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SENATE BILL 266

**54TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2020**

INTRODUCED BY

Roberto "Bobby" J. Gonzales

AN ACT

RELATING TO RURAL COMMUNITIES; PROVIDING FOR A RURAL EQUITY  
OMBUD IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION; PROVIDING POWERS AND DUTIES.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

**SECTION 1.** ~~[NEW MATERIAL]~~ RURAL EQUITY OMBUD--LOCAL  
GOVERNMENT DIVISION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND  
ADMINISTRATION.--

A. The local government division of the department  
of finance and administration shall employ at least one "rural  
equity ombud", whose job it is to work on issues of concern to  
rural and frontier communities with:

(1) the governor's office, the legislature and  
all state agencies;

(2) counties and municipalities in the state;

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1 (3) federal agencies, including the rural  
2 utilities service and the rural development agency of the  
3 United States department of agriculture, the United States  
4 department of the interior, the United States department of  
5 housing and urban development and other appropriate federal  
6 agencies; and

7 (4) nonprofit organizations that address  
8 issues faced by rural and frontier communities or provide  
9 services to residents of those communities.

10 B. The rural equity ombud shall be appointed solely  
11 on the basis of education and experience and shall be  
12 nonpartisan.

13 C. The rural equity ombud shall:

14 (1) provide technical assistance to federal,  
15 state and local governments on issues of concern for rural and  
16 frontier communities;

17 (2) provide planning assistance to the state  
18 and counties to ensure that concerns of residents of rural and  
19 frontier communities are being addressed as part of the state's  
20 or a county's planning processes in:

21 (a) health;

22 (b) human services;

23 (c) educational services;

24 (d) economic development;

25 (e) infrastructure planning, funding and

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1 improvements, including water and wastewater, utilities, roads  
2 and highways, broadband and other infrastructure;

3 (f) public safety;

4 (g) transportation;

5 (h) land use and land development;

6 (i) tourism;

7 (j) energy;

8 (k) natural resource management,

9 including game and fish resources;

10 (l) community development block grant  
11 projects;

12 (m) state or local planning in  
13 conjunction with federal agencies and funding; and

14 (n) any other planning processes that  
15 affect rural and frontier communities;

16 (3) serve as an advocate for rural and  
17 frontier communities and work to ensure that those communities'  
18 needs are met and that residents of rural and frontier  
19 communities have a voice in state and local government;

20 (4) take and resolve complaints from rural and  
21 frontier communities about laws and rules that are  
22 intentionally or unintentionally biased against rural and  
23 frontier communities;

24 (5) provide bill analyses and provide  
25 testimony to the legislature on legislation that positively or

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1 negatively affects rural and frontier communities;

2 (6) make annual reports to the governor and  
3 the legislature on:

4 (a) activities of the ombud, including  
5 interactions with governmental agencies and the outcome of  
6 those interactions;

7 (b) complaints received and resolved;

8 (c) structural barriers to providing  
9 needed services to rural and frontier communities and  
10 recommendations for eliminating or ameliorating those barriers;  
11 and

12 (d) other information that may inform  
13 executive and legislative decisions affecting rural and  
14 frontier communities; and

15 (7) perform other duties as assigned by the  
16 director of the local government division of the department of  
17 finance and administration, the secretary of finance and  
18 administration, the governor or the legislature.