



Rural Center

Partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia

2021-2022

Center for Rural Virginia Annual Report

Our Mission

The Center is a partnership of the Center for Rural Virginia, a Virginia legislative entity advocating for rural policy, and the Council for Rural Virginia, an entity organized by federal statute that is a conduit for building rural capacity by facilitating the collaboration and creation of coalitions of the key economic regions and sectors of the Commonwealth.

Our History

Created by the General Assembly in 2004, the Center for Rural Virginia works to advance economic development, job creation, workforce development, education, infrastructure, healthcare and other vital initiatives for the prosperity of rural Virginia.



Dear Friends,

What an exciting year it has been for The Center for Rural Virginia (The Center). The Center had a memorable year, officially launching and implementing the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI) and concluding the program with a graduation ceremony for the inaugural class. VRLI is the Commonwealth's first and only leadership program devoted to retaining and attracting the best and brightest in our rural communities! VRLI's inaugural cohort was announced in April of 2022 and after a competitive selection process, twenty-nine (29) rural leaders were selected to participate in the program from all corners of the Commonwealth.

In addition to the launch of VRLI, the Center continued to serve as a facilitator, advocate and creator of programs and initiatives that work towards success throughout rural Virginia. The Center's Executive Director continues to serve as statewide spokesperson on issues pertaining to Rural Virginia. Additionally, the Center fundraised throughout 2021 and 2022 to ensure that programming and VRLI could move forward, though these efforts have become more challenging with a 40-year high inflation and a significant increase in operational costs and programming.

The Center continues to maintain its focus on rural economic development opportunities, workforce readiness, access to rural housing, broadband, entrepreneurship and small business, agriculture, and forestry opportunities, while also weaving together the topics of economic development with natural resources and conservation practices.

Highlights of the past year include: the successful launch and graduation of the inaugural class of Virginia Rural Leadership Institute, the 2022 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, 2022 Rural Caucus Reception, and Virginia General Assembly Rural Caucus weekly meetings during the 2022 legislative session, which the executive director served as staff for and organized.

Enclosed in this report, you will find a detailed summary of the Center's activities throughout this operating year. It has been a true honor to work and meet with many of you as we traveled around the state visiting rural communities throughout Virginia. We sincerely appreciate the dedication and hard work from The Board of Directors of the Center for Rural Virginia. The efforts from the Board make the impact of the work we do at Center for Rural Virginia possible. We are grateful for the ongoing support from all of our friends across the Commonwealth.

Best regards,

Kristie Helmick Proctor

Organizational Structure

Executive Director

The 2021-2022 operational year of the Center for Rural Virginia was the fourth full year for the Executive Director, Kristie Helmick Proctor. Mrs. Proctor was hired in December 2017 and has taken the opportunity to build new partnerships and sponsorships to strengthen visibility and programming at the Center, breaking records nearly every year since being hired. The Executive Director continues to perform other organizational maintenance tasks, such as reviewing the organization's structure, bylaws, collective services agreement, operational practices, and other guiding documentation.

Annual Summit on Rural Prosperity

The Center was pleased to host the annual 2022 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity in beautiful Smithfield, VA. This annual event occurred October 12-13, 2022. The Center for Rural Virginia co-hosted this event with the Governor's office and was proud to provide interactive and meaningful experiences for attendees.

We were delighted to have over 200 attendees from nearly 50 counties join us for the 2022 Rural Summit. Seven members from Governor Youngkin's Cabinet participated in the event and it was a tremendous success. Additionally, Lt. Governor Winsome Earle-Sears served as the keynote speaker of the event.

Board Meetings

In addition to hosting an all-virtual Board meeting, we were pleased to host quarterly Board meetings in the following locations:

- Warsaw, VA
- Goochland, VA
- Smithfield, VA

Collective Services Agreement

The Center for Rural Virginia is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2004. The creation of the Center was a recommendation of the Rural Prosperity Commission, created by the General Assembly in 2000. The goal of the Commission was "Prosperity for all Virginians". The 18-member Commission was instructed by the General Assembly to "undertake a detailed analysis of rural Virginia economies and recommend flexible but targeted state policies which, combined with local efforts, will help foster sustainable economic growth in Virginia's rural areas."

