

House Bill 951 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)

By: Representatives Shaw of the 176th, Watson of the 172nd, Houston of the 170th, Powell of the 171st, England of the 116th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to education, so as to
2 establish the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation; to provide for a director; to provide
3 for the incorporation of the Centers of Innovation Agribusiness administered by the
4 Department of Economic Development; to provide for collaboration; to provide for the
5 incorporation and structure of a new Georgia Rural Development Council; to provide for
6 members and duties; to provide for conditions related to appropriations; to provide for
7 legislative findings; to amend Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating
8 to state government, so as to provide for a deputy commissioner for rural Georgia within the
9 Georgia Department of Economic Development; to repeal the Georgia Rural Development
10 Council; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

11 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

12 style="text-align:center">**SECTION 1.**

13 The General Assembly finds that:

- 14 (1) Since 2010 the State of Georgia has experienced tremendous job growth, adding more
15 than 500,000 new private sector jobs;
- 16 (2) Georgia's economic successes during this period have resulted from a favorable tax
17 structure and regulatory environment and aggressive economic development initiatives;
- 18 (3) Georgia has been declared by several industry publications, including *Site Selection*
19 *Magazine*, to be the best state in the nation for business for the previous four years;
- 20 (4) This economic success has not extended into all of Georgia's rural areas to a desired
21 level;
- 22 (5) As a result, Georgia's rural areas face with challenges distinct from other regions of this
23 state, including loss of population, insufficient health care access, poor infrastructure,
24 diminished opportunity for quality education, scarcity of employment opportunities, and
25 overall lack of economic growth;

- 26 (6) A thorough, intensive, and systematic study of the existing issues in Georgia's rural areas
 27 is necessary and appropriate; and
 28 (7) The objective of such study should be to identify policies and ideas to enhance economic
 29 opportunity across the entire state, particularly in rural areas.

30 **SECTION 2.**

31 Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to education, is amended by
 32 adding a new chapter to read as follows:

33 "CHAPTER 18

34 20-18-1.

35 (a) There is created at and in connection with the University System of Georgia, the Center
 36 for Rural Prosperity and Innovation to be physically located within a college or institution
 37 of the University System of Georgia which awards Bachelor of Science degrees in rural
 38 community development.

39 (b)(1) The director of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall be appointed
 40 by the president of the college or institution in which said center is physically located,
 41 provided that such appointment shall be subject to approval by a majority vote of the
 42 Georgia Rural Development Council. The director shall continue to serve in such
 43 position until his or her resignation or until the appointment of a new director by the
 44 president of the college or institution in which said center is physically located and such
 45 appointment is approved by a majority vote of such council.

46 (2) Subject to appropriations, the director shall be authorized to employ such personnel
 47 as are necessary to carry out the provisions of this chapter.

48 20-18-2.

49 (a) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall assume the business and
 50 responsibilities of the Centers of Innovation Agribusiness administered by the Department
 51 of Economic Development.

52 (b) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, the Department of Economic
 53 Development, and the Georgia Department of Agriculture shall collaborate as necessary
 54 to achieve the mission provided by Code Section 20-18-4.

55 20-18-3.

56 (a) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall include a council, to be known
 57 and designated as the Georgia Rural Development Council, that shall offer guidance to the
 58 Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation.

59 (b) The Georgia Rural Development Council shall be composed of 12 members who shall
 60 be appointed as follows:

61 (1) Six members shall be appointed by the Governor who, by majority vote, shall appoint
 62 one of such members to serve as the chairperson of the council. Each of the six shall be
 63 selected to represent one of the following areas:

64 (A) Leadership management;

65 (B) Business development and entrepreneurship;

66 (C) Finance and taxes;

67 (D) Logistics of rural industries;

68 (E) Health care; and

69 (F) Education;

70 (2) Three members who live in different geographic areas of the state from each other
 71 shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and

72 (3) Three members who live in different geographic areas of the state from each other
 73 shall be appointed by the President of the Senate.

