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;
MAKING AN APPROPRIATION.

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

    SECTION 1. 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;

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

            (4)   nonprofit organizations that address
issues faced by rural and frontier communities or provide

services to residents of those communities.

B. The rural equity ombud shall be employed solely on the basis of education and experience.

C. The rural equity ombud shall:

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

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

(a) health;

(b) human services;

(c) educational services;

(d) economic development;

(e) infrastructure planning, funding and improvements, including water and wastewater, utilities, roads and highways, broadband and other infrastructure;

(f) public safety;

(g) transportation;

(h) land use and land development;

(i) tourism;

(j) energy;

(k) natural resource management, including game and fish resources;

1   (l)   community development block grant

2   projects;

3   (m)   state or local planning in

4   conjunction with federal agencies and funding; and

5   (n)   any other planning processes that

6   affect rural and frontier communities;

7   (3)   serve as an advocate for rural and

8   frontier communities and work to ensure that those

9   communities' needs are met and that residents of rural and

10   frontier communities have a voice in state and local

11   government;

12   (4)   take and resolve complaints from rural

13   and frontier communities;

14   (5)   provide bill analyses and provide

15   testimony to the legislature on legislation that positively

16   or negatively affects rural and frontier communities;

17   (6)   make annual reports to the governor and

18   the legislature on:

19   (a)   activities of the ombud, including

20   interactions with governmental agencies and the outcome of

21   those interactions;

22   (b)   complaints received and resolved;

23   (c)   structural barriers to providing

24   needed services to rural and frontier communities and

25   recommendations for eliminating or ameliorating those

barriers; and

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

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

    SECTION 2. APPROPRIATION.--Ninety-five thousand dollars ($95,000) is appropriated from the general fund to the local government division of the department of finance and administration for expenditure in fiscal year 2022 to carry out the purposes of Section 1 of this act. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year 2022 shall revert to the general fund.