The Center currently operates in a collaborative partnership with the Council for Rural Virginia through a collective services agreement as the Virginia Rural Center. The two organizations operate independently but share an executive director and operate in conjunction to fulfill their joint mission of economic prosperity for rural communities throughout Virginia.

The final report of the Rural Prosperity Commission was issued in December 2001 and featured specific policy recommendations, including the creation of the Center for Rural Virginia to address the obstacles and capitalize on the many opportunities of Rural Virginia. In 2004, founding Board members Senator Frank Ruff and Delegate Steve Landes, sponsored the enabling legislation, creating the Center.

The 21-member board of the Center for Rural Virginia works in partnership with Board at the Council for Rural Virginia. The Council is associated with the National Rural Development Partnership, created out of the 2002 Farm Bill.

The Executive Director actively participates in Partners for Rural America (PRA), and the Council is a member of this organization. PRA's mission is to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDC's), which are uniquely positioned:

- To provide a collective voice for rural America
- To expand social and economic opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents;
- To promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector;

Together, the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia work with federal, state and local policymakers and regulators as well private sector stakeholders to improve economic opportunities and preserve the quality of life throughout rural Virginia.

Institutional Partners

In addition to the support of the Virginia General Assembly and the Governor's Office, the Virginia Rural Center continues to enjoy partnerships with two other entities that make the daily operations of the Center for Rural Virginia and the Council for Rural Virginia efficient, effective, and successful.

The first is the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). This agency provides office space to the Executive Director. Additionally, DHCD provides back-office support and assistance that enhances the productivity and accessibility at The Virginia Rural Center.

The second is Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. The Virginia Rural Center's partnership with VCE, through the Council for Rural Virginia, provides assets and operational efficiencies that enhance the cost-effective operation for both entities of the Virginia Rural Center. Virginia Tech serves as the payroll agent to the Executive Director.

Annual Sponsors

The Center for Rural Virginia is fortunate to have numerous organizational sponsors committed to the Center's mission and rural prosperity. The Executive Director spends a large amount of time obtaining financial support from various organizations to ensure the Virginia Rural Center is successful.

These 2022 Annual Sponsors include (in alphabetical order):

- Appalachian Power
 - Cozen O'Connor
 - Danville Community College
 - Dominion Energy
 - Farm Bureau of Virginia
 - Farm Credit
 - Gaston Group
 - Letterpress Communications
 - Lumos
 - Old Dominion Electric Cooperative
 - Rappahannock Electric Cooperative
 - Smithfield Foods
 - Southeast Rural Community Assistance Project
 - The Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development
 - The Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
 - Virginia Broadband Industry Association
 - Virginia Community Capital
 - Virginia Cooperative Extension
 - Virginia Housing
 - Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation
 - Virginia Maryland & Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives
 - Virginia Resources Authority
 - Virginia Rural Health Association
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Project Overview & Status Updates

We are pleased to share an update on the Center's projects. During the 2021-2022 operating year, the organization worked towards its overall mission of enhancing rural Virginia.

2022 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity

At the 2022 Governor's Summit on Rural Prosperity, seven members of Gov. Glenn Youngkin's cabinet engaged with local, state, and private sector representatives from across Virginia to discuss initiatives around education, economic development, affordable housing and more in rural communities.

The event kicked off with a keynote address from Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears who stressed the administration's focus on ensuring all of Virginia prospers and how education plays a key role. Earle-Sears was followed by featured speaker D.J. Jordan, Chief of Staff for the Attorney General of Virginia, who discussed initiatives such as Operation Ceasefire, which will focus on prosecutorial resources in regions of Virginia where crime has been an issue.

Transportation and healthcare were also discussed during the first day of the Summit and the focus of a panel discussion with John Littel, Virginia Secretary of Health & Human Resources, and Shep Miller, Virginia Secretary of Transportation.

Attendees also heard from Matthew Lohr, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry and Travis Voyles, Acting Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, who sat on a panel discussing the relationship between agriculture, natural resource conservation and local economies. The panel was moderated by Del. Emily Brewer and included Judy Winslow, Director of Smithfield & Isle of Wight Tourism and Stewart Leeth, Chief Sustainability Officer of Smithfield Foods.

