

Great Northwest Day at the Capitol

(Proposed) Legislative Priorities 2024

- ✓ **Infrastructure** (including Broadband)
- ✓ **Education**
- ✓ **Workforce** (including Childcare)
- ✓ **Community Improvement** (including Housing)

Infrastructure (including Broadband)

Safe and reliable infrastructure is essential to the health and wealth of our region. Great Northwest Day encourages lawmakers to invest in our rural region's roads, bridges, water, and wastewater projects – vital keys to the economic future of northwest Missouri. Broadband is currently one of the most critical components in attracting talent; without competitive internet speeds, our rural communities cannot attract new residents. Sufficient internet leads to prosperity, because of continued access to education, commerce, healthcare, precision agriculture, and much more.

WHAT can be done to help:

1. Do not give responsibility for lettered highways to county commissioners for maintenance as county budgets are even tighter than state budgets.
2. Support innovative funding efforts to expand high-quality replacement of outdated infrastructure assets.
3. Establish a fund specifically for lettered routes.
4. With the upcoming construction to Interstate 70, additional resources will be needed to support and maintain Highway 36.
5. Continue to provide aid to qualified, local internet providers deploying broadband access in unserved/underserved rural areas, while redefining the definition of underserved to be 100Mbps down and up.
6. Improve broadband adoption efforts in rural households and closing the digital divide (Digital Equity)
7. Continue to support/fund the Office of Broadband
9. Support the Office of Broadband's efforts in implementing the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment (BEAD) program in 2024.
10. Support wireless broadband accessibility for important regional components including: agriculture, emergency responders, and outdoor recreational activities

Education

The future of our state and the Northwest Region depends on an educated, skilled workforce, meaning quality educational institutions are a top priority because they significantly contribute to the development of our next generation of citizens. Our region's educational institutions vary from the ages they serve (preschool through postsecondary) to the training they provide (professional certificates to degrees). However, they all depend on your support to fulfill their mission. Collectively, we ask legislators to make increasingly larger investments in education

and workforce development to build stronger communities and create improved employment opportunities.

WHAT can be done to help:

For Elementary and Secondary Education:

1. Fully fund transportation formula as outlined by state law.
2. Increase local autonomy of districts and boards of education.
3. Reduce bureaucracy and unfunded administrative mandates.
4. Continue supporting increases for PreK programs and PreK special education programs.
5. Support teaching as a profession with assistance to increase teacher pay, reduce the teacher shortage, and preserve its public-school retirement system.

For Higher Education:

1. Seek and support an increase in core appropriations for each higher education institution to keep pace with inflationary costs.
2. Support opportunities with maximize state and federal funds for deferred maintenance needs on each public campus
3. Support efforts to modernize energy resources
4. Support MOSERS cost containment as increasing costs are not sustainable for institutions.
5. Seek continued inclusion and additional funding of MoExcels in the Governor's budget plans.
6. Support additional residency positions at existing graduate medical education (GME) medical residency programs. There is a noted shortage of physicians in our rural health care facilities, including the specialties of family medicine, general internal medicine, general pediatrics, general obstetrics, and gynecology (OB/Gyn), and general psychiatry.

Workforce (including Childcare)

One of the most challenging issues facing rural Missouri is a diminished workforce. Typically, rural labor markets have very low unemployment rates; however, they also suffer from lower-than-average labor force participation rates. For rural areas to thrive, there must be an emphasis placed on increasing labor force participation, as well as expanding the labor force (through marketing rural living). Focusing solely on labor force training does not adequately address the workforce needs of rural Missouri. Access to affordable childcare is a major workforce issue for our region and the State of Missouri. If parents do not have safe, reliable, affordable childcare, they are unable to work. Childcare is a fundamental Workforce and Economic Development issue.

WHAT can be done to help:

1. We need to prioritize efforts to increase the supply of people in our rural communities, such as: growing the population of the state, recruitment to Missouri (Rural Living marketing plan- career opportunities and great work-life balance), developing a talent pipeline focused on career opportunities (engaging our youth), and identifying barriers to work (Lack of skills, daycare, transportation, government).
3. Create an incentive for employment – (create a personal tax credit/tax deduction for people entering the labor force and maintaining employment) – program to be focused on cities and counties with below average labor force participation rates.
5. Create an employment retention program – codifying the ability for local communities to

create Employment Incentive District (EID) - like a CID or NID. An EID would provide funding for a locally controlled Employment Incentive Program, which could include employment retention grants, employment relocation grants and workforce housing down payment.

7. Simplify and streamline the application and licensing process for new childcare centers, the fingerprinting process, and the childcare enrollment forms.

8. Support the Governor's proposed childcare related tax credits.

Community Improvement (including Housing)

If rural areas are to retain and grow population, vibrant communities must be a focal point in redevelopment efforts.

WHAT can be done to help:

1. Establish an Office for Rural Housing – focus would be on statewide evaluation of rural housing and research into best practices from other states.

2. Support and expand of the low-income tax credits (with a 35% minimum to be spent in rural areas) – expand the Missouri Low Income Housing Tax Credits to include “workforce housing” projects that are rent to own or have an ownership plan.

3. Create a fund for down payment assistance (could be funded through a reallocation of Missouri Works funds from businesses to their employees – if authorized by the business).

4. Create a tax break for employer contribution to a down payment fund for employees (like retirement and/or health insurance).

5. Adopt a program like the Nebraska or Iowa Workforce Housing Tax Incentive Program under the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

6. Support for communities dealing with the effects of crime, addiction, homelessness, abandoned properties and community appearance. (Develop a fund for community demolition and/or rehabilitation resources to address abandoned or neglected properties)

7. Support for Entrepreneurship & Small Business Expansion Resources (RPC's, SBDC's) for all our rural communities. (see Rep. Jeff Farnan's regional planning commission legislation)

8. Legislation to protect 340B Non-Discrimination (CAH's FQHC's, SCH's) legislation. SB 26