensive high-speed rail transportation network and the allocation of appropriate funding for the  
3 replacement, repair, upgrade, and development of current and needed infrastructure, and for the  
4 acquisition of fast trains to connect urban and rural settings throughout the nation.  
5

6 **Background:** High-speed rail transportation networks utilize trains that run significantly faster than those  
7 of traditional rail, with dedicated lines built to handle speeds above 155 mile per hour or by utilizing  
8 current upgraded lines at speeds in excess of 124 miles per hour. The current speed limit for regular  
9 passenger trains is 59 miles per hour. Currently, Amtrak’s Acela is the only true high speed rail service in  
10 the U.S., reaching 150 miles per hour over 49.9 miles of track along the Northeast Corridor. As of 2023,  
11 the California High-Speed Rail Authority is working on the California High-Speed Rail project and  
12 construction is under way, or will be soon, on sections traversing the Central Valley, Las Vegas, and other  
13 parts of California. The rest of the nation’s plans for high-speed rail have been indefinitely suspended.  
14

15 Connecting urban and rural areas with a fast, convenient, reliable, and safe mode of transportation will  
16 improve medical services for millions of residents currently under-served by primary and specialty  
17 doctors. The shortage of medical services is not exclusive to rural areas. In urban areas, the shortage of  
18 specialized surgeons, forces patients facing an emergency to travel long distances at extremely low speeds  
19 to get the trauma treatment they require. Inter-urban, and urban to rural, high-speed rail would allow these  
20 specialty surgeons to provide pre-scheduled and emergency services to patients in under-served areas by  
21 traveling a few minutes from their base of operation via high-speed train.  
22

23 NACo urges Congress to commit to funding the expansion of high-speed rail throughout the United States  
24 connecting other highly populated urban and rural settings with the fastest, safest most reliable mode of  
25 transportation, allowing the sharing of medical human resources throughout larger areas of service among  
26 other many other benefits.  
27

28 **Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact:** Would provide new federal funds for construction, replacement, repair,  
29 upgrade, and development of high-speed rail and the acquisition of high-speed trains throughout the U.S.  
30

31 **Sponsor(s):** Monica Gordon, Commissioner, Cook County, Ill.