The first day concluded with attendees getting a unique opportunity to "Experience Smithfield by Land and Sea." One group of participants boarded boats with Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources and Virginia Marine Resources Commission with agency officials who provided tours of the scenic Pagan River. Another group enjoyed a customized walking tour of downtown Smithfield hosted by Smithfield and Isle of Wight Tourism along with The Isle of Wight County Museum. The two groups later convened for a reception at the Smithfield Station Restaurant.

The second day of the conference kicked off with representatives of the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI), the first ever leadership development program focused on attracting, growing, and retaining leaders in rural Virginia. Members of VRLI's inaugural 2022 cohort took the stage to comment on how their VRLI required "Community Impact Projects" give back actively and immediately to local communities.

A panel discussion on rural housing featured Bryan Horn, Director of Virginia Housing and Community Development and Del. Danny Marshall, who also serves as the Chair of the Virginia Housing Commission. The pair was joined by Chris Thompson, Director of Strategic Housing for Virginia Housing and Josh Goldschmidt, President at Eagle Construction of Virginia.

Dr. Tamarah Holmes, Director of the Office of Broadband for Virginia, also provided an update on broadband initiatives in rural Virginia. Citing program successes, Holmes said that Virginia will

continue to be a model for broadband nationally, not just for access infrastructure, but also for lack of access because of affordability.

Thursday afternoon sessions included a panel discussion with Virginia Secretary of Labor G. Bryan Slater, Virginia Secretary of Commerce and Trade Caren Merrick and Virginia Secretary of Education Aimee Guidera. The group discussed ways the administration is addressing rural workforce development challenges, including driving statewide initiatives from a central location.

The Summit concluded with an update from Jason El Koubi, President and CEO of the Virginia Economic Development Partnership. El Koubi reported that 52% of localities say their highest economic development barrier is availability of a project-ready site. He also noted that speed to market is shrinking, with businesses needing to find solutions quickly.

2022 Rural Caucus Reception

Governor Youngkin served as keynote speaker at the 13th Annual Rural Caucus Reception which was held in February 2022. This event is a joint effort of the Center for Rural Virginia, the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) and the Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus. Attorney General Jason Miyares and Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears also spoke at the event, which included multiple members of Youngkin's administration.

The event had nearly 300 attendees from more than 50 counties in the Commonwealth and the audience was made up of local government officials, legislators, business and economic leaders, and policymakers.

Sen. Emmett Hanger who serves as Chairman of the Rural Caucus spoke at the event and introduced the speakers. Delegate Emily Brewer serves as Vice Chair of the Rural Caucus, and she was also in attendance. The Virginia Rural Center was grateful to host a record number of legislators at the 2022 Rural Caucus Reception, and it further underscored that issues that impact rural Virginia remain front and center.

Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus

The Virginia Rural Center (VRC) organized and staffed numerous meetings of the Virginia General Assembly's Rural Caucus during the 2022 General Assembly session.

The special guests for the 2022 Rural Caucus meeting included:

- The Honorable Winsome Earle-Sears, Lt. Governor of Virginia
 - The Honorable Caren Merrick Virginia's Secretary of Commerce & Trade
 - The Honorable Matthew Lohr, Virginia's Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry
 - The Honorable Todd Gilbert, Speaker of the Virginia House of Delegates
 - The Honorable Aimee Guidera, Virginia's Secretary of Education
 - The Honorable John Littel, Virginia's Secretary of Health & Human Resources
 - The Honorable Bryan Slater, Virginia's Secretary of Labor
 - The Honorable Eric Moeller, Governor Youngkin's Chief Transformation Officer
 - Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Virginia Department of Education
 - Carrie Roth, Virginia Employment Commission
 - Susan Dewey, Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Housing
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- Ryan Brown, Executive Director, Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources

The Rural Caucus provides an opportunity for legislators and stakeholders to learn about legislation and initiatives impacting rural areas of the State. At the Rural Caucus meetings, legislators heard from stakeholders and cabinet members about legislation and its potential effect on rural Virginia.

