House Bill 1418

By: Representative Beverly of the 143rd

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

To amend Chapter 8 of Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Department of Community Affairs, so as to create the Office of Urban Affairs; to provide for definitions; to provide for the powers and duties of such office; to provide for the position of director of such office; to provide the duties of the director; to require agencies of state and local government to cooperate and assist the director in the performance of his or her duties; to provide for related matters; to provide legislative findings; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

The General Assembly finds and declares that:

(1) Urban areas of this state are facing a myriad of unique and significant challenges, some of which are particularly pronounced in cities such as Atlanta, Savannah, Augusta, and Macon. These challenges often stem from population density, economic disparities, and the infrastructure needs of a large, diverse population and include, but are not limited to:

(A) Rising costs of housing and gentrification that threaten to displace long-time residents and that make it difficult for low-income and middle-income individuals and families to find affordable housing;

(B) Heavy traffic congestion that leads to lower quality of life and increased pollution;

(C) Economic disparities that have resulted in pockets of extreme poverty and areas of relative prosperity or even great wealth existing in close proximity;

(D) High rates of crime and negative interactions between police and citizens;

(E) Disparities in the quality of education and in access to educational opportunities and resources;

(F) Disparities in access to quality healthcare, particularly for minority and low-income populations;

(G) Pollution, poor air quality, and lack of accessible green spaces;

(H) Needed maintenance and upgrades to infrastructure to keep pace with growing populations;

(I) Homelessness and the need for social services to support vulnerable populations; and

(J) Continued lack of access to reliable, high-speed internet that is vitally important to education, employment, and access to services and programs;

(2) While agencies and programs now exist for the purposes of addressing these challenges, such agencies and programs often fail to act in concert with each other and are often designed to operate independently of each other and, as a result, do not provide a holistic approach to these challenges faced by citizens in urban areas; and

(3) Accordingly, it is necessary to establish a new office within the state government that is designed to coordinate among and between the various agencies of government at the local, state, and federal level and the various government and private programs that currently exist, and that may hereinafter be created, so as to integrate and harmonize the efforts to address these challenges and improve the lives of the citizens of this state that

live in urban areas. Such office will allow for comprehensive planning, investment, and collaboration between the various agencies and levels of government, the private sector, and community organizations and will create efficiency in the allocation of resources in addressing the challenges of urban areas of this state.

SECTION 2.

Chapter 8 of Title 50 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Department of Community Affairs, is amended by adding a new article to read as follows:

"ARTICLE 6A

50-8-160.

As used in this article, the term:

(1) 'Category IV poverty area' means an area designated by the United States Department of Commerce as a census block in which the poverty level is 40 percent or higher.

(2) 'Director' means the director of the office.

(3) 'Metropolitan statistical area' means an area of this state that is designated as a metropolitan statistical area by the United States Office of Management and Budget.

(4) 'Minority business enterprise' means any business enterprise:

(A) That is at least 51 percent owned by one or more minority individuals or, in the case of any publicly owned corporation, has at least 51 percent of its stock owned by one or more minority individuals; and

(B) Whose management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more minority individuals.

(5) 'Office' means the Office of Urban Affairs created pursuant to Code Section 50-8-161.

50-8-161.

(a) There is created the Office of Urban Affairs, which shall be assigned for administrative purposes only to the Department of Community Affairs.

(b) The office shall have all powers and duties necessary to carry out the provisions of this article. Such powers and duties shall include:

(1) To act as a liaison between and among the various agencies, departments, and instrumentalities of the federal government, the state, and of the counties, municipal corporations, and school districts of this state so as to coordinate efforts in, and develop comprehensive planning for, the administration and provision of all programs and services in metropolitan statistical areas, with a focus on the administration and provision of such programs and services in category IV poverty areas within such metropolitan statistical areas;

(2) To serve as the Governor's principal advisor on urban affairs and to assist in coordinating the activities and services of state agencies and to develop comprehensive plans for such activities and services in order to provide more effective services to individuals living in metropolitan statistical areas, particularly the category IV poverty areas within such metropolitan statistical areas;

(3) To administer funds under its control to directly provide, or to coordinate and plan with local, state, and federal agencies in the provision of, programs and services within metropolitan statistical areas, with a focus on the provision of such programs and services in the category IV poverty areas within such metropolitan statistical areas, that are designed to:

(A) Promote the availability of affordable housing;

(B) Ensure access to public transportation;

(C) Eliminate poverty and enhance communities;

(D) Reduce crime and improve police-community relations;

(E) Ensure access to quality education and healthcare;

(F) Increase the availability of green spaces and reduce environmental pollution;

(G) Identify needed maintenance and upgrades to existing infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and utilities, in light of expected population growth;

(H) Address homelessness and provide support to vulnerable populations; and

(I) Promote access to reliable, high-speed internet;

(4) To serve as the point of contact in state government for information, data, resources, and assistance regarding urban affairs, community enhancement efforts, and programs and services in metropolitan statistical areas. The office shall provide assistance to or refer individuals, government officials or employees, or others seeking help to the appropriate department or agency of local, state, or federal government or elsewhere where applicable;

(5) To conduct ongoing research and analysis of issues and policies affecting metropolitan statistical areas, particularly the category IV poverty areas within such metropolitan statistical areas, and provide advice and recommendations to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the President of the Senate on such issues and policies and to publish in print or electronically periodically information and data relating to such metropolitan statistical areas;

(6) To monitor and report on activities at the federal level affecting metropolitan statistical areas, particularly the category IV poverty areas within such metropolitan statistical areas, to ensure a prompt and adequate state response to new or amended federal programs and initiatives;

(7) To provide technical assistance to agencies, departments, and instrumentalities of counties and municipal corporations and to school districts that have metropolitan statistical areas within their jurisdiction so as to facilitate the administration, provision, and implementation of programs and services in such metropolitan statistical areas;

(8) To encourage the engagement of private organizations in the provision of programs and services designed to eliminate poverty and enhance communities within metropolitan statistical areas;

(9) To encourage and facilitate participation of minority business enterprises within metropolitan statistical areas in programs and services offered by local, state, and federal levels of government;

(10) To accept loans or grants of money or materials or property of any kind from the federal government of the United States or any agency or instrumentality thereof, upon such terms and conditions as the United States or such agency or instrumentality thereof may require;

(11) To accept loans or grants of money or materials or property of any kind from the state or any agency or instrumentality or political subdivision thereof, upon such terms and conditions as the state or such agency or instrumentality or political subdivision thereof may require;

(12) To accept loans or grants of money or materials or property of any kind from private corporations, individuals, and entities, upon such terms and conditions as such private corporations, individuals, and entities may require;

(13) To appoint, select, and employ officers, agents, and employees as may be necessary to carry out its duties and to fix the compensation of such officers, agents, and employees; and

(14) To have a seal and alter the same at its pleasure.

50-8-162.

(a) There is created the position of director of the office, who shall serve as the chief executive officer of the office. The director shall be appointed and removed by the Governor and shall receive compensation in an amount to be determined by the Governor. In addition to such compensation, the director shall also receive reimbursement for his or

her reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of his or her duties, as provided by law for state employees.

(b) The director is authorized to employ personnel for the office, as may be necessary to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the office, and to prescribe the duties and to fix the compensation of such personnel.

50-8-163.

All departments, agencies, boards, commissions, authorities, and instrumentalities of the state or of any county or municipal corporation in this state and all school districts in this state shall cooperate with the director and other officers or employees of the office in the performance of their duties under this article and shall assist, to the extent practicable, the director and other officers or employees of the office in the performance of such duties."

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.