

# THE H.O.M.E. PLAN

A Congressional Policy Blueprint for Southwest Virginia  
and the Central Appalachian Region

by  
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Prepared for Public Review and Community Feedback

This document is a living policy framework shaped by the people of Southwest Virginia.

Revisions will reflect ongoing listening sessions, town halls, stakeholder meetings,  
and the voices of workers, families, farmers, parents, teachers, and veterans.

***Southwest Virginia is home.  
This plan is about building roots, restoring trust,  
and building the future right here.***

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The H.O.M.E. Plan was born from conversations held not in committee rooms, but in church basements, on front porches, and across kitchen tables throughout Southwest Virginia. It grew from the stories of nurses and teachers, of coal miners and veterans, of parents and small business owners who love this region deeply and want to see it thrive again.

For too long, our corner of the Commonwealth has been treated as an afterthought—talked about during campaigns, but rarely listened to when it truly mattered. The H.O.M.E.

Plan—standing for Healthcare, Opportunity, Market Affordability, and Education—is our answer to that neglect. It's not a slogan or a sound bite. It's a living policy framework built from the ground up to meet the unique needs of rural communities like ours.

Each title within this plan is rooted in the same simple idea: that the people of Southwest Virginia deserve the same access, respect, and opportunity as anyone anywhere else. Whether it's ensuring that every family can reach a doctor, every worker can earn a dignified living, or every child can see a future here at home, this plan is about restoring trust and rebuilding the foundation of community.

This document is not finished—because it was never meant to be. It is designed to evolve through listening sessions, town halls, and the voices of those who call these mountains home. The goal is to craft policy that reflects who we are and where we are going, together. Southwest Virginia is more than a place—it's a promise. And the H.O.M.E. Plan is our commitment to keeping that promise.

With deep gratitude and respect,

Joy Powers

Candidate for Congress, Virginia's 9th District

For the people, by the people, that call Southwest Virginia home.

## HEALTHCARE: ACCESS, STABILITY, AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

Purpose: Stabilize rural hospitals, secure dependable telehealth access where appropriate, strengthen behavioral health and addiction treatment capacity, and complete the long-term rollout of the PACT Act for veterans and families in coal and service communities.

Southwest Virginia's healthcare challenges are not the result of lack of need or lack of providers who care. They are structural. Rural reimbursement formulas under Medicare and Medicaid do not fully account for low population density, high chronic disease rates, or the cost of maintaining full-service hospitals in small communities. Behavioral health systems were never scaled to meet the realities of the opioid crisis and the rise of co-occurring mental health needs. The PACT Act was a significant federal achievement, but its benefits are not fully reaching veterans in coal regions due to distance, staffing shortages, and uneven screening access. Telehealth proved vital during the pandemic, yet its long-term reimbursement stability remains uncertain and broadband access remains uneven.

Addressing these problems requires coordinated federal policy and *stable* funding streams. Key federal levers include: Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility funding; Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital adjustments; HRSA provider recruitment programs; SAMHSA block grants; VA clinical staffing authorizations; and USDA Rural Utilities Service broadband deployment programs. The Inflation Reduction Act, the American Rescue Plan, and the Consolidated Appropriations framework create opportunities to support hospital stabilization, workforce incentives, and continuity of addiction treatment—but only if the region secures competitive access and maintains ongoing eligibility.

This healthcare plan is built around four commitments:

1. Rural hospitals and clinics must remain open and locally accessible. Federal reimbursement formulas should be updated to reflect the higher fixed operating costs of rural hospitals, and community-based outpatient clinics need stable funding rather than year-to-year crisis financing.
2. Telehealth and mobile care are *supplements* to in-person care, not replacements. Permanent telehealth reimbursement parity is necessary, but it must be paired with investments in rural broadband and local clinical staff who can provide continuity of care.
3. Behavioral health and addiction treatment must be integrated into primary care, not siloed. Medication-assisted treatment, postpartum mental health care, and recovery housing must be accessible without bureaucratic delays or county-to-county referral gaps.
4. The PACT Act rollout must reach every veteran in every coal county—not just those who live close to VA medical centers. Mobile screening, local support officers, and consistent follow-up care are essential to honoring the full intent of the law.

Healthcare in Southwest Virginia is not simply a public service. It is a foundation of whether families can stay here, whether employers can hire here, and whether communities can grow here. When care is close to home, communities are stable. When it is distant, costly, or unreliable, families are forced to leave.

This section lays out the policies necessary to make care dependable, local, and rooted in the dignity of the people who call this region home.

## **Rural Hospital Stability & 340B Integrity Act**

**Goal:** Protect small-town hospitals, keep emergency rooms, maternity units, and local clinics open, and ensure families don't lose access to care because reimbursement rules are stacked against rural providers.

**Problem:** In rural Appalachia and across Southwest Virginia, hospitals are operating on margins so thin that any federal reimbursement change can push them into service cuts or closure. Critical Access Hospitals depend on stable reimbursement and the federal 340B drug pricing program to fund basic services. Attempts to reduce or claw back 340B savings, along with reimbursement formulas that ignore rural realities, are placing rural hospitals at risk.

This proposal provides long-term financial stability, protects access to care, and prevents D.C. policy from quietly bankrupting rural hospitals.

### **Key Provisions:**

1. **Protect 340B for Critical Access Hospitals**  
Codifies the existing 340B reimbursement protections for Critical Access Hospitals to prevent future clawbacks or rate reductions. Ensures that rural hospitals keep the savings they are intended to receive and can continue using them to support emergency rooms, maternity units, outpatient clinics, behavioral health services, and recovery programs. This keeps resources in rural communities instead of allowing them to be absorbed by large pharmaceutical middlemen.
2. **Establish a Rural Margin Index**  
Requires CMS to adjust hospital reimbursement rates based on real rural operating conditions, including:
  - Travel time to the next nearest comparable hospital
  - Local provider scarcity and recruitment challenges
  - Uncompensated care burden and payer mixThis ensures reimbursement reflects the cost of delivering care in rural communities and helps stabilize staffing and essential services.
3. **Create a Rural Stability Trigger**  
Prohibits federal Medicaid reimbursement or cost-shift rule changes from taking effect if the Congressional Budget Office determines they would reduce the net operating margin of any Critical Access Hospital or create negative financial impacts in eligible rural counties. If risk is detected, the rule is automatically paused until an alternative approach is developed. This prevents sudden financial shocks that could cause hospital closures.

### **Impact:**

- Keeps emergency rooms, maternity units, and primary care clinics open.

- Protects access to care for rural families, seniors, and people with chronic conditions.
- Helps rural hospitals recruit and retain nurses, physicians, and specialists by providing predictable operating conditions.
- Supports local economies, as hospitals are often the largest employer in rural counties.

