

NOTE: This bill has been prepared for the signatures of the appropriate legislative officers and the Governor. To determine whether the Governor has signed the bill or taken other action on it, please consult the legislative status sheet, the legislative history, or the Session Laws.

An Act

SENATE BILL 23-006

BY SENATOR(S) Roberts and Rich, Bridges, Buckner, Cutter, Exum, Ginal, Hansen, Hinrichsen, Jaquez Lewis, Marchman, Mullica, Pelton B., Pelton R., Priola, Simpson, Will, Winter F., Zenzinger, Fenberg;
also REPRESENTATIVE(S) McLachlan and Catlin, Amabile, Bird, Brown, Daugherty, deGruy Kennedy, Dickson, Froelich, Hamrick, Joseph, Lieder, Lindsay, Lukens, Mabrey, Marshall, Martinez, McCormick, Michaelson Jenet, Pugliese, Snyder, Titone, Velasco, Weissman, Woodrow, McCluskie.

CONCERNING THE CREATION OF THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE IN THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND, IN CONNECTION THEREWITH, MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

SECTION 1. In Colorado Revised Statutes, **add** 24-48.5-133 as follows:

24-48.5-133. Rural opportunity office - creation - duties - legislative declaration. (1) (a) THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY HEREBY FINDS AND DECLARES THAT:

Capital letters or bold & italic numbers indicate new material added to existing law; dashes through words or numbers indicate deletions from existing law and such material is not part of the act.

(I) RURAL COLORADO IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT TO THE CULTURE AND ECONOMY OF THE ENTIRE STATE; HOWEVER, RURAL COMMUNITIES FACE ECONOMIC CHALLENGES THAT ARE NOT EXPERIENCED IN MORE URBAN AREAS;

(II) RURAL COMMUNITIES DO NOT BENEFIT FROM THE ECONOMIES OF SCALE OR DIVERSIFICATION FOUND IN LARGER, METROPOLITAN REGIONS;

(III) MOST RURAL COMMUNITIES ARE MISSING FOUNDATIONAL DATA, STRATEGIES, CAPACITY, AND CONNECTIONS TO PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION RESOURCES TO HELP THEM RESPOND, INNOVATE, AND DIVERSIFY FROM A PREVALENCE OF SINGLE-INDUSTRY ECONOMIES;

(IV) AN EXTENDED SUPPORT SYSTEM THAT PROVIDES CONSISTENT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING IS DESPERATELY NEEDED IN RURAL COLORADO WHERE LOCAL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS TURN OVER MORE RAPIDLY THAN IN URBAN AREAS;

(V) EVERY RURAL COMMUNITY IS DIFFERENT, AND OUTREACH AND PROGRAMMING NEEDS TO BE CUSTOMIZED TO AN INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY'S NEEDS, CONDITIONS, AND CAPACITY;

(VI) RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SUPPORT REQUIRE PERSONAL CONNECTIONS IN ADDITION TO TARGETED PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT LONG-TERM RESILIENCE;

(VII) THERE IS A DEMONSTRATED NEED IN THE STATE FOR A CENTRALIZED OFFICE TO HELP CONNECT COMMUNITIES WITH THE WIDE RANGE OF RURAL-FOCUSED RECOVERY PROGRAMMING RESULTING FROM STATE AND FEDERAL STIMULUS EFFORTS;

(VIII) SINCE THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE BEGAN ITS WORK IN THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN 2019, THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE HAS:

(A) PROVIDED CRITICAL COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC SUPPORT TO THE STATE'S RURAL AREAS AND BUILT IMPORTANT INDIVIDUAL CONNECTIONS WITH RURAL STAKEHOLDERS;

(B) PROVIDED SUPPORT TO THE STATE'S RURAL PARTNERS BY CONNECTING THEM TO RELEVANT PROGRAMS PROVIDED BY THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ALIGNED STATE, FEDERAL, NONPROFIT, AND PRIVATE PARTNER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS AND FACILITATED COLLABORATION WITH STATE AGENCIES REGARDING RURAL ISSUES; AND

(C) PROVIDED FEEDBACK TO IMPROVE STATE PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO RURAL COLORADO AND INFORMED THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW INITIATIVES, POLICY DECISIONS, AND LEGISLATION THAT INFLUENCES RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STATEWIDE;

(b) THEREFORE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINDS AND DECLARES IT TO BE THE POLICY OF THE STATE TO CONTINUE TO:

(I) INCREASE THE ECONOMIC RESILIENCY OF RURAL COLORADO WITH COORDINATED, ON-THE-GROUND OUTREACH TO RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE STATE;

(II) INCREASE ACCESS TO SPECIFIC AND CUSTOMIZED EDUCATION, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING PROVIDED TO RURAL COMMUNITIES; AND

(III) COORDINATE MESSAGING AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES TO INCREASE ACCESS TO THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OTHER STATE AND FEDERAL PROGRAMS TO BENEFIT THE HEALTH AND VITALITY OF RURAL COLORADO.

(c) THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FURTHER FINDS AND DECLARES THAT THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE, AS CODIFIED BY THIS SECTION, IS THE DIVISION WITHIN THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THAT IS BEST SITUATED TO EFFECTIVELY CURATE AND PRESENT TO RURAL STAKEHOLDERS THE FULL SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE THROUGH THE OFFICE, THE STATE, AND FEDERAL PARTNERS TO FOSTER AND PROMOTE RURAL PROSPERITY IN THE STATE.

(2) THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE IS HEREBY CREATED WITHIN THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THE DIRECTOR OF THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE IS DESIGNATED BY AND SHALL REPORT TO THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

(3) THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE SHALL:

(a) SERVE AS COLORADO'S CENTRAL COORDINATOR OF RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS WITH CERTAIN STAFF PHYSICALLY LOCATED IN RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS COLORADO. IN PARTICULAR, THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE SHALL COORDINATE THE PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES AVAILABLE TO RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE OFFICE, CONNECT RURAL COMMUNITIES TO GRANT WRITING TECHNICAL SUPPORT OPPORTUNITIES, AND PROVIDE SUPPORT AND COORDINATION WITH OTHER STATE AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS THAT DEAL WITH RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS, INCLUDING THE JUST TRANSITION OFFICE CREATED IN SECTION 8-83-503 (1).

(b) WORK WITH COAL TRANSITIONING COMMUNITIES TO EXPLORE UNIQUE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES, INCLUDING WORKING WITH COAL TRANSITIONING COMMUNITIES AND STATE AGENCIES TO ACCESS FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL FUNDING SOURCES FOR THOSE UNIQUE BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES. THE DIRECTOR AND COAL TRANSITIONING COMMUNITIES MAY WORK IN COORDINATION WITH STATE AGENCIES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE JUST TRANSITION OFFICE CREATED IN SECTION 8-83-503 (1), THE DIVISION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL AFFAIRS, FEDERAL AGENCIES, AND COMMUNITY NONPROFITS.

(c) MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT INFORM THE GOVERNOR'S POLICY ON RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MATTERS, INCLUDING POLICY ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES UNIQUE TO RURAL COMMUNITIES; AND

(d) MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF PROGRAM OUTREACH AND CONDUCT RESEARCH TO DETERMINE WHETHER COLORADO'S RURAL COMMUNITIES RECEIVE MORE STATEWIDE FUNDING AS A RESULT OF THE EFFORTS OF THE RURAL OPPORTUNITY OFFICE.

SECTION 2. Appropriation. For the 2023-24 state fiscal year, \$299,193 is appropriated to the office of the governor for use by economic development programs. This appropriation is from the general fund and is based on an assumption that the office will require an additional 3.0 FTE. To implement this act, the office may use this appropriation for the rural opportunity office.

SECTION 3. Act subject to petition - effective date. This act takes effect at 12:01 a.m. on the day following the expiration of the ninety-day period after final adjournment of the general assembly; except that, if a referendum petition is filed pursuant to section 1 (3) of article V of the state constitution against this act or an item, section, or part of this act within such period, then the act, item, section, or part will not take effect unless approved by the people at the general election to be held in November 2024 and, in such case, will take effect on the date of the official declaration of the vote thereon by the governor.

Steve Fenberg
PRESIDENT OF
THE SENATE

Julie McCluskie
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

Cindi L. Markwell
SECRETARY OF
THE SENATE

Robin Jones
CHIEF CLERK OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

APPROVED _____
(Date and Time)

Jared S. Polis
GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF COLORADO