74 (c)(1) Legislative members who are appointed to the council shall serve for two-year
 75 terms. Nonlegislative members shall serve four-year terms, provided that three of the
 76 initial six members to be appointed by the Governor shall serve initial terms of two years
 77 and thereafter such appointments shall be for four-year terms.

78 (2) Members may serve consecutive terms without limit.

79 (d)(1) The council shall study the conditions, needs, issues, and problems affecting rural
 80 economic development and shall examine related policy areas as it may deem necessary
 81 and appropriate, including, but not limited to, population studies, access to health care,
 82 infrastructure, education, unemployment, and economic growth incentives.

83 (2) All departments and agencies of the state, except the University System of Georgia
 84 and the Technical College System of Georgia, shall provide upon request of the council
 85 services, information, and other support for the council and its work.

86 (e) The chairperson shall call all meetings of the council. The council shall meet at least
 87 once per quarter and each such meeting shall be at a different location within the state,
 88 particularly in rural areas of this state, for the purpose of interacting with local government
 89 officials, educational leaders, health care providers, business leaders, civic groups, and all
 90 other citizens who desire to offer input, so as to enable the council to exercise fully and

91 effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes of
92 this resolution.

93 (f)(1) Legislative members of the council shall receive the allowances provided for in
94 Code Section 28-1-8 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated.

95 (2) Members of the council who are state officials, other than legislative members, or
96 state employees shall receive no compensation for their services on the council, but they
97 may be reimbursed for expenses incurred by them in the performance of their duties as
98 members of the council in the same manner as they are reimbursed for expenses in their
99 capacities as state officials or employees.

100 (3) Citizen members of the council shall receive a daily expense allowance in an amount
101 the same as that specified in subsection (b) of Code Section 45-7-21 of the Official Code
102 of Georgia Annotated, as well as the mileage or transportation allowance authorized for
103 state employees.

104 (4) The allowances and expenses authorized by this resolution shall not be received by
105 the chairperson for more than fifteen days and any other member of the council for more
106 than ten days per year. Funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this Code section
107 shall come from appropriated funds; provided, however, that funds for the reimbursement
108 of the expenses of state officials, other than legislative members, and state employees
109 shall come from funds appropriated to or otherwise available to their respective agencies.

110 20-18-4.

111 (a) It shall be the duty of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation to provide a
112 central information and research hub for rural leadership training and best practices which
113 may include:

114 (1) Community planning models for proactively identifying value added gaps or
115 strengths;

116 (2) Industry-specific assistance; and

117 (3) Cooperative efforts with nonprofit organizations, religious organizations, and other
118 higher education partners.

119 (b) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation may establish such satellite offices as
120 are necessary to accomplish its mission.

121 20-18-5.

122 All funds appropriated by the General Assembly for the establishment and operation of the
123 Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, together with any funds which may be
124 appropriated by the United States Congress or apportioned to this state from the United
125 States Department of the Treasury for purposes substantially the same as specified in this

126 chapter, shall be paid to the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and then
 127 forwarded to the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation for its work, provided that the
 128 Board of Regents formally presents to the Governor its acceptance of the conditions of this
 129 chapter.

130 20-18-6.

131 In the event that the United States Congress appropriates funds to this state for the conduct
 132 of work similar to that which is specified in this chapter, such work of the Center for Rural
 133 Prosperity and Innovation shall conform to the requirements imposed as conditions for
 134 such federal appropriations and as may be accepted by the General Assembly in order that
 135 such scientific, engineering, and industrial research work may be aided and extended by
 136 means of such federal appropriations.

137 20-18-7.

138 (a) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall annually prepare and submit to
 139 the General Assembly, for review by the House of Representatives' and the Senate's
 140 standing committees on agriculture and economic development, a ten-year strategic plan
 141 that outlines the use of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation's resources for the
 142 upcoming fiscal years.