**Who Benefits:** Rural families, seniors, new mothers, first responders, healthcare workers, and the local businesses and tax bases that rely on a stable hospital presence.

**Message Summary:** This policy keeps our hospitals open. It ensures that small towns aren't left behind or forced to drive hours for basic medical care. It stabilizes rural healthcare by protecting 340B, correcting unfair reimbursement formulas, and preventing Washington from making changes that would bankrupt Critical Access Hospitals. This is about dignity, safety, and ensuring that people can get care close to home.

## **Miner Health & Safety Enforcement Act**

**Goal:** Protect the long-term health, breathing capacity, and working lives of miners and former miners in Southwest Virginia by enforcing silica dust safety standards, safeguarding black lung benefits, and ensuring routine access to lung screenings in every coal community.

**Problem:** Black lung disease is rising sharply, especially among younger miners in Appalachia, due to higher silica content in thinner coal seams and faster cutting speeds underground. Families in Southwest Virginia have seen the disease return in severe and aggressive forms. The federal silica dust exposure rule exists, but inconsistent enforcement and weak penalties leave miners at risk. The Black Lung Disability Trust Fund has faced repeated funding uncertainty, creating delays and denials for miners who earned these benefits. In many coal counties, lung screenings require long-distance travel, making early detection less likely and outcomes worse.

This proposal treats miner health as a matter of basic dignity and national responsibility.

### **Key Provisions:**

- **Silica Dust Rule Enforcement:** Codifies enforcement of the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) silica dust exposure standard and establishes clear penalties for violations. Requires real-time dust monitoring and public reporting of compliance. Ensures that mines operate within safe exposure levels to prevent irreversible and fatal lung disease.
- **Black Lung Disability Trust Fund Stability:** Permanently restores the excise tax on coal production that funds the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund. Ends year-to-year uncertainty that leads to delayed medical care, appeals backlogs, and financial hardship for families. Guarantees that miners who develop black lung receive the support they are legally entitled to, without delay.
- **Mobile Lung Screening in Every Coal County:** Requires the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to operate mobile lung screening units in every coal county at least twice per year. Screenings identify disease earlier, allowing treatment and benefits to begin sooner and reducing the severity of illness. Screenings are coordinated with local clinics, fire stations, county fairs, and union halls to ensure accessibility.

**Impact:** Reduces preventable illness, disability, and early death among miners. Shortens the time between diagnosis and support for families affected by black lung. Improves long-term health outcomes by detecting disease earlier. Strengthens trust and accountability between workers and regulators. Keeps local healthcare systems engaged in ongoing miner monitoring and care.

**Who Benefits:** Current miners, retired miners, coal preparation plant workers, mining families, rural health clinics, and communities whose identity and economy have been shaped by coal. Employers benefit from safer workplaces and more stable labor relationships.

**Message Summary:** Southwest Virginia powered the nation, and this nation owes our miners safety, care, and respect. This policy enforces dust protections, secures black lung benefits permanently, and brings lung screenings directly into coal communities. It protects the lives of the people who built and fueled the country.

## **Rural Primary Care Workforce & Mobile Health Access Expansion Act**

**Goal:** Restore in-person healthcare access in coal and mountain communities by training and retaining medical professionals who live in-region and by deploying permanent mobile clinic routes that bring routine and preventive care directly to residents.

**Problem:** In Southwest Virginia and rural Appalachia, there are not enough primary care doctors, nurses, or behavioral health providers to meet community needs. Many residents must travel long distances for basic appointments and chronic disease management. Local clinics struggle to recruit and keep staff, leading to reduced hours or the loss of services. Current federal policies do not adequately support training healthcare providers in rural settings or keeping them here once trained. The result is delayed care, unmanaged conditions, and preventable emergencies.

This proposal builds local healthcare capacity and ensures reliable, face-to-face access to care in every county.

### **Key Provisions:**

- Rural Service Medical Corps: Creates a scholarship and housing support program for students training to become Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Behavioral Health Counselors, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Certified Nursing Assistants. In exchange, participants commit to four years of practice in rural counties within the district after completing training. This program is operated through existing regional institutions such as UVA Wise nursing programs, Radford University Health Sciences, Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC), Virginia Highlands Community College (VHCC), New River Community College (NRCC), and Wytheville Community College (WCC). The goal is to grow our own workforce from the region rather than relying on short-term contracted providers.
- Rural Primary Care Clinic Stabilization Grants: Provides operating support to independent rural primary care clinics to increase nurse pay, offer signing and retention bonuses, integrate behavioral health services on-site, and modernize scheduling and billing systems. Support is tied to maintaining local service access rather than clinic consolidation into large hospital systems.
- Permanent Mobile Clinic Routes: Establishes county-based mobile clinic rotations on consistent monthly schedules. Mobile clinics operate from community-accessible locations such as fire stations, libraries, community centers, and fairgrounds. Services include preventive care, chronic disease monitoring, women's health care, behavioral health appointments, and medication-assisted treatment follow-up for substance use recovery. This ensures access even where travel, broadband gaps, or lack of transportation are barriers.

### **Impact:**

Reduces the distance and time required to receive routine and preventive care.

Improves staffing stability for rural hospitals and clinics.  
Expands access to behavioral health and addiction treatment in every county.  
Keeps healthcare spending and healthcare jobs rooted in local communities.

**Who Benefits:** Rural families, seniors, residents with chronic health conditions, new mothers, veterans, first responders, students entering healthcare careers, and the local economies that depend on stable healthcare infrastructure.

**Message Summary:** This policy restores real access to care by training healthcare providers from the community, for the community. It strengthens local clinics, keeps care close to home, and brings medical services directly to rural residents. This is about dignity, stability, and sustaining the health of our communities here at home.

## **Veterans Access Completion Act (PACT Implementation in Coal Country)**

**Goal:** Ensure veterans in coal and mountain communities receive timely, local access to specialty care, mental health services, and toxic exposure screening without traveling long distances or waiting months for appointments.

**Problem:** Southwest Virginia has one of the highest per-capita rates of military service in the country. Many veterans here were exposed to burn pits, industrial toxins, or environmental hazards throughout their service. The PACT Act expanded eligibility and benefits, but access is uneven in rural regions. Veterans in coal communities often must travel hours to reach specialty care, and local Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) are overwhelmed, leading to long wait times and delays in mental health services. Without local navigation support, paperwork, scheduling, and follow-up can become barriers to receiving care. This proposal ensures PACT Act benefits are fully accessible in coal country by bringing care directly into rural communities and staffing local support roles to guide veterans through the process.

