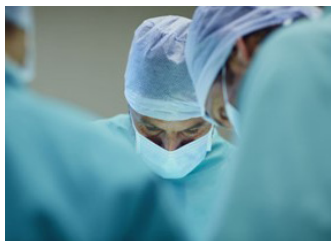


Center Board Announces 2024 Research Grant Awards

Congratulations to the recipients of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania’s 2024 Research Grant Program. In December 2023, the Center’s Board of Directors voted to approve two mini grants and six grants for academic research.

“The Center’s Board of Directors, Center staff, and external reviewers are always aware of the many issues that affect rural Pennsylvania and need deeper research and examinations,” said Senator Gene Yaw, Chairman of the Center’s Board of Directors. “As the final stage in the grant review process, the Board approves projects that will expand the Center’s database and offer potential policy considerations. As always, the Center looks forward to sharing the results of this research with policymakers and our rural residents and communities.”



2024 Research Grant Projects

Comprehensive Analysis of the Supply, Demand, and Affordability of Senior Housing in Rural Pennsylvania, Dr. Thuy Bui, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

This mini grant funded research project provides a comprehensive analysis of supply and demand for senior (55+) housing in rural Pennsylvania. It aims to paint a complete picture of the housing circumstances of the elderly in rural