143 (b) Said committees may, by majority vote, approve the plan and submit recommendations
 144 to the Senate Appropriations Committee and the House Committee on Appropriations for
 145 their consideration in developing the budget."

146 **SECTION 3.**

147 Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to state government, is amended
 148 in Article 1 of Chapter 7, relating to general provisions of the Department of Economic
 149 Development, by revising Code Section 50-7-2, relating to commissioner as head of
 150 department, appointment and compensation, assistant commissioner, and travel expenses, as
 151 follows:

152 "50-7-2.

153 (a) There is created the office of commissioner of economic development, who shall be
 154 executive office and administrative head of the department. The commissioner shall be
 155 appointed by and serve at the pleasure of the Board of Economic Development. The
 156 compensation of the commissioner shall be fixed by the board. The commissioner shall
 157 assist the board in the performance of its duties, powers, and authority, and jurisdiction as
 158 the board shall provide. The commissioner shall receive expenses, including mileage, as
 159 do other state officials and employees.

160 (b) The board is authorized to designate an assistant commissioner, a deputy commissioner
 161 to be known as the deputy commissioner for Rural Georgia, and such other employees as
 162 are necessary to carry out and effectuate this chapter.

163 (c) The commissioner is further authorized and empowered to reimburse authorized
 164 personnel of the department for the actual cost incurred in the pursuit of official business
 165 for all meals, taxis, parking, and the rental of automobiles when the use of such vehicles
 166 is less expensive or more efficient than other commercial transportation."

167 **SECTION 4.**

168 Said title is further amended in Article 6 of Chapter 8, relating to the Office of Rural
 169 Development and State Advisory Committee on Rural Development, by revising Part 2,
 170 relating to the Rural Development Council, as follows:

171 "Part 2

172 50-8-150.

173 ~~(a) There is created the Georgia Rural Development Council. The council shall advise the~~
 174 ~~Governor on matters related to rural development and the preparation of a biennial rural~~
 175 ~~economic development plan and any other such matters requested by the Governor. The~~
 176 ~~council shall be composed of elected officials of municipalities, elected officials of~~
 177 ~~counties, members of the General Assembly, and other persons knowledgeable about the~~
 178 ~~community and economic development of rural areas appointed by the Governor. In~~
 179 ~~making appointments to the council, the Governor shall ensure that members include~~
 180 ~~representatives from throughout rural Georgia.~~

181 ~~(b) Members of the council shall serve terms of office of two years and until their~~
 182 ~~successors are appointed by the Governor and qualified.~~

183 ~~(c) The officers of the council shall consist of the Governor, who shall serve as the~~
 184 ~~chairperson, a vice chairperson, and a secretary. Except for the chairperson, the council~~
 185 ~~shall elect officers at its July meeting or, if there is no July meeting, at the next scheduled~~
 186 ~~meeting. The vice chairperson and secretary shall serve one-year terms until their~~
 187 ~~replacements are selected and qualified.~~

188 ~~(d) The council shall meet at least twice a year; however, the Governor may call additional~~
 189 ~~special meetings.~~

190 ~~(e) Membership on the council shall not preclude the member from holding other public~~
 191 ~~office. Each member of the council shall receive the same per diem expense allowance as~~
 192 ~~that received by members of the General Assembly for each day a councilmember is in~~
 193 ~~attendance at a meeting of the council, plus reimbursement for actual transportation costs~~

194 ~~incurred while traveling by public carrier or the mileage allowance authorized for certain~~
195 ~~state officials and employees for the use of a personal automobile in connection with such~~
196 ~~attendance. The above shall be paid in lieu of any other per diem, allowance, or~~
197 ~~remuneration.~~

198 ~~(f) The council shall adopt bylaws for the regulation of its affairs and conduct of its~~
199 ~~business Reserved.~~

200 **SECTION 5.**

201 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.