Rural Caucus meetings continue to provide a forum to share information, learn, and collaborate to increase prosperity across rural Virginia.

Virginia Rural Leadership Institute

Strong civic-minded leadership has been well-documented as a driver of community strength. Prosperous communities rely on qualified, enthusiastic leaders who can adapt to the ever-changing community and economy. With an aging population and younger generations moving away from many rural regions across the Commonwealth, rural communities are facing a historic gap in civic leadership opportunities. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by rural localities and the limitations of current leadership programs focused specifically on rural leaders, the Virginia Rural Center created the Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI).

VRLI is a first-of-its-kind program with a mission to retain, attract, and develop rural Virginians into innovative, responsible, and civic-minded leaders who build strong communities. The inaugural cohort of VRLI was announced in April of 2022 and includes 29 Cohort members from all corners of the Commonwealth.

The Center for Rural Virginia was pleased to see the following Cohort members graduate from The Virginia Rural Leadership Institute:

Richelle Alexander, Lexington, VA

Rockbridge Area Housing Corporation, Assistant Property Manager

Luke Allison, Pulaski County, VA

Aggregate Capital LLC, Project Manager

Garrett Blaize, Wise County, VA

Appalachian Community Fund, Grants Manager and Regional Organizer

Neva Bryan, St. Paul, VA

University of Virginia's College at Wise (UVA Wise), Senior Director of Academic Enhancement & Coordinator of National Awards and Fellowships

Rebekah Castle, Augusta County, VA

Augusta County, Director of Economic Development and Marketing

James Clements, Prince George County, VA

University of Richmond, Full-Time MBA Student

Stacey English, Hopewell, VA

Prince George County, Interim Economic Development and Tourism Director

Jenna French, *Shenandoah County, VA*
Shenandoah County, Director of Tourism & Economic Development

Jessi Fritz, MBA, *Abingdon, VA*
Virginia Economic Development Partnership, Regional Business Manager (Talent Solutions)

Lydia Gilmer, *Pulaski County, VA*
Pulaski County, VA, Small Business Solutions Manager (Economic Development)

Shannon Hair, Ed. D., *Danville, VA*
Danville Community College, VP of Institutional Advancement & Development/Executive
Director of DCC Educational Foundation, Inc.

Debbie Irwin, *Staunton, VA*
Shenandoah Community Capital Fund, Executive Director

Michelle Johnson, *Charles City County, VA*
Charles City County, County Administrator

Lisa Jordan, Ph.D., *South Hill, VA*
Department of Military Affairs, Historic Preservation Specialist and Collections Manager

Zachary King, *Harrisonburg, VA*
Virginia Poultry Growers Cooperative LLC, Sales Associate & Business Analyst

Lachanda Lee, *Dinwiddie County, VA*
Dinwiddie County, Director of Human Resources

Maggie Beal Longest, M.S., *Ashland, VA*
Downtown Ashland Association, Executive Director

John Matthews, *Wytheville, VA*
Joint Industrial Development Authority of Wythe County, Deputy Director

Joseph Mengedoth, M.S., *Henrico County, VA*
Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Regional Economist

Allison Moore, *Pittsylvania County, VA*
Institute for Advanced Learning and Research, Manager of Public Relations & Communications

Hope Mothershead, *Richmond County, VA*
Richmond County, VA, Director of Planning and Zoning

Julia Pilipenko, *Augusta County, VA*
Dominion Energy, External Affairs Representative

French Price, *Woodstock, VA*
Virginia Cooperative Extension, Value Chain Coordinator

Billie Roberts, *Bluefield, VA*
Virginia Community Capital, Community Innovation Advisor

Joy Rumley, *Abingdon, VA*
New River Valley Regional Commission, Senior Planner

Logan Ryan, *Mechanicsville, VA*
Covintus, Inc., Director of Community Engagement

Lauren Stuhldreher, *North Chesterfield*
VA - U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Economic Development Administration, Economic Development Representative for Virginia

Wendy Welch, Ph.D., *Wythe County, VA*
Graduate Medical Education Consortium of SWVA, Executive Director

James Werth, Ph.D., *Bristol, VA*
Tri-Area Community Health, CEO

VRLI program development began in 2019 with research conducted to create a curriculum focused on the unique skills required by rural leaders to address current and future economic and community challenges. Virginia Rural Center staff consulted other statewide leadership development program directors to determine best practices for the implementation of VRLI's curriculum and programming. During this process, more applications were received than spots available in the Cohort and our diverse list of partners were instrumental in the selection process of the cohort.

