

Editor-In-Chief's Foreword

On behalf of the Board of Directors and the staff of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, I am pleased to present this inaugural issue of *Rural Policy: The Research Bulletin of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania*. Since 1987, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania has worked to advance policy research that benefits the rural communities throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The Center has done so through its own internal research efforts, and through its research grant program. Rural Policy is the next step in our efforts to ensure that high-quality policy research is widely available to inform members of the General Assembly, local officials, scholars, and members of the public of important issues that affect rural Pennsylvania. And we are grateful for our partnership with Penn State Libraries to make the Center's research freely available to anyone with an internet connection.

This issue includes three articles. The first article is co-authored by Jonathan Johnson and David Martin, the Center's Senior Policy Analyst and Public Policy Data Analyst, respectively. It seems fitting to lead with an article that addresses an issue that is foundational to the work of the Center: what is rural. Johnson and Martin discuss the history of the Center's rural definition, and why the Center relies on a binary definition based upon population density. They then demonstrate how this definition applies in the context of Pennsylvania counties, school districts, and municipalities.

The next two articles originated as a result of a special request for proposals focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic in rural communities. It goes without saying that the pandemic fundamentally changed many aspects of daily life. To that end, the Center sought to understand the effects of the pandemic across a variety of policy areas. Here, our research partners assessed the effects of the pandemic on crime trends and educational equity.

Researchers David Yerger, Brandon Vick, and Robert Orth of Indiana University of Pennsylvania examined protection from abuse order data and crime data obtained from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to determine how crime rates varied before and after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While Yerger et al. did not find evidence of the pandemic causing long-term effects on crime throughout the Commonwealth, there were significant increases in homicide rates in Philadelphia County relative to previous years. Their analysis also finds that counties with higher unemployment rates and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation rates experienced higher murder rates and protection from abuse orders.

Researchers Kai A. Schafft, Annie Maselli, Matthew Gardner Kelly, Katharine Dulaney, Laura E. Pirkle Howd, David A. Gamson, Ashley N. Patterson, Betsy Boggs, and Erica Frankenberg of The Pennsylvania State University examined how COVID-19 affected

educational equity among school districts in rural Pennsylvania. Their analysis shows that rural school districts were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, individuals in rural school districts were disproportionately more likely to be infected with COVID than urban districts, the lack of broadband access hindered the ability for many students to learn online, and teacher burnout and mental health issues were a significant concern in rural districts, among other findings.

It is the hope of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania that you find these studies to be useful resources. I would also like to take this opportunity to invite you to visit our website at www.rural.pa.gov to view our past research reports, and access rural data that the Center makes available to the public. Please feel free to contact us if we can be of assistance in your rural policy and research needs.

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