### **Key Provisions:**

- Quarterly Mobile Specialty Clinics: Requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to operate mobile specialty clinic teams in every coal county at least once per quarter. Services include PACT toxic exposure screening, pulmonary and cardiac evaluations, cancer monitoring, women's veteran health appointments, and follow-up consultations. Clinic days are held at central community sites such as county courthouses, armories, fire stations, and VFW and American Legion posts. This reduces travel barriers and ensures consistent specialty access.
- Same-Day Mental Health Appointments: Requires all Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs) within the district to provide same-day mental health appointments either in-person or via secure telehealth if clinically appropriate. This prevents veterans experiencing crisis, trauma symptoms, or grief from waiting weeks for care and reduces emergency room utilization.
- County-Based PACT Navigation Officers: Places a trained PACT Navigation Officer in each county seat to assist veterans with:
  - Understanding eligibility and benefits
  - Completing claims and documentation
  - Scheduling screening and follow-up appointments
  - Coordinating transportation if needed
  - Ensuring continuity of care across providersThis position is funded through the VA and coordinated with local veteran service organizations.

### **Impact:**

Reduces delays in diagnosis and treatment for conditions tied to military exposure.

Ensures veterans can access mental health support when they need it, not after a long wait.

Decreases travel burden and out-of-pocket costs for rural veterans.

Improves completion rates for PACT claims and screenings.  
Strengthens trust between veterans and the healthcare system.

**Who Benefits:** Veterans of all service eras, especially those exposed to burn pits and industrial hazards. Rural families of veterans, local employers, service organizations, community mental health providers, and county governments that currently fill care gaps without adequate support.

**Message Summary:** This policy keeps the promise made to veterans in Southwest Virginia. It brings specialty care into coal communities, guarantees timely mental health support, and ensures veterans have someone local to help them navigate the system. It honors service with real access, delivered where people at Home.

## **Addiction Treatment as Healthcare Act**

**Goal:** Treat addiction as a chronic medical condition instead of a criminal issue by ensuring reliable access to medication-assisted treatment, expanding recovery housing connected to real job pathways, and removing delays that prevent people from getting timely care.

**Problem:** Southwest Virginia has faced some of the highest overdose rates in the country. Many families have lost loved ones, and nearly every community has been affected. While medication-assisted treatment (MAT) such as buprenorphine is proven to reduce overdose deaths, many people in CD9 still cannot access it due to pharmacy refusal, transportation barriers, clinic closures, stigma, or insurance delays. Recovery housing in the region is scarce and often disconnected from employment opportunities. At the same time, new mothers experiencing postpartum depression or substance use disorder often struggle to get care, which can lead to family separation rather than support and stabilization. This proposal focuses on stabilizing individuals, rebuilding family structures, and connecting recovery to secure employment. It treats addiction as a medical issue with local solutions.

### **Key Provisions:**

- **Pharmacy-Based Access to Buprenorphine:** Requires retail pharmacies to stock and dispense buprenorphine in accordance with federal law and DEA guidelines. Prevents pharmacy-level refusals that result in patients traveling county-to-county to fill prescriptions. Ensures medication-assisted treatment is available in every community, not only where a specialized clinic operates. Allows primary care providers and community clinics to continue prescribing buprenorphine without unnecessary administrative burden.
- **Recovery Housing Connected to Workforce Training:** Expands Medicaid reimbursement for recovery housing programs that are directly partnered with job training pipelines. Eligible tracks include linemen training programs, CDL licensing, certified nursing assistant (CNA) certification, and machining or industrial trades. Programs must demonstrate employment placement support, skills training, and a sober living environment. This connects recovery with meaningful work, long-term stability, and independence.
- **No Prior Authorization Delays:** Prohibits insurance companies and managed care organizations from requiring prior authorization for medication-assisted treatment or postpartum mental healthcare. Delays in approval often result in relapse, hospitalization, or family separation. Immediate access is medically necessary in both addiction treatment and maternal mental health recovery.

### **Impact:**

Reduces overdose deaths and keeps families intact.

Stabilizes individuals in recovery by connecting treatment to employment.

Strengthens rural workforce participation in essential trades.

Reduces emergency room visits, hospitalization, and incarceration costs.

Improves outcomes for mothers and infants during postpartum recovery.

**Who Benefits:** Individuals in recovery, families affected by addiction, new mothers, rural employers seeking reliable workers, community colleges, workforce training centers, first responders, and rural healthcare providers. Communities benefit from greater stability, reduced trauma, and increased employment.

**Message Summary:** Addiction is a disease, not a moral failure. This policy ensures medication is available where people live, recovery housing is tied to real work opportunities, and care is not delayed by red tape. It helps people rebuild their lives, stay with their families, and return to the workforce. This is how we save lives and restore communities in Southwest Virginia.

# APPALACHIAN INDUSTRIAL & INFRASTRUCTURE REINVESTMENT ACT

**Purpose:** Rebuild real economies in coal, timber, and manufacturing communities through strategic industrial reinvestment and fair infrastructure policy.

Southwest Virginia's economic decline was not inevitable. It was the result of disinvestment, consolidation, and industrial policy that treated rural regions as resource extraction zones rather than places where long-term value is built and retained. As coal employment fell and timber mills closed, there was no coordinated federal strategy to replace those jobs with new forms of work rooted in the skills and capacity of Appalachian communities. Infrastructure funding has flowed unevenly, with large urban and coastal regions capturing most competitive awards while rural counties are expected to do more with shrinking tax bases and limited grant-writing capacity.

The purpose of this Industrial and Infrastructure Reinvestment framework is to reverse that trajectory through targeted federal investment that leverages existing regional advantages: skilled mechanical labor, abundant water and forest resources, strategic rail and highway access, and strong local identity. Instead of chasing "mega-project" promises that rarely materialize for rural regions, this plan prioritizes mid-scale, durable industry and industrial land reuse that matches the natural and workforce strengths of coalfield counties.

Key federal mechanisms include: Inflation Reduction Act §48C Advanced Energy manufacturing credits; Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) funds; Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration Build Back Better and Good Jobs Challenge structures; USDA Rural Development utilities financing; ARC POWER multi-county economic transition grants; and bipartisan IJA infrastructure support for rail, water, and grid modernization.

This plan is grounded in four principles:

1. **Industrial investment must align with workforce reality.** The region has skilled equipment operators, electricians, welders, machinists, surveyors, foresters, linemen, fabricators, and heavy construction and logistics experience. Successful reinvestment builds directly on those capacities—not on imagined labor markets.
2. **Mine land and legacy industrial sites must be prepared for new use.** Former coal and timber sites can be turned into manufacturing pads, logistics hubs, workforce housing, and training centers if reclamation dollars are tied to industrial readiness and local hiring.
3. **Infrastructure policy must be fair and transparent.** Rural residents cannot shoulder the cost of power infrastructure expansions for data centers and utility-scale facilities located elsewhere. Cost allocation must reflect use, not geography.