In the first year, Cohort members take a leadership assessment performed by a certified professional where Cohort members better understand their leadership style and learn skills to impact change in their community. In the second year, the skills are demonstrated by VRLI graduates through a Community Impact Project. Cohort members participate in four 3-day Sessions, allowing the VRLI Cohort to see five uniquely different rural regions across the Commonwealth.

Session locations include:

- Southern Virginia
- Middle Peninsula/Northern Neck
- New River Valley
- Southwest Virginia
- Shenandoah Valley.

The VRLI Sessions provide an immersive experience in the rural communities of the region where the Cohort tours recent economic and community development successes while also participating in discussions and presentations from experts.

The topics discussed included:

- Agriculture
- Broadband
- Building a Team
- Civic Engagement & Advocacy
- Communication & Listening
- Community Story Telling
- Difficult Conversations
- Engaging with Elected Officials & the Government
- Food Issues
- Gaining Capital
- Growing Your Network
- Navigating Power Structures
- Organization & Funding
- Regional Collaboration
- Rural Entrepreneurship
- Rural Health
- Rural Housing
- Rural Tourism
- Understanding Data
- Youth In Rural Communities.

Additionally, in the first year, the Mentorship Program, a unique component of VRLI which connects Cohort members with established rural leaders providing valuable insight into their future Community Impact Projects. Mentorship meetings occur throughout the VRLI experience and include at least three meetings between Mentors and Cohort members.

Mentors involved with Virginia Rural Leadership Institute come from the following organizations:

- Vice President of Health, Richmond - *American Heart Association*
 - Managing Partner - *Coalfield Strategies*
 - Deputy Secretary of Commerce & Trade - Commonwealth of Virginia
 - Former Deputy Secretary of Commerce & Trade for Rural Economic Development - *Commonwealth of Virginia*
 - President - *Community Futures*
 - Owner - *Elk Logistics*
 - Vice President of Advanced Learning - *Institute for Advanced Learning and Research*
 - Director of Economic Development & Community Engagement - *Mid-Atlantic Broadband Communities Corporation*
 - Certified Travel Concierge - *P.T. Enterprise, LLC*
 - Principal - *River Link Group*
 - Community Development Specialist - *Rural Development Innovation Center, United States Department of Agriculture*
 - Founder - *Southern Virginia Food Hub*
 - Executive Director - *Southern Virginia Regional Alliance*
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- President & CEO - *Strategic Consulting LLC*
- Chief Sustainability Officer, Former Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry - *Sustainable Forestry Initiative*
- Owner/Developer - *The Bee Hotel*
- Program Director - *UVA Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service/Growth and Opportunity Virginia Region 3 Council*
- Vice Chancellor for Administration, Government Relations and Strategic Initiatives - *UVA-Wise*
- Government Relations Manager - *VA Housing*
- Principal - *Valley Pike Partners*
- Executive Director - *Virginia Association of Counties*
- Director of Local Government - *Virginia Association of Counties*
- Retired, Deputy Director of Administration - *Virginia Department of Corrections*
- Revitalization Planner - *Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development*
- Community Development Manager - *Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development*
- Capacity Development Specialist - *Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development*
- Vice President of Entrepreneurial Ecosystems- *Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation*
- Associate Department Head - *Virginia Tech*

Year two of VRLI focuses on implementing the Community Impact Projects selected by each Cohort member. Each project is approved by the VRLI Advisory Committee. This project-focused approach for year two allows Cohort Members to take learnings from the first year and quickly apply them in their communities, providing benefits for individual Cohort members and their locality as well as providing a return on investment for supporters of VRLI.

