

ENROLLED HOUSE  
BILL NO. 2288

By: Turner, Askins, Boren,  
Brannon, Carey, Dorman,  
Harrison, Pope and Smithson  
of the House

and

Gumm, Myers and Rabon of  
the Senate

An Act relating to rural economic development; creating Rural Action Partnership Program; prescribing responsibilities of Rural Action Partnership Program; providing for primary emphasis and mission of Program; authorizing requests for assistance by Oklahoma Department of Commerce; requiring annual evaluation of program; requiring report regarding Rural Action Partnership Program; providing for Advisory Team for Rural Action Partnership Program; providing for responsibility of Executive Director of Oklahoma Department of Commerce; providing for composition of Advisory Team; authorizing conduct of Advisory Team meetings by teleconference; authorizing Advisory Team meetings; amending Section 1, Chapter 269, O.S.L. 2003 (74 O.S. Supp. 2003, Section 8302), which relates to the Rural Area Development Task Force; authorizing assistance to Advisory Team for Rural Action Partnership Program; authorizing meetings by teleconference; authorizing action by certain affirmative vote; deleting reference to certain final report; deleting reference to travel reimbursement; requiring assistance by Rural Area Development Task Force; providing for codification; providing an effective date; and declaring an emergency.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA:

SECTION 1. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 8303 of Title 74, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. There is hereby created within the Oklahoma Department of Commerce the Rural Action Partnership Program.

B. The Rural Action Partnership Program shall be responsible for coordinating and assisting in:

1. Establishing a statewide toll free telephone program to serve as a point of first contact between persons, business entities, groups, associations, organizations, state and local government

officials and others for purposes of facilitating contact with service providers, providing information regarding primarily rural economic development entities, programs, resources and activities and to provide assistance to persons, firms and representatives of governmental entities attempting to establish or expand a for-profit business in a rural area of the state;

2. Assisting in the coordination of primarily rural economic development programs offered within the state;

3. Administering a rural economic development and employer regional outreach program that divides the state into at least four areas with each such area to be served by at least one rural regional economic development coordinator who shall assist in the establishment and coordination of rural economic development partnerships;

4. The accumulation and organization of information to be used as a rural economic development resource database, including, but not limited to, contact information for persons, firms, groups, organizations and others involved in rural economic development issues, availability of federal, state and local incentive programs, and, subject to available funding, the development and maintenance of a rural development Internet web site to promote access to such information;

5. A comprehensive survey of natural resources located or available in primarily rural areas of the state in order to match potential value-added business activity with such resources;

6. The sponsorship, with key economic development partners, of periodic rural development summits or conferences for purposes of communicating about the existence of the Rural Action Partnership Program, availability of assistance, development of additional services consistent with the mission of the Program and such matters as may be conducive to improving the delivery of services with respect to rural development programs and rural economic development; and

7. Providing such services and developing such programs, functions or initiatives that may be necessary for or that would promote the development of rural resources and the rural economy.

C. The mission of the Rural Action Partnership Program shall be to foster healthy and sustainable rural communities through small business retention, expansion, and entrepreneurial development.

D. The primary emphasis for the regional economic development outreach specialists shall be to serve the needs of the communities or regions with declining populations or with economic indicators that suggest additional information and resources would be of benefit to improve the economic conditions of such community.

E. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce, in support of the mission of the Rural Action Partnership Program, may request the assistance of the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, Department of Environmental Quality, Oklahoma Corporation Commission, Oklahoma Tax Commission, Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry, Oklahoma Department of Tourism, Department of Transportation, the Oklahoma State Regents

for Higher Education, the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education or such other agencies, boards, commissions, departments or other entities of state government as may be required in order to assist with the implementation of the programs for which the Rural Action Partnership Program is responsible.

F. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce shall conduct an annual evaluation of the Rural Action Partnership Program. Not later than December 31, 2007, the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce shall make a report regarding the actions and functions of the Rural Action Partnership Program to the Governor, Speaker of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the State Senate. The report shall summarize the activity and results of the Program and may contain recommendations for changes in the functions of the Program, including changes in funding.

SECTION 2. NEW LAW A new section of law to be codified in the Oklahoma Statutes as Section 8304 of Title 74, unless there is created a duplication in numbering, reads as follows:

A. There shall be an Advisory Team for the Rural Action Partnership Program.

B. The Advisory Team shall not have any direct control or policy making authority with respect to the Rural Action Partnership Program. The Rural Action Partnership Program shall be the responsibility of the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

C. The Advisory Team shall consist of:

1. The Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce or a designee;

2. A person to be selected by action of the Board of Directors of Rural Enterprises of Oklahoma, Inc.;

3. A person to be selected by action of the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils;

4. A person to be selected by the governing entity for the Oklahoma Small Business Development Centers;

5. A person to be selected by the Oklahoma Association of R.C. and D. Councils;

6. A person to be designated by the Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Food, and Forestry;

7. A person to be designated by the Governor's Council of Workforce and Economic Development;

8. A person to be selected by the Board of the Oklahoma Alliance for Manufacturing Excellence;

9. A person to be selected by the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education;

10. A person to be selected by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education;

11. A person to be selected by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation; and

12. Three persons to be selected by the Governor to represent rural businesses and rural communities.

D. For purposes of the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, the Advisory Team shall be deemed a public body, but shall be authorized to conduct its meetings by teleconference.