4. **Manufacturing must be rooted in the region to last.** Short-term, speculative development cycles do not build stable economies. Durable economies come from supply chain integration, regionally aligned industrial clusters, and training-to-employment pipelines located where people live.

Rebuilding the economic foundation of Southwest Virginia requires using federal tools with precision and intention. The goal is not to restore the past, but to build a future where families can work, learn, and stay rooted. Real reinvestment means wages that support households, industry that belongs here, and infrastructure built for the long-term stability of Appalachian communities.

## Mine Land to Manufacturing & Housing Act

**Goal:** Reclaim former mine land for productive use by preparing shovel-ready industrial sites, workforce housing, and essential water and sewer infrastructure while ensuring that reclamation work creates jobs for local residents.

**Problem:** Southwest Virginia has thousands of acres of former mine land sitting idle. These properties often have road access, cleared grading, and proximity to existing power lines, but they are not ready for business development or housing because they lack water, sewer, or site preparation. At the same time, reclamation work is frequently awarded to out-of-state contractors who perform the minimum required cleanup and leave without contributing to long-term economic development. Communities lose twice: land that could support jobs remains unused, and local workers do not benefit from the cleanup process.

This proposal turns mine land from abandoned liability into economic opportunity by preparing sites for manufacturing, skilled trades, regional logistics, and housing development, while ensuring hiring benefits local workers.

### Key Provisions:

#### Industrial and Housing-Ready Site Development

Directs IJJA Abandoned Mine Land (AML) and AMLER economic transition funding to prepare former mine lands for new uses. Eligible projects include:

- Grading and pad development for industrial or fabrication facilities
- Construction of water and sewer lines to support business and housing growth
- Preparation of land for workforce and mixed-income housing within existing town limits  
Projects must demonstrate that the site can reasonably support employment or housing within two to five years of funding.

**Local Hiring Requirements:** Requires that companies and contractors performing reclamation and site preparation employ a defined minimum percentage of workers from the region. Local hiring requirements apply to skilled trades, equipment operators, engineering technicians, and labor positions. Veterans and workers previously employed in mining or logging receive priority access to training slots.

**Apprenticeship Integration:** Ties reclamation and site preparation contracts to registered apprenticeship opportunities. Contractors must create or partner with apprenticeship programs to train workers in heavy equipment operation, surveying, environmental restoration, welding, linemen training, and construction trades. This ensures that cleanup work also functions as on-the-job training that leads directly into long-term employment.

**Impact:**

Transforms unused mine land into locations where businesses and housing can realistically be built.

Creates stable, skilled trade employment for residents who want to work in the region.

Supports manufacturing and small-scale fabrication growth in counties that currently lack prepared industrial sites.

Expands the housing supply in communities facing workforce shortages and limited rental availability.

Strengthens local tax bases rather than allowing economic value to leave the region.

**Who Benefits:** Former miners seeking good jobs, young workers entering the skilled trades, local contractors, community colleges, county industrial development authorities, housing authorities, and families who want to live and work close to home. Local businesses and manufacturers benefit from having viable sites to expand on.

**Message Summary:** This policy turns abandoned mine land into places where people can work and live. It ensures that cleanup dollars create local jobs and apprenticeships and that land repurposing leads to real economic development. It is about rebuilding communities from the ground up and keeping opportunity rooted in Southwest Virginia.

## Advanced Manufacturing Anchors Act

**Goal:** Bring long-term, good-paying manufacturing jobs back to coal and mountain communities by prioritizing Southwest Virginia for federal advanced-energy manufacturing incentives and focusing on industries that match the skills of the local workforce.

**Problem:** Southwest Virginia has the workforce, land, and energy infrastructure required for small and mid-scale manufacturing, but most federal incentives flow to metropolitan regions or large corporate projects. The Inflation Reduction Act created §48C tax credits and Energy-Community bonus eligibility designed to support regions transitioning away from coal. However, without intentional prioritization and local project planning, these dollars may bypass CD9. At the same time, the workforce in CD9 is well-suited for industries that require mechanical, technical, forestry, electrical, and precision operating skills. Aligning federal incentives with industries that fit the region's existing strengths is essential for job growth and community stability.

This proposal ensures that advanced manufacturing investment lands in Southwest Virginia and that job creation aligns with local training pathways and existing skill sets.

### Key Provisions:

- Priority Eligibility for §48C and Energy-Community Credits  
Directs the Department of Energy and Treasury to prioritize CD9 counties for §48C Advanced Energy Project Credits and Energy-Community bonus eligibility. Applies to small and mid-scale manufacturers rather than megaprojects. This ensures tax incentives support manufacturing growth rooted in local communities instead of being absorbed by large outside developers.
- Targeted Industry Development  
Encourages and supports manufacturing projects in four industry areas aligned with local workforce capabilities and natural resources:
  - Grid hardware and transformer component production to support national energy reliability
  - Timber and wood-based value-added production, including engineered wood products and furniture fabrication
  - Cold-chain, meat processing, and regional food distribution infrastructure to support local livestock and agriculture
  - Precision machining, surveying, and digital mapping technology for construction, utilities, and transportation sectors  
These sectors build on existing skills and strengthen long-term economic independence.

**Local Project Readiness and Site Support:** Works with county industrial development authorities to identify and prepare development sites, especially those connected to reclaimed mine land, existing substations, rail corridors, and four-lane access. Provides technical

assistance to manufacturers in navigating the §48C application process, environmental permitting, and workforce planning.

**Impact:**

Creates stable, year-round manufacturing jobs in communities that have lost coal and timber employment.

Strengthens tax bases for counties that have experienced declining revenue.

Builds industrial diversity to reduce regional economic vulnerability.

Supports existing community college and apprenticeship training pipelines.

Increases local control over economic development priorities and land use.

**Who Benefits:** Skilled trades workers, high school and community college graduates entering technical careers, former coal and timber workers, small manufacturers, industrial development authorities, and local businesses supported by manufacturing payrolls.

**Message Summary:** This policy brings manufacturing back to Southwest Virginia by focusing on industries our workforce can step into today. It directs federal investment to the counties that earned it and ensures that new industrial growth strengthens local economies instead of bypassing them. This is about building jobs that stay in our region and support our families.

## **Transmission and Data-Center Cost Fairness Act**

**Goal:** Protect households, small businesses, schools, and local governments in Southwest Virginia from rising electricity costs by requiring transparent planning, fair cost allocation, and ensuring that large industrial power users pay for the grid upgrades they drive.