The VRLI Community Impact Projects include (sorted by specialty area):

Agribusiness

- Prince George County Kitchen Incubator and Market
- Pulaski Bike Hostel and Farmers Market
- Shenandoah Valley Food and Ag Development Group

Economic Development

- Charles City County Shipping Container Park
- Statewide EDA Grants Toolkit
- Southern Virginia Economic Development Effort Guided by IALR Priority Areas

Entrepreneurship

- Ashland Diverse and Nontraditional Entrepreneurs Program
- Shenandoah Valley Supply Chain Ecosystem Database

Rural Health

- Carrol County New Pharmacy & Health Center that also Addresses Community Needs
 - Danville Community College Food Insecurity Program
 - Dinwiddie Food Insecurity Program for a local K-12 School System
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- Southwest Virginia Address Medical Mistrust in Rural Poverty Communities

Rural Housing

- Lexington Affordable Housing Project
- Southwest Virginia Regional Housing Summit

Strategic Planning

- Appalachian Council of Business Leaders (ACBL) Mentor Program
- New River Valley Outdoor Recreation Economic Analysis, Inventory and Strategic Development Plan

Sustainability

- Waynesboro Sustainability Plan

Workforce Development

- Northern Neck Workforce Development Program for K-12 School system
- Shenandoah Valley Career Pathway Program
- Statewide Workforce/Instruction Reentry Program for Prisons
- Southwest Virginia Community-fronted Research Project focused on Regional Workforce Development

Youth In Rural Communities

- St. Paul Youth Empathy Map

The Virginia Rural Leadership Institute (VRLI) was able to provide a need-blind program in its inaugural year due to fundraising efforts from mostly private sector entities that are committed to the Center's and Institute's mission. Additionally, VRLI was able to offer an automatic \$1,000 scholarship to each Cohort member chosen to participate in the inaugural year. The financial support from sponsors is essential to building more rural leaders across the Commonwealth.

These sponsors include (in alphabetical order):

- Appalachian Regional Commission
 - Appalachian Power
 - Danville Community College Educational Foundation
 - Dominion
 - MidAtlantic Broadband
 - Microsoft
 - River Link Group
 - Virginia Housing
 - The Institute for Advanced Learning & Research
 - Virginia Community Capital
 - Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
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Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts

The Virginia Rural Center engages in numerous partnerships and collaborative efforts with other organizations. These partners, often sharing aligned missions, exponentially strengthen the Rural Center's efforts and provide a platform to elevate the Commonwealth's rural issues.

Partners for Rural America, Board of Directors Member

Partners for Rural America (PRA) was founded in 1998 to support the efforts of its member State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs), which are uniquely positioned to expand economic and social opportunities for America's rural communities and their residents, promote equal treatment of rural America by government agencies and the private sector and provide a collective voice for rural America. Joined in January 2018, the PRA Board of Directors provides a networking platform for other state rural center leaders to share successes and answer inquiries on best practices in member states.

Broadband Advisory Council, Member

The Broadband Advisory Council was established to help determine the Commonwealth's goals for broadband and how best to achieve them. The Rural Center's executive director gathers knowledge and contributes thought to further advocate for broadband expansion across the Commonwealth.

Virginia Housing, Rural Housing Advisory Council Member

The Rural Housing Advisory Council (RHAC) is a cross-regional group that will provide guidance and expertise to Virginia Housing regarding housing issues in rural Virginia. Mrs. Proctor became a member of Virginia Housing's Rural Housing Advisory Council in August 2018, and she is pleased to take on this role and provide additional insight to the housing needs in rural Virginia.

2023 Mary V. Bicouvaris Virginia Teacher of the Year Selection Committee, Member

Dr. Mary V. Bicouvaris), a respected teacher of government and international relations in Hampton City public schools, who went on to become Virginia's *first National Teacher of the Year*. She was famous for her dedication and for helping students become citizens of the world. Every year, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) seeks to recognize outstanding educators who carry on Dr. Bicouvaris's legacy. The Virginia Rural Center was very pleased to have the Executive Director participate on the 2023 selection committee.

There are approximately 100,000 teachers in the Commonwealth of Virginia, people who dedicate their lives to inspiring young people to achieve their highest potential.

Legislative Sportsmen Caucus, Participant

Formed in 2004, the Virginia Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus is a bipartisan, bicameral group of legislators dedicated to protecting and advancing hunting, fishing, trapping and recreational shooting in Virginia. Regular involvement by the Rural Center in the Legislative Sportsmen Caucus includes participating in and recruitment for weekly legislative sportsman caucus meetings and has previously provided support for the sportsman caucus retreat.

Prime Farm/Forestland Workgroup pertinent to House Bill 894 Section 3

The Virginia Rural Center's Executive Director served as workgroup member and partner on the House Bill 894 Section 3 Workgroup. The workgroup was made up of diverse team that worked to make meaningful contributions to the topic of prime farm/forestland and solar siting considerations as charged by the Virginia General Assembly in HB894.

Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, Rural Community of Practice, Participant

The Richmond Fed created this group with the goal to bring together leaders who help rural areas and small towns thrive. Participants collaborate on the needs and challenges that are facing rural communities, as well as highlighting opportunities.

Areas of focus include helping rural communities access post-pandemic funds; develop innovations in community financing and leadership; and create a common set of community indicators, tools, and success stories.

Leadership

Board of Trustees Center for Rural Virginia

Chair, Honorable Frank M. Ruff, Jr, Senate of Virginia

Vice-Chair, Honorable Les Adams, Jr., Virginia House of Delegates

Honorable Emily Brewer, Member, Virginia House of Delegates

Honorable Winsome Earle-Sears, Lieutenant Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia

Honorable Wendy Gooditis, Member, Virginia House of Delegates

Patricia Harper-Tunley, Certified Travel Concierge, P.T. Enterprise LLC

Julie Hensley, President, Law Office of Julie D. Hensley

Anne Herring, Partnership Liaison Specialist, Rural Development Innovation Center, United States Department of Agriculture

Brian Isringhausen, CEO, Cranemasters, Inc.

Willene A. Johnson, Ph. D, Independent Consultant

Honorable Jennifer McClellan, Member, Senate of Virginia

Honorable Matthew Lohr, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Commonwealth of Virginia

Sarah Marshall, Manager, State & Local Affairs, Dominion Energy

Honorable Caren Merrick, Secretary of Commerce and Trade, Commonwealth of Virginia

Liz Povar, Principal Officer, The River Link Group

Eddie Ramirez, Ramirez Consulting, LLC

Honorable Chris Runion, Member, Virginia House of Delegates

Chris Van Vlack, Farmer, Hanging Rock Hay & Bush Hog

Lindsey Watson, Director of Government Affairs, Rappahannock Electric Cooperative

In partnership with

Board of Directors – Council for Rural Virginia

Chair, Bryan David, Program Director, Growth and Opportunity Virginia Region 3

Vice-Chair, Dr. Edwin Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech

Shannon Blevins, Associate Vice Chancellor for Economic Development and Engagement,
University of Virginia's College at Wise

The Honorable Ruby Brabo, Realtor

Katie Frazier, Director, Farm Credit of the Virginias Knowledge Center

Sharon Johnson, CEO of the Shenandoah Valley Workforce Investment Board

Hugh Joyce, Owner, James River Air Conditioning

Gary Keener, Dabney S. Lancaster Community College

John A. King II, General Manager and Vice President of Sales, VA Poultry Growers Cooperative

Caroline Lane, Director of Coaching Programs, Virginia's Community Colleges

Mark Lawrence, Vice President of Governmental and External Affairs, Carilion Clinic

Patrick Mauney, Executive Director, Rappahannock-Rapidan Regional Commission

Jay Poole, Owner, Common Sense Strategies

R. Morgan Quicke, County Administrator, Richmond County

Robin Sullenberger, Retired, Shenandoah Valley Partnership

Bill Tucker, Tucker Family Farms

Brian T. Warner, Rolls Royce

Carlyle Wimbish, Hickory Hill Farm

Contact Information



Kristie Helmick Proctor
Executive Director
varuralcenter@vt.edu

600 East Main St., Suite 300
Richmond, VA 23219

For more information, visit:
www.cfrv.org