



HB 16 Rural Opportunities Interim Committee

Summary: Sponsored by Rep. Roger Montoya, the Rural Opportunity Act addresses the severe disparity between rural and urban communities in New Mexico. This act would have a significant impact on the quality of life for rural New Mexicans, who have been all too forgotten, especially during this challenging COVID-19 period. This legislation would authorize creation of an Interim “Rural Opportunity Committee,” with membership coming from key existing Interim Committees. This 14-member committee with representation from the House and Senate would develop a long-range plan to identify barriers to economic and educational opportunities in rural areas of the state and propose policies to reduce or eliminate those barriers; assess all potential funding sources and opportunities for investment in infrastructure, economic development, education, and health care in rural areas of the state; propose legislation to maximize public and private investments in rural communities and to foster the health and well-being of all residents of rural areas of the state; and create a rural economic relief package that will leverage both the severance tax and section 9 of the General Appropriations bill for capital outlay and operational expenses for rural communities.

Why This Legislation Is Good for NM: HB 16 is a comprehensive systemic strategy for addressing NM infrastructure needs in the long-term. It will engage a bipartisan committee of legislators representing Interim Committees ensuring that strategies outlined are informed from multiple perspectives. There are significant costs that result from failing to address New Mexico’s crumbling infrastructure:

- Census Bureau statistics from the annual American Community Survey from 2011 to 2015 showed that rural communities in New Mexico had the highest poverty rate in the nation at 22%.
- The Road Improvement Program (TRIP), a nonprofit research organization, identified NM rural roads as the third worst in the nation, "Roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested or lack some desirable safety features cost New Mexico drivers a total of \$2.7 billion annually – as much as \$2,058 per driver in some areas," TRIP noted.
- The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture ranks New Mexico 50th in food security, with 17% of households unable to provide adequate food for one or more household members due to lack of resources.
- The percentage of households with broadband is lower in New Mexico than any state or territory except Mississippi and Puerto Rico, according to a November, 2019 report by the state Legislative Finance Committee.
- Access is particularly scarce in New Mexico’s rural areas and on Indian lands, where fewer than half of households have fixed broadband, according to a report by the Federal Communications Commission. That pattern matches the national average of only 53 percent of Native Americans on tribal lands who have access to high-speed internet.
- Lack of internet denies access to telehealth services, children’s education during COVID, applying for unemployment benefits, emergency assistance and resources, and many other health, economic, and educational opportunities that urban and suburban dwellers take for granted.

Building grassroots power to successfully advocate for social, racial, environmental, and economic justice.

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