**Problem:** Electricity demand is increasing rapidly in Virginia due to large data centers and industrial facilities concentrated in other regions of the state. Without safeguards, the cost of new transmission lines, substations, and reliability upgrades needed to support this growth can be shifted onto ratepayers in rural regions, even when the power demand is not coming from these communities. Families and businesses in CD9 already struggle with high energy burdens relative to income. If grid infrastructure costs are not fairly assigned, electric bills in Southwest Virginia could rise without bringing any associated job or economic benefit to the region.

This proposal ensures that the cost of new demand is carried by the users that generate it, not by rural households or local governments.

### **Key Provisions:**

- **County-Level Cost Impact Reporting:** Requires PJM Interconnection, the regional grid operator, to publish clear county-level bill impact statements before approving interconnection requests for large new loads such as data centers, major industrial sites, and multi-state transmission projects. Local governments and residents must be informed when decisions could raise their power bills. This restores transparency and accountability.
- **Fair Cost Allocation for Large Power Consumers:** Ensures that data centers and other high-demand industrial users pay for the grid upgrades directly resulting from their energy needs. Prohibits shifting these infrastructure costs onto residential and small business ratepayers in areas that do not benefit from the facility's job creation or tax revenue. Protects rural consumers from subsidizing growth elsewhere.
- **Transparent Long-Range Transmission Planning:** Enforces Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Order 1920-A, which requires 20-year regional transmission planning. Mandates that utilities and grid operators evaluate the cost and benefits of grid upgrades over time rather than through short-term, incremental expansion. This prevents reactionary spending and supports smarter, long-term investment decisions.

### **Impact:**

Prevents unnecessary increases in monthly electricity bills for families, farmers, and small businesses in Southwest Virginia.

Supports stable local government budgets by preventing sudden increases in school and public service utility costs.

Encourages responsible siting and development of power-intensive industries by making costs transparent and fair.

Strengthens public trust in utility regulation and regional grid planning.

**Who Benefits:** Rural families, seniors on fixed incomes, farmers, small businesses, school systems, county governments, and local industries that depend on predictable energy costs. Communities across CD9 that should not be paying for infrastructure built to serve growth elsewhere.

**Message Summary:** This policy makes energy pricing fair. It stops rural communities from being forced to subsidize power costs for large data centers and industrial users in other parts of the state. It ensures that those who drive demand pay for the expansion needed to support it. This is about protecting household budgets, preserving local economies, and keeping Southwest Virginia's energy affordable.

## **Last-Mile Rural Broadband and Affordability Act**

**Goal:** Ensure every home, farm, business, and school in Southwest Virginia has affordable, reliable high-speed internet by directing funding to the hardest-to-reach hollows first, restoring broadband affordability support, and expanding school-based connectivity options.

**Problem:** Many communities in Southwest Virginia still lack access to reliable high-speed internet, particularly in mountain hollows and ridge communities where the cost of building fiber is higher and the terrain is more complex. In some counties, coverage maps claim connectivity exists where it does not. Families may live within a few miles of major fiber lines yet remain unserved because providers have prioritized dense or higher-profit markets first. Students in CD9 often complete homework in parking lots, at libraries, or from cars parked near public Wi-Fi. When the federal connectivity credit expired, many households saw their internet bills increase to unaffordable levels. Without intervention, the digital divide in Appalachia will widen, limiting education, jobs, telehealth, and economic development.

This proposal focuses on finishing the job: building the last mile, connecting the homes left behind, and making service affordable enough for families to use it.

### **Key Provisions:**

- Last-Mile Construction First: Requires that Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funds in Virginia be directed first to unserved hollows, ridgelines, and dispersed rural settlements rather than neighborhoods already served by cable or fixed wireless. Prioritizes fiber buildout to locations where connectivity is necessary for work, school, telehealth, and agricultural operations. Ensures that homes marked incorrectly as “served” on FCC maps are re-evaluated and corrected based on local verification.
- Restored Federal Connectivity Credit: Re-establishes a \$30 per month federal broadband affordability credit for low-income households and students. This helps ensure that broadband is not only available but usable. Restores cost stability for families, seniors, and workers who rely on internet access for remote employment, telemedicine, and education.
- School and Community Wi-Fi Access: Reinstates E-Rate eligibility for Wi-Fi hotspots, book-mobile routers, and bus-based connectivity programs. Allows rural school divisions to equip school buses, libraries, and community centers with reliable Wi-Fi to support students who live in areas still awaiting fiber buildout. This ensures no student is left behind during the transition period between planning and construction.

### **Impact:**

Connects the remaining unserved homes and hollows across Southwest Virginia.

Reduces the financial burden of internet service on working families and seniors.

Supports telehealth access for chronic care, mental health, and veterans.

Helps students complete homework without traveling to find signal.

Strengthens economic development by making remote work feasible in rural communities.

**Who Benefits:** Students, families, farmers, small businesses, remote workers, seniors using telehealth, schools, county governments, and local employers who need a connected workforce. Broadband providers benefit from a clear buildout plan and reliable cost-share framework.

**Message Summary:** This policy finishes the job of connecting rural Appalachia. It brings high-speed internet to the hollows that have been left out, restores affordability so families can actually use the service, and supports students while infrastructure is being built. Reliable broadband is not a luxury; it is essential for work, healthcare, education, and the future of Southwest Virginia.

# MARKET AFFORDABILITY: SOUTHWEST COST-OF-LIVING PROTECTION ACT

**Purpose:** Lower power bills, expand rural housing options, and stabilize grocery access.

The cost of living in Southwest Virginia is shaped less by consumer spending and more by the structural realities of rural life: higher transportation costs, limited housing supply, utility rate pressures, and grocery access constrained by distance and declining retail presence. When national inflation rises, rural communities feel it faster and harder, particularly where wages have not kept pace and where there are fewer market competitors for housing, groceries, or utilities. These challenges are not the result of individual choices—they are the outcome of market consolidation, underinvestment, and regulatory frameworks that do not reflect the conditions of Appalachian counties.

Lower-income families, seniors, and working households often live on fixed financial margins. A \$40 increase in a power bill or a \$60 increase in a weekly grocery bill can determine whether a family makes rent, heats their home, or pays for medication. Housing supply is constrained by outdated USDA loan caps, lack of workforce housing near job centers, and water and sewer limitations in hollows and ridge communities. Meanwhile, grocery access is vulnerable to store consolidation and supply chain fragility—conditions that worsen during federal budget uncertainty or shutdowns, when food assistance and retailer reimbursements may be delayed.

