



131st MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST SPECIAL SESSION-2023

Legislative Document

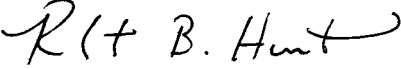
No. 1927

H.P. 1232

House of Representatives, May 11, 2023

An Act to Create the Rural Prosperity Council

Reference to the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business suggested and ordered printed.


ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative PLUECKER of Warren.

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 5 MRSA §3109** is enacted to read:

3 **§3109. Rural Prosperity Council**

4 The Rural Prosperity Council, referred to in this section as "the council," is established
5 as an advisory council within the office to address the social, economic and community
6 well-being and resilience of rural areas in the State by addressing unique structural
7 challenges experienced by rural communities, including but not limited to housing,
8 education, health care, small business development and job creation.

9 **1. Membership.** The council consists of 10 members appointed as follows:

10 A. The director or the director's designee;

11 B. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry or the commissioner's
12 designee;

13 C. One member appointed by the federally recognized Indian nations, tribes or bands
14 in the State; and

15 D. The following 7 members appointed by the Governor and subject to review by the
16 joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agriculture,
17 conservation and forestry matters and confirmation by the Legislature:

18 (1) One member with expertise in rural development;

19 (2) One member with experience in running a rural business;

20 (3) One member with experience with rural education;

21 (4) One member with experience in rural health care;

22 (5) One member with experience with rural infrastructure;

23 (6) One member with experience with conservation; and

24 (7) One member with experience with a nongovernmental organization working in
25 rural communities.

26 **2. Terms of office.** Appointed members of the council serve 5-year terms and may be
27 reappointed. A vacancy for an unexpired term must be filled in accordance with subsection
28 1. A member may serve until a replacement is appointed and qualified.

29 **3. Chair; vice-chair.** The council shall annually elect a chair and a vice-chair from
30 among its members.

31 **4. Quorum.** Six voting members of the council constitute a quorum.

32 **5. Affirmative vote.** An affirmative vote of a majority of the voting members is
33 required for any action taken by the council.

34 **6. Meetings.** The council shall meet at the call of the chair. Meetings may be cancelled
35 or postponed at the discretion of the chair. All meetings of the council are public
36 proceedings within the meaning of Title 1, chapter 13, subchapter 1.

37 **7. Duties.** The council shall make recommendations to the office on coordinating state
38 policy, including taxation and rules affecting rural areas, to improve economic
39 opportunities and the quality of life in rural areas in the State in order to:

- 1 A. Ensure coordination among agencies, units of local government, nonprofit
2 organizations and other stakeholders, as appropriate, in addressing the needs of rural
3 areas of the State;
- 4 B. Coordinate and improve community-level outcomes and return on investment of tax
5 dollars relating to the needs of rural areas in the State with stakeholders based in rural
6 communities, including but not limited to:
- 7 (1) Agricultural organizations;
8 (2) Small businesses;
9 (3) Education and training institutions;
10 (4) Health care providers;
11 (5) Telecommunications service providers;
12 (6) Electric service providers;
13 (7) Transportation providers;
14 (8) Research and land-grant institutions;
15 (9) Law enforcement agencies and the Department of Corrections;
16 (10) State and local governments;
17 (11) Federally recognized Indian nations, tribes or bands in the State; and
18 (12) Nongovernmental organizations;
- 19 C. Coordinate efforts directed toward the growth and development of rural geographic
20 regions that encompass metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas;
- 21 D. Identify and facilitate rural economic opportunities associated with energy
22 transitions, outdoor recreation and other conservation-related activities;
- 23 E. Identify common economic and social challenges faced by rural communities that
24 could be overcome through better coordination of existing state and nonstate resources;
- 25 F. Convene public hearings on the state of rural areas in the State and the action plan
26 developed by the council in accordance with subsection 9, paragraph B;
- 27 G. Identify tax policies that could be changed to reduce their impact on rural
28 communities;
- 29 H. Develop plans and strategies to address the needs of rural areas in the State;
- 30 I. Coordinate with relevant federal and state agencies and funding programs to leverage
31 public funds, including federal funds, to address the needs identified by the council;
32 and
- 33 J. Make recommendations to the office and the Legislature to improve the quality of
34 life in rural areas in the State.
- 35 **8. Metrics; analysis.** The office shall measure the effect of identified policies on rural
36 areas in the State. For this purpose, the office shall:
- 37 A. Develop a comprehensive set of metrics relating to a rural area, including but not
38 limited to:

- 1 (1) Employment;
- 2 (2) Inequality;
- 3 (3) Economic competitiveness;
- 4 (4) Inflation or deflation;
- 5 (5) Housing availability and costs;
- 6 (6) Access to health care or telehealth;
- 7 (7) The rate of small business start-ups;
- 8 (8) Educational attainment;
- 9 (9) Workforce participation; and
- 10 (10) Other metrics, as determined appropriate by the director; and
- 11 B. Develop an analysis of taxation in rural areas in the State and measure its impact
- 12 using the metrics described in paragraph A.
- 13 **9. Report.** Beginning January 1, 2024 and every 2 years thereafter, the council shall
- 14 develop and submit a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having
- 15 jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters and the joint standing
- 16 committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over appropriations and financial affairs
- 17 in accordance with this subsection. The report must include:
- 18 A. A plan to improve the metrics described in subsection 8, paragraph A with
- 19 demographic breakdowns by race, age and geographic region; and
- 20 B. A rural prosperity action plan, referred to in this section as "the action plan," that
- 21 describes the actions to be carried out by the office and state agencies for the purposes
- 22 of addressing the social, economic and community well-being and resilience of rural
- 23 areas in the State by addressing unique structural challenges experienced by rural
- 24 communities. In developing the action plan, the council shall identify regulatory and
- 25 policy changes that could be made by the State that would improve the metrics
- 26 described in subsection 8, paragraph A, including changes that would:
- 27 (1) Remove barriers to economic prosperity and quality of life in rural areas in the
- 28 State;
- 29 (2) Strengthen and expand educational opportunities for students in rural
- 30 communities, particularly in agricultural education, science, technology,
- 31 engineering and mathematics;
- 32 (3) Empower local agencies and federally recognized Indian nations, tribes or
- 33 bands in the State that implement rural economic development, agricultural and
- 34 environmental programs to modify those programs to account for relevant regional
- 35 circumstances;
- 36 (4) Recognize the unique circumstances of small businesses that serve rural
- 37 communities and the unique business structures and regional diversity of farms and
- 38 ranches;
- 39 (5) Ensure access to a reliable workforce and increase employment opportunities
- 40 in rural-focused businesses, including agriculture;

- 1 (6) Promote the preservation of family farms as they are passed from generation to
- 2 generation;
- 3 (7) Encourage the production, export and use of domestically produced agricultural
- 4 products;
- 5 (8) Further the energy security of the State in the rural landscape without
- 6 jeopardizing food production and land-based economic production;
- 7 (9) Address barriers to access to resources on public land for rural communities
- 8 that rely on timber harvests, recreation and other multiple uses;
- 9 (10) Identify and facilitate rural economic opportunities associated with energy
- 10 development, outdoor recreation and other conservation-related activities; and
- 11 (11) Coordinate and improve the effectiveness of state engagement with rural
- 12 stakeholders, including agricultural organizations, small businesses, education and
- 13 training institutions, health care providers, telecommunications service providers,
- 14 research and land-grant institutions, law enforcement agencies, state and local
- 15 governments, federally recognized nations, tribes or bands in the State and
- 16 nongovernmental organizations, regarding the needs of rural areas in the State.

17 The council shall make the report required under this subsection publicly available. The

18 joint standing committees receiving the report may report out legislation relating to the

19 action plan.

20 **10. Public outreach.** The council shall annually hold public meetings in a rural

21 community for the purpose of soliciting:

22 A. Feedback from the public, units of local government, federally recognized Indian

23 nations, tribes or bands in the State, businesses and workers on concerns relating to the

24 social, economic and community well-being and resilience of rural areas; and

25 B. Recommendations on actions state agencies may consider to support the economic

26 development of rural communities.

27 **11. Staff assistance.** The office shall provide staff assistance to the council.

28 **Sec. 2. 5 MRSA §12004-I, sub-§6-K** is enacted to read:

29 **6-K.**

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| 30 <u>Economic</u> | <u>Rural Prosperity Council</u> | <u>Not Authorized</u> | <u>5 MRSA</u> |
| 31 <u>Development</u> | | | <u>§3109</u> |

32 **Sec. 3. Staggered terms.** Notwithstanding the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 5,

33 section 3109, subsection 2, of the members initially appointed to the Rural Prosperity

34 Council, 3 members must be appointed to serve initial terms of 3 years, 3 members must

35 be appointed to serve initial terms of 4 years and 2 members must be appointed to serve

36 initial terms of 5 years.

37 **SUMMARY**

38 This bill establishes the Rural Prosperity Council as an advisory council within the

39 Office of Policy Innovation and the Future to address the social, economic and community

40 well-being and resilience of rural areas in the State by addressing unique structural

1 challenges experienced by rural communities, including but not limited to housing,
2 education, health care, small business development and job creation.