HOUSE RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Georgia House of Representatives
Rep. Terry England, Co-chair
“To move the entire state forward through an intense study of the issues facing rural Georgia and develop tangible solutions that promote economic success regardless of zip code.”

– Speaker David Ralston
GEORGIA ON MY MIND...

- Largest state in area east of the Mississippi River
- 7th fastest growing state economy in the nation (2017)
- Busiest airport in the world; 12th in cargo
- Two deep water ports; Savannah is the 2nd busiest port on the east coast with $67 billion in annual revenue
- 159 counties (108 rural)
- 10.4 million population and growing
- Rural communities contribute + $75 billion to the state’s economy (2015)
SOMETIMES CASTS A SHADOW…

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- A lot of ground to cover for infrastructure needs
- Must provide workforce and infrastructure to support industries
- Airport and seaports require infrastructure to move commodities and goods
- Large number of local governments
- Growth is disproportionately centered in metro counties
- Higher poverty levels; household earnings average $54,358 in metro vs. $39,481 in rural (2015); and losing $71 million in income a year to reverse migration.
7 counties account for 2/3 of all population growth since 2010

78 counties have lost population since 2010

99 counties have negative net migration

36 counties have negative natural increase

Sources: US Census Bureau and the UGA Carl Vinson Institute of Government
The success of the state’s metro areas is deeply aligned with the contributions of rural Georgia.

Georgia’s rural communities sustain the intense demand and consumption of the state’s urban centers for food, clothing (fiber) and housing (lumber).

The entire state’s well-being depends on a recognition of this relationship, as well as better communication and cooperation across county lines and regions.

Recognize that some of the challenges are deep-rooted and will take time to turn.
26 MEMBERS

Two co-chairs - one from the north and one from the south

15 members – geographic and bipartisan diversity

Speaker Ralston appointed key standing and budget committee chairs as members or ex-officio members
Brought it to the people
- Scheduled 9 two-day meetings across the state in 11 rural locations
  - Selected topics for deep-dive sessions
  - Instructed speakers to speak candidly and bring ideas and solutions with the problems
  - Included local leaders, workers and public innovators
- Livestreamed over 70 hours of meetings
- Published all documents on the web

Designated one staff lead
- Utilized all staff resources: research, legal, budget and communications
“... to improve the social and economic vibrancy of the state’s rural communities and regions. The recommendations are interrelated and reflect the complexity of building upon our assets without hampering the many unique attributes and contributions of the state’s rural communities.”

-Recommendations Report, December 2017
25% of rural Georgians do not have access to broadband:

**SB 402:**
- Creates a broadband grant program
- Prioritizes funding to census blocks:
  - 1) with no broadband coverage
  - 2) related to public safety (hospitals)
- Includes incentives for adopting and implementing a model broadband ordinance for added priority in grant programs
- Allows GDOT to run fiber along interstates and lease excess space on the fiber to providers
- Establishes an updated, official state coverage map
Roads:
Transportation sunset provision cuts $11 billion over 20 years:
- HB 150 - maintains the CPI/CAFÉ on motor fuel tax indexes for ongoing construction and maintenance needs.

Rail:
Georgia is 7th in the U.S. in the number of rail miles, which handle the equivalent of 7.7 million trucks; however, less than half of short line miles have the modern weight capacity of 286,000 lbs. and 25 mph speed to compete with trucks:
- HR 1225 - urges Congress to pass the ‘BRACE Act’
- HB 735 - creates a state 45G rail tax credit for Class III lines.
  - 50 percent deduction at $3,500 per mile for a company or customer
  - applies to income tax or withholding tax
Erode the disadvantages of high poverty causing lower graduation rates and mitigate the need to “catch-up”:

- Birth to 5 literacy/numeracy education - Grant funding for lowest socio-economic rural counties

Teach soft skills for employability:

- Character education - Competitive grant funding for rural schools under the Chief Turnaround Officer’s purview
- Structure for a failing school

Streamline the pathway between workforce development and education to better meet industry training demands:

- HB 684 - Transfers the Career, Technical and Agricultural Education program to the Technical College System of Georgia

Rural universities have flat or declining enrollment, lower completion rates and students are training and staying in urban areas:

- Market analysis of masters and professional level degree programs needed in South Georgia for accessible programming and/or niche recommendations
**HB 769:**

- Creates Micro-hospitals
  - defined as a 24/7 emergency services setting in a rural county with 2 to 7 beds
  - allows the certificate of need and bed licenses of a closing hospital to be purchased together for a contiguous county or moved within the original county

- Requires training on fiscal and best practices for hospital administrators, board members and authority members

- Allows liability premium assistance to physicians
  - operating in a county with less than two physicians
  - licensed; board-certified; maintain the practice for a certain period of time; complete 100 hours of continuing education; accept Medicaid and Medicare patients; and provide extended or weekend clinical hours

- Expands Remote Order Pharmacy

- Rural Hospital Tax Credit
  - $5,000 individual to $10,000 married or s-corp. per tax year
  - 100% credit
  - sunsets December 2021
  - caps at $60 million
**Billing**
- reduce the number of insurance billing platforms
- standardize codes
- allow for the presenter and the physician to bill for telehealth
- allow (when possible) to bill for multiple specialists at one appointment in safety net settings
- added gap payments for emergency room visits and OB/GYN in rural settings

**Workforce**
- reduce credentialing time by overlapping provider and insurer contracting processes
- regional training for EMS
- added 99 new residencies and 12 fellowships

**HEALTH: BEST PRACTICES**
Establish a Rural Center for Health Care Innovation and Sustainability (HB 769)
- develop and promote a best practices curriculum, to include leadership for all health providers
- provide mandatory training for hospital CEOs, board and authority members who participate in state-funded health programs
- centralize health data analytics staff for workforce and community hospital niche planning
- potential technology hub for small hospital IT

Establish a Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovations (HB 951)
- central information and research hub
- rural leadership training
- best practices that may include community planning models
- coordination with non-profits, religious, and other higher education partners.
UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

- Modernizing the “Jobs Tax Credit” and Regionalism
- Funding Assistance for Local Broadband Projects
- Scope of Practice for Healthcare Providers
- Transit and Non-emergency Transportation
QUESTIONS?