E. The Advisory Team shall be authorized to meet as often as may be required to assist in the development of the Rural Action Partnership Program and may request assistance from the Rural Area Development Task Force for such purpose.

SECTION 3. AMENDATORY Section 1, Chapter 269, O.S.L. 2003 (74 O.S. Supp. 2003, Section 8302), is amended to read as follows:

Section 8302. A. There is hereby created the Rural Area Development Task Force. The Task Force shall consist of eleven (11) members to be selected as follows:

1. One member to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;

2. One member to be appointed by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate;

3. Five members to be appointed by the Governor, each of whom shall have demonstrated experience or interest in one or more issues affecting rural development, including, but not limited to, private sector financial expertise, economic development at the state or local level, agricultural economics, health care services, communications technology, business site location decisions, rural housing or such other areas of expertise as the Governor deems to be in the best interests of service as a member of the Task Force;

4. One member who shall be the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce or a designee;

5. One member who shall be the Director of the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry or a designee;

6. One member to be selected by the board of directors of Rural Enterprises, Inc.; and

7. One member to be selected by Oklahoma Association of Regional Councils, with the advice and consent of each of the substate planning districts.

B. The Task Force shall select from among its membership a chair and vice-chair. The Task Force shall be authorized to meet at such times as may be required in order to perform the duties imposed upon it by law.

C. ~~The~~ Except as otherwise provided by this subsection, the Task Force shall be subject to the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act and the Oklahoma Open Records Act. For purposes of providing assistance to

the Advisory Team for the Rural Action Partnership Program, the Rural Area Development Task Force shall be authorized to conduct meetings by teleconference or videoconference, if required. For purposes of any action requiring a vote of the Task Force to provide such assistance to the Advisory Team, the Task Force may take such action by affirmative vote of a simple majority of the members of the Task Force present or participating in such teleconference or videoconference.

D. The Task Force shall study and examine ways in which the State of Oklahoma:

1. Can effectively develop its rural economy;

2. Promote rural areas of the State of Oklahoma for purposes of business site location efforts;

3. Support the Oklahoma Department of Commerce in implementation of the Rural Action Partnership Program and existing efforts to assist rural areas of the state with economic development efforts;

4. Can modify existing incentives or create additional incentives that are likely to result in the formation of business capital and job creation which directly benefits the communities located in primarily rural areas of the state;

5. Can modify existing incentives or create additional incentives that promote and support individuals engaged in agriculture, aquaculture, farming, ranching, agricultural product processing and all forms of business activity that add significant value to inputs developed with labor and capital originating from the state; and

6. Take such other actions as may be conducive to the improvement of the rural Oklahoma economy and creation of quality employment in rural areas and to enhance the quality of life for rural residents.

E. The Task Force may request such assistance as it may require from the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, the Oklahoma Tax Commission, the Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department, the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, and such other entities of state government as the Task Force may deem relevant to its mission and duties.

F. Staff assistance for the Task Force shall be provided by the Oklahoma House of Representatives and the State Senate.

G. The Task Force shall examine the final recommendations of any previous Task Force, Commission, working group, association or other entity that has previously undertaken a study of rural economic development efforts within the ten (10) years preceding the effective date of this act. The Task Force shall determine the extent to which any of such recommendations have been implemented, either pursuant to changes in state law or policy, and to the extent possible, the Task Force shall determine whether the implementation of the recommendation from such prior studies was effective.

H. The Task Force shall develop recommendations specifically designed to improve the economic development of rural areas of the State of Oklahoma, whether through formation of business capital, job creation, job training, agricultural development, small business formation and entrepreneurship programs, or other method identified by the Task Force as having potential for improvement of economic and related conditions in rural areas of the state. ~~The recommendations shall be contained in a final report to be submitted to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate not later than December 31, 2003.~~

I. ~~Travel reimbursement for the members of the Task Force shall be provided by the appointing authorities. Legislators who are members of the Task Force shall be reimbursed pursuant to Section 456 of Title 74 of the Oklahoma Statutes.~~ On and after the effective date of this act, the Task Force shall provide such assistance to the Advisory Team for the Rural Action Partnership Program as may be required.

SECTION 4. This act shall become effective July 1, 2004.

SECTION 5. It being immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety, an emergency is hereby declared to exist, by reason whereof this act shall take effect and be in full force from and after its passage and approval.

Passed the House of Representatives the 24th day of May, 2004.

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Presiding Officer of the House of  
Representatives

Passed the Senate the 25th day of May, 2004.

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Presiding Officer of the Senate