This Cost-of-Living Protection framework uses federal tools already on the books—USDA Rural Development housing programs, federal energy regulatory authority, SNAP purchasing protections, and regional supply chain grants—to stabilize household budgets and make it possible for families to stay and build their lives in Southwest Virginia.

This strategy is grounded in three core commitments:

- 1. Energy must remain affordable for households, schools, and small businesses.**  
Transmission and large-load grid upgrades should not be financed through rural ratepayers when the energy demand comes from facilities outside the region. Community-scale energy storage and transparent rate impact assessments are necessary for protecting household budgets.
- 2. Housing must match rural workforce realities.**  
Workforce housing, main street rehabilitation, and septic-to-sewer infrastructure support are required to expand supply and keep communities livable. Federal housing programs must reflect the inflation-adjusted cost of construction and renovation in rural markets.
- 3. Grocery access is an infrastructure issue, not a retail convenience.**  
Local food supply chains, cold storage networks, and grocery continuity planning must be supported at the federal level to ensure that no community becomes a food desert due to market consolidation or administrative funding lapses.

Ensuring that the cost of living remains manageable in Southwest Virginia is not a short-term relief program. It is a strategy for community stability, workforce retention, and regional resilience. When families can afford to stay, work, and raise children here, communities remain whole—and the region has the foundation it needs to grow.

## **Fair Power & Local Resilience Act**

**Goal:** Lower power bills for families, farms, schools, and small businesses in Southwest Virginia by investing in community energy resilience and requiring full transparency around how large industrial users affect local electricity rates.

**Problem:** Electricity costs in Southwest Virginia are already high relative to average household income, and many families live on fixed or limited wage budgets. When the power grid experiences high demand, especially during extreme heat or cold, utilities charge higher peak rates. Rural schools, county governments, volunteer fire departments, small businesses, and working families often absorb these extra costs. At the same time, large new power users such as data centers or industrial facilities can trigger expensive substation or transmission upgrades, and those costs can be passed down to residential customers without clear public explanation. Rural communities should not be forced to subsidize higher energy demand from outside the region.

This proposal strengthens local energy independence and prevents unfair cost burdens on CD9 ratepayers.

### Key Provisions:

- **Community Battery Banks:** Supports the installation of shared battery storage systems at schools, fire stations, water treatment facilities, and county vehicle garages. These community battery sites store electricity when rates are low and release it when rates rise, reducing the impact of peak pricing. Battery banks also keep essential services running during outages, protecting rural emergency response and continuity of care. Local governments, co-ops, and school divisions are eligible to apply for support.
- **Transparent Rate Impact Disclosure:** Requires utilities and grid operators to provide clear, county-level disclosure of projected rate changes before approving new large-load interconnections such as data centers or industrial facilities. Communities need to know whether a proposed project will raise local power bills, and whether the economic benefits outweigh the cost. This allows counties to make informed decisions when offering zoning approval or local incentives.
- **Fair Cost Allocation for Large Users:** Ensures that high-demand customers pay their fair share of the grid upgrades required to serve them. Prevents shifting infrastructure costs to rural households or small businesses when the primary beneficiaries are large industrial users. This protects local ratepayers from hidden increases.

### Impact:

Reduces monthly electricity costs for families, farms, and small businesses in Southwest Virginia.

Strengthens emergency resilience for schools, fire departments, and critical county services.

Protects rural communities from subsidizing growth elsewhere in the state.

Supports long-term energy stability and local planning.

**Who Benefits:** Rural households, seniors on fixed incomes, small businesses, farmers, volunteer fire stations, school districts, county governments, and local employers that depend on stable and affordable energy. Communities gain independence and predictability in energy management.

**Message Summary:** This policy puts Southwest Virginia ratepayers first. It lowers power costs by investing in local energy storage and makes sure that big users, not rural families, pay for the grid upgrades they require. It protects household budgets and strengthens community resilience across CD9.

## **Rural Housing Reinvestment Act**

**Goal:** Increase access to safe, affordable housing in Southwest Virginia by updating federal loan programs to reflect current construction costs, supporting the rehabilitation of existing buildings, and improving water and sewer infrastructure where lack of utilities prevents new housing development.

**Problem:** Housing shortages are growing across Southwest Virginia. Many towns have vacant buildings that could be converted into apartments, but financing is difficult because federal loan caps have not kept up with construction costs. In rural areas, especially in hollows and ridge communities, the absence of reliable water and sewer infrastructure prevents any new housing construction. Meanwhile, young workers, families, seniors, and essential workers often struggle to find stable housing near jobs, schools, and healthcare. Without housing, communities cannot retain workforce or support economic growth.

This proposal focuses on making existing communities livable, revitalizing town centers, and overcoming infrastructure barriers that block new homes from being built.

### **Key Provisions:**

- Updated USDA 502 Loan Caps: Expands Section 502 Direct and Guaranteed loan limits to reflect real construction and renovation costs in rural markets. Allows working families, first-time homebuyers, teachers, nurses, veterans, and other essential workers to finance homes in their communities. Helps stabilize school enrollment and local workforce retention by making housing attainable within the county.
- Rural Rehab-First Lending Pilot: Creates a financing program for converting unused or underutilized buildings into workforce housing. Eligible projects include upper floors of main street commercial buildings, former schools or municipal buildings, and small motels that can be renovated into apartments. Streamlines approval and encourages partnerships with local housing authorities, counties, and small developers. This keeps historic town centers active and prevents further decline of rural downtowns.
- Septic-to-Sewer Infrastructure Support: Simplifies and accelerates grant funding for rural water and sewer upgrades in hollows where private septic systems are failing or land conditions prevent installation. Unlocks sites that cannot currently support any new housing. Provides technical assistance to counties to navigate engineering, permitting, and cost-sharing requirements.

### **Impact:**

Expands affordable, workforce, and senior housing options in rural communities.

Revitalizes main street buildings and prevents further blight and vacancy.

Keeps local workforce close to job centers, schools, clinics, and family networks.

Removes infrastructure barriers that have stalled new home development for decades.

Supports small-town economic resilience and stable population growth.

**Who Benefits:** Local workers, young families, seniors, returning residents, teachers, nurses, county and school staff, small businesses, and local governments that rely on a stable residential base. Community colleges and employers benefit when students and workers have housing close to training sites and jobs.

**Message Summary:** Housing is the foundation of community stability. This policy invests in the homes and towns we already have, makes it possible for local residents to stay and build their lives here, and ensures that our hollows and main streets remain places where families can live with dignity. It strengthens communities from the inside out.

## **Food Security Through Regional Supply Act**

**Goal:** Ensure that families in Southwest Virginia have consistent access to healthy and affordable food by protecting SNAP purchasing power, strengthening local and regional food supply chains, and preventing grocery access disruptions during funding gaps or economic emergencies.

