

**SENATE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CITY, COUNTY, & LOCAL AFFAIRS
HOUSE INTERIM COMMITTEE ON CITY, COUNTY, & LOCAL AFFAIRS**

MEETING JOINTLY

TUESDAY, MAY 19, 2015

MINUTES

Senate and House Interim Committees on City, County, and Local Affairs met Tuesday, May 19, 2015 at 2:00 p.m. in the Pope Room, at the Statehouse Convention Center, Little Rock, Arkansas. The meeting was held during the 2015 annual Arkansas Rural Development Conference (ARDC).

Committee members present were Representatives Betty Overbey, House Chair, Mary Bentley, Charles Blake, Justin Boyd, Jana Della Rosa, Lance Eads, Les Eaves, Kenneth Ferguson, David Fielding, Justin Gonzales, Michael John Gray, Ken Henderson, Milton Nicks, Jr., Warwick Sabin, Tim Lemons, and Senators Linda Collins-Smith, Stephanie Flowers, and Greg Standridge.

Other legislators attending were Senators Alan Clark, Bill Sample, and Gary Stubblefield.

Call to Order

Representative Overbey called the meeting to order. She asked the legislators to introduce themselves.

Opening Remarks – Senator Missy Irvin, and Representative Betty Overbey, Committee Chairs

Senator Irvin was unable to attend the meeting. Representative Overbey recognized Representative Mary Bentley, Vice Chair, who announced a meeting she is hosting at 9:00 a.m., Wednesday, May 20, 2015 in the Pope Room to discuss the "Farm to School Program". She said the program will help local farmers financially by encouraging them to sell their produce to local schools, giving them a new market. This program will help provide fresh produce to students.

Overview of AR Department of Rural Services – Programs and Grants

Representative Overbey recognized Ms. Alex Johnston, the new Director of the Arkansas Department of Rural Services (ADRS). Ms. Johnston introduced Ms. Amy Fecher, former Director, ADRS, who gave an agency update. Ms. Fecher said the ADRS has physically moved its offices from the Main Street Mall Building to the fourth floor of the Economic Development Building at 900 West Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Ms. Fecher said that Governor Hutchinson recently appointed her as a Deputy Director, Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and Ms. Johnston as the new Director for the ADRS. Ms. Fecher believes the change will help ADRS and AEDC broaden services to rural Arkansas, assisted by the collaboration between the two agencies.

Ms. Johnston referenced a handout with a summary of the department's programs [Handout 1]. She gave an overview of the ADRS's programs and stated that the

department receives state and federal funding, which it then provides to communities in the form of grants. The grants are distributed to communities with populations of less than 3,000 and are for community development projects and fire protection projects. She stated that projects include:

- The purchase of new fire trucks
- Renovations to fire stations
- Community Center renovations
- Installation of storm sirens

Ms. Johnston said the department also receives General Improvement Funds (GIF), which they will begin receiving July 1, 2015. The GIF funds expand the scope of projects the department can provide. The GIF funding increases the population requirements up to a maximum of 20,000.

Ms. Johnston described two new programs the department will initiate beginning July 1, 2015. First is a partnership with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission (AGFC), which will allow the department to receive monies that AGFC collects in the form of fines. The department will distribute the funds back to the counties where the fines were collected to be used for educational programs. ADRS is currently working with AGFC to write rules and regulations to govern the program. Amy Fecher stated this an existing program, which was previously administered by the Arkansas Department of Education, but will now be administered by ADRS.

A second new partnership program between ADRS and the Arkansas Nature Conservancy is for an "Unpaved Roads Program", a public/private partnership. It was created through legislation sponsored by Senator Missy Irvin, Senate Chair, City, County, and Local Affairs Committee, during the 90th General Session. The program will provide funds to counties to repair roads located in conservation districts and watershed areas. The rules and regulations for this program are currently being written. Ms. Fecher said that program partners include Arkansas Farm Bureau, the Arkansas Forestry Commission, and AGFC.

Ms. Fecher provided an overview of upcoming workshops and meetings that will be held during the conference. See below.

Wednesday, May 21, 2015

9:30 a.m. Healthcare in Rural Arkansas and Emergency Preparedness and Recovery
10:00 a.m. Agriculture, Forestry, and Economic Development legislative committee meeting

Thursday, May 22, 2015

9:00 a.m. Farm to School meeting hosted by Representative Bentley
10:30 a.m. City, County, and Local Affairs Legislative Committee meeting
11:30 a.m. Governor's luncheon and awards ceremony

Representative Overbey encouraged legislators to attend as many of the meetings as possible.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.