

House Bill 495 (COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE)

By: Representatives Dickey of the 134th, Burns of the 159th, Meeks of the 178th, Hagan of the 156th, Greene of the 154th, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to education, so as to
2 repeal Chapter 18, relating to the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation; to amend
3 Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to agriculture, so as to transfer the
4 Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation to the Department of Agriculture; to provide for
5 a director; to provide for the Georgia Rural Development Council; to provide for duties and
6 satellite offices; to provide for reporting and approval of plans of work; to provide for related
7 matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

8 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

9 **SECTION 1.**

10 Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to education, is amended by
11 repealing Chapter 18, relating to the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation, in its
12 entirety.

13 **SECTION 2.**

14 Title 2 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to agriculture, is amended by
15 adding a new chapter to read as follows:

H. B. 495 (SUB)

"CHAPTER 24

2-24-1.

(a) Effective July 1, 2025, the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall be transferred from the University System of Georgia to the department and shall be located within an appropriate facility.

(b)(1) The director of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall be appointed by the Commissioner, provided that such appointment shall be subject to approval by a majority vote of the Georgia Rural Development Council. The director shall continue to serve in such position until his or her resignation or until the appointment of a new director by the Commissioner, provided that such appointment is approved by a majority vote of such council.

(2) Subject to appropriations, the director shall be authorized to employ such personnel as are necessary to carry out the provisions of this chapter.

2-24-2.

(a) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall include a council, to be known and designated as the Georgia Rural Development Council, that shall offer guidance to the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation.

(b) The Georgia Rural Development Council shall be composed of 12 members who shall be appointed as follows:

(1) Six members shall be appointed by the Governor which six members, by majority vote, shall appoint one of such members to serve as the chairperson of the council. Each of the six shall be selected to represent one of the following areas:

(A) Leadership management;

(B) Business development and entrepreneurship;

(C) Finance and taxes;

(D) Logistics of rural industries;

(E) Healthcare; and

(F) Education;

(2) Three members who live in different geographic areas of this state from each other shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and

(3) Three members who live in different geographic areas of this state from each other shall be appointed by the President of the Senate.

(c)(1) Legislative members who are appointed to the council shall serve for two-year terms. Nonlegislative members shall serve for four-year terms, provided that three of the initial six members to be appointed by the Governor shall serve initial terms of two years, and thereafter such appointments shall be for four-year terms.

(2) Members may serve consecutive terms without limit.

(d) The council shall study the conditions, needs, issues, and problems affecting rural economic development and shall examine related policy areas as it may deem necessary and appropriate, including, but not limited to, population studies, access to healthcare, infrastructure, education, unemployment, and economic growth incentives.

(e) The chairperson shall call all meetings of the council. The council shall meet at least once per quarter and each such meeting shall be at a different location within this state, particularly in rural areas of this state, for the purpose of interacting with local government officials, educational leaders, healthcare providers, business leaders, civic groups, and all other citizens who desire to offer input, so as to enable the council to exercise fully and effectively its powers, perform its duties, and accomplish the objectives and purposes of this chapter.

(f)(1) Legislative members of the council shall receive the allowances provided for in Code Section 28-1-8.

(2) Members of the council who are state officials, other than legislative members, or state employees shall receive no compensation for their services on the council, but they

may be reimbursed for expenses incurred by them in the performance of their duties as members of the council in the same manner as they are reimbursed for expenses in their capacities as state officials or employees.

(3) Citizen members of the council shall receive a daily expense allowance in an amount the same as that specified in subsection (b) of Code Section 45-7-21, as well as the mileage or transportation allowance authorized for state employees.

(4) The allowances and expenses authorized by this subsection shall not be received by the chairperson for more than 15 days and any other member of the council for more than ten days per year. Funds necessary to carry out the provisions of this Code section shall come from appropriated funds; provided, however, that funds for the reimbursement of the expenses of state officials, other than legislative members, and state employees shall come from funds appropriated to or otherwise available to their respective agencies.

2-24-3.

(a) It shall be the duty of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation to provide a central information and research hub for rural matters and best practices which may include:

(1) Community planning models for proactively identifying value added gaps or strengths; and

(2) Industry-specific assistance.

(b) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation may establish such satellite offices as are necessary to accomplish its mission.

2-24-4.

(a) The Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation shall annually prepare and submit to the General Assembly, for review by the House of Representatives' and the Senate's standing committees on agriculture and economic development, a plan of work that

93 outlines the use of the Center for Rural Prosperity and Innovation's resources for the
94 upcoming fiscal years.
95 (b) Said committees may, by majority vote, approve the plan and submit recommendations
96 to the Senate Appropriations Committee and the House Committee on Appropriations for
97 their consideration in developing the budget."

98 **SECTION 3.**

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