**Problem:** Many communities in Southwest Virginia have limited access to full-service grocery stores. When stores close or consolidate, families often must travel long distances to buy basic groceries. Rising food prices, limited transportation, workforce shortages in food retail, and supply chain disruptions make access even more difficult. At the same time, local farmers and livestock producers often sell their products out of the region because there are not enough processing, cold storage, or distribution facilities nearby. This means food is produced here, shipped away, processed elsewhere, and sold back at higher prices. When federal food benefit programs lapse or become uncertain, rural families and local grocery retailers are placed at heightened risk.

This proposal strengthens both sides of the food system: family access and regional agricultural distribution.

### **Key Provisions:**

- **Protect SNAP Purchasing Power:** Ensures that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits maintain their buying value in all budget negotiations. Prevents cuts or benefit reductions that would fall hardest on rural families, seniors, and children. Recognizes that rural grocery prices are often higher than those in urban centers, making consistent SNAP support essential for both nutrition and economic stability.
- **Regional Cold-Chain and Delivery Infrastructure:** Funds cold-chain logistics hubs, small-scale processing facilities, and regional distribution networks through USDA Rural Development programs and ARC POWER. Supports local grocery stores, community markets, schools, hospitals, and senior centers in sourcing food from local farms. Enables grocery delivery or mobile market routes in communities where full-service stores are no longer viable. Helps ensure that food grown in Appalachia is sold and eaten here.
- **Food Access Continuity Reporting:** Requires USDA to track and publicly report rural grocery access during federal funding lapses, shutdowns, or emergency conditions. Ensures counties are not left without essential supply during disruptions. Provides states and localities with clarity to coordinate food assistance, mobile market services, and nonprofit support during uncertain funding periods.

### **Impact:**

Reduces food insecurity and improves nutrition for children, seniors, and working families. Strengthens local grocery stores and prevents closures in small towns. Keeps more food system revenue circulating within the region.

Supports farmers, livestock producers, processors, and rural supply chain workers.  
Improves regional resilience against supply disruptions and national price shocks.

**Who Benefits:** Families, children, seniors, veterans, farmers, ranchers, grocery store owners, local markets, school meal programs, health clinics, community colleges, and small businesses that depend on stable regional food supply systems.

**Message Summary:** Food security is community security. This policy protects family food budgets, strengthens local grocery and distribution systems, and keeps Appalachian-grown food in Appalachian communities. It ensures that no hollow, no ridge community, and no small town is cut off from the food supply. It is about stability, dignity, and taking care of our own.

## **EDUCATION: APPALACHIAN SKILLS & DIGNITY OF WORK ACT**

**Purpose:** Build clear pathways from education to employment in Southwest Virginia by guaranteeing that training leads to local jobs, stabilizing the K–12 and early childhood workforce, and treating childcare and schools as core economic infrastructure.

Southwest Virginia has the workforce. What we lack is a system that connects education, training, and employment in a reliable and predictable way. High school students in CTE programs learn trade skills, but too often find that apprenticeships are limited or require relocation. Community colleges train welders, linemen, CNAs, surveyors, and machinists, but local employers frequently hire contractors from outside the region. At the same time, school divisions struggle to recruit and retain the teachers, bus drivers, early childhood educators, and instructional support staff who make education possible. Families cannot participate fully in the workforce if they cannot secure reliable childcare. The result is a fractured system in which talent leaves the region, employers face chronic vacancies, and communities lose young families.

This Act aligns federal economic development spending, public education, and workforce preparation into one coordinated pipeline, ensuring that opportunity stays rooted in the region that built it.

This approach uses existing federal authority. Section 48C manufacturing credits, AMLER mine land reinvestment, ARC POWER transition grants, Perkins V CTE funding, WIOA apprenticeship support, USDA Community Facilities financing, and Head Start and Early Head Start frameworks are not new. The problem is that they are not currently linked to local hiring guarantees, and they are not designed to keep students, families, and workers in the region. This plan fixes that.

The Appalachian Skills & Dignity of Work Act is built on three commitments:

1. Education and apprenticeship programs must lead to local job placement, not training for work elsewhere.  
If taxpayer dollars support manufacturing, broadband, construction, forestry, or healthcare infrastructure in Southwest Virginia, then Southwest Virginians must be the ones hired to build and staff that work.
2. Public schools and childcare centers are workforce infrastructure, not secondary services.  
Teacher residency incentives, rural service stipends for early childhood educators, and support for childcare center startup staffing allow parents to work and communities to retain families.
3. Workers deserve the ability to build a life in the place they call home.  
When job pathways are predictable and rooted locally, young people can stay, returning

workers can come home, and families can build stable futures here.

This is a regional strategy to end the cycle of “train our people to leave” and replace it with “train our people to lead.” It links classrooms to apprenticeships, apprenticeships to employers, and employers to long-term economic stability in Southwest Virginia. It treats work with dignity, education with purpose, and community with permanence.

## **Apprenticeships Tied to Actual Local Jobs Act**

**Goal:** Ensure that federal economic development dollars in Southwest Virginia result in real, local employment by requiring on-the-job training opportunities and guaranteed hiring pathways for residents, students, and workers already living in the region.

**Problem:** Southwest Virginia has strong work ethic, skilled hands, and generations of experience in mechanical, industrial, forestry, energy, and construction trades. However, too many federal and state-funded projects hire labor from outside the region or use temporary work crews that leave once the project is complete. At the same time, high school students and community college graduates often struggle to find apprenticeships that lead to stable jobs without relocating. This disconnect drives young people away, weakens the local workforce pipeline, and prevents rural communities from capturing the full economic benefit of infrastructure and redevelopment projects.

This proposal ensures that new investment builds long-term employment capacity inside CD9.

### **Key Provisions:**

- **Local Hiring and Apprenticeship Requirements:** Requires recipients of major federal economic development funding streams—such as §48C manufacturing credits, Abandoned Mine Land (AML and AMLER) reclamation funds, ARC POWER grants, and USDA ReConnect broadband buildout funds—to maintain minimum local hiring and apprenticeship ratios. Contractors and developers must train and employ workers from the region, not rely solely on outside labor crews. Enforcement is tied to project reporting and continued funding eligibility.
- **CTE to Apprenticeship to Job Pipeline:** Creates a regional training and placement system linking high school Career and Technical Education programs, community college certificate and associate programs, and registered apprenticeships directly to job slots on federally supported projects. This includes trades such as welding, linework, CDL, construction, electrical work, timber processing, surveying, machining, and industrial maintenance. Students who complete training have prioritized access to apprenticeships and job placements in their own counties.
- **Career Paths That Stay Local:** Ensures that training leads to employment located in Southwest Virginia—not job offers requiring workers to relocate to other regions or states. Helps keep young workers, returning veterans, and skilled tradespeople rooted in the communities where they live, raise families, and contribute to the local economy.

### **Impact:**

Keeps federal investment circulating inside the region.

Provides direct job entry points for students and working-age adults.

Strengthens skilled trade capacity across CD9.

Reduces outward migration of young workers.

Improves wages and job stability in construction, manufacturing, and infrastructure sectors.

**Who Benefits:** High school CTE students, community college students, returning residents, skilled trades workers, veterans, small contractors, rural manufacturers, local governments, and families who want economic opportunity to exist close to home.

**Message Summary:** Economic development only matters if the jobs stay here. This policy guarantees that when taxpayer dollars are spent on infrastructure, manufacturing, broadband, or reclamation in Southwest Virginia, the work is done by Southwest Virginians. It builds career paths that start in our schools and end in stable jobs in our communities. This is about keeping talent, wages, and opportunity rooted in CD9.

## Rural Schools Support and Teacher Retention Act

**Goal:** Strengthen the instructional workforce and educational stability of rural school districts in Southwest Virginia by improving teacher recruitment and retention, modernizing student transportation systems, and expanding federally supported career and technical education pathways that lead directly to in-district employment.

**Problem:** Rural school divisions in Southwest Virginia face persistent teacher vacancies, particularly in special education, math, science, and early literacy. Federal Title I and IDEA funding formulas do not fully reflect the higher per-student operating costs of sparsely populated districts. Additionally, school consolidations and long-distance bus routes reduce instructional time and place undue burden on students and families. Meanwhile, existing CTE and apprenticeship programs lack direct federal incentives to require local job placement, leading to out-migration of trained students.

This proposal uses federal authority and funding to stabilize the educator workforce and ensure that rural students can access education and career pathways where they live.

### Key Provisions:

- Rural Teacher Residency and Service Incentives: Amends the Higher Education Act to establish a Rural Educator Service Scholarship. Provides up to four years of tuition assistance and cost-of-living stipends for teacher candidates who complete state licensure and commit to serving in a federally designated rural school district in Southwest Virginia for a minimum of four years. Priority given to special education, STEM, and early childhood educators. Enforcement handled through service-year credit or prorated repayment.
- Adjusted Federal Funding Formulas for Rural Cost Structures: Directs the Department of Education to revise Title I, Title II, and IDEA per-pupil allocations in districts with low population density and high transportation demands. Enables rural districts to receive supplemental formula adjustments tied to student travel time, geographic isolation, and staff recruitment costs. Maintains current eligibility while improving stability.
- CTE and Registered Apprenticeship Pathway Requirements: Updates Perkins V and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) local plan requirements to include guaranteed placement agreements with registered apprenticeship sponsors and employers in Southwest Virginia. Ensures that career and technical education courses lead to in-district employment opportunities in sectors such as healthcare, construction trades, manufacturing, forestry, public safety, and broadband deployment.
- Rural Student Transportation Modernization Grants: Authorizes a dedicated competitive grant under the Department of Education's Student Support and Academic Enrichment program to:
  - Reduce excessive bus route duration
  - Upgrade school bus fleets, including electric or hybrid replacements where feasible

- Develop community hub pickup models in low-density areas  
Priority given to school divisions where average student travel time exceeds state median travel times.

**Impact:**

Reduces chronic teacher vacancy rates in rural divisions.

Improves instructional time and student well-being by reducing extreme commute duration.

Aligns high school CTE coursework with real job opportunities in the region.

Strengthens local workforce pipelines, supporting economic development efforts tied to manufacturing, healthcare, infrastructure, and skilled trades.

Provides predictable federal support rather than short-term grant dependence.

**Who Benefits:** Students, teachers, school divisions, local employers, community colleges, and rural communities that rely on stable public education systems as a foundation for economic sustainability.

**Message Summary:** This legislation recognizes that rural education is national infrastructure. It invests in teachers who commit to our communities, modernizes school transportation to match Appalachian geography, and ensures that career training leads to real employment here in Southwest Virginia. It keeps opportunity rooted where people live.

## **Childcare as Workforce Infrastructure Act**

**Goal:** Treat childcare as essential economic infrastructure in Southwest Virginia by expanding federal support for renovating and establishing childcare centers and by creating incentives to retain qualified childcare workers in rural communities.

**Problem:** A shortage of affordable, reliable childcare limits workforce participation in Southwest Virginia. Families often face long waitlists, irregular hours of operation, or lack of available slots entirely. Small towns and rural counties frequently rely on informal care arrangements because startup and staffing costs prevent new centers from opening. At the same time, childcare workers receive low wages relative to the training and responsibilities required, contributing to high turnover and unstable care availability. Without reliable childcare, parents cannot work, employers cannot retain staff, and local economies struggle to grow.

This proposal supports childcare as a foundation of workforce participation and economic stability.

### **Key Provisions:**

- Expanded USDA Community Facilities Eligibility: This ensures rural childcare providers can access the same level of capital support that libraries, fire stations, and community clinics currently receive. Amends USDA Community Facilities Program guidance to explicitly include:
  - Renovation of existing buildings for childcare use
  - Construction of small childcare centers in rural town centers
  - Conversion of faith-based or municipal buildings for licensed early learning programs
  - Initial staffing and administrative setup costs for new centers during the first 24–36 months of operation
- Rural Childcare Workforce Service Stipends  
Creates a federal service stipend program for licensed childcare workers who commit to working in rural counties for 2–4 years. Stipends help stabilize wages, reduce turnover, and make childcare careers financially viable. Priority is given to workers serving infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities, where staffing shortages are most acute.
- Local Eligibility and Administration: Childcare centers, Head Start and Early Head Start providers, school-based preschool programs, family childcare home networks, and nonprofit childcare operators in federally designated rural counties are eligible. Funds may flow through county governments, regional education agencies, or qualified local organizations.

### **Impact:**

Increases availability of childcare slots for working families.

Stabilizes childcare staffing to ensure consistent, reliable care.

Supports workforce participation, especially for women and single parents.

Strengthens local employer recruitment and retention.

Reuses existing buildings and anchors childcare within community centers, towns, and neighborhoods.

**Who Benefits:** Parents seeking stable employment, children needing early development support, childcare workers, employers, local governments, and small towns aiming to retain families and grow local economies.

**Message Summary:** Childcare is not just a social service. It is core economic infrastructure. When families have stable childcare, they can work. When employers have workers, communities can grow. This policy supports the centers that care for our children and ensures those who do this essential work can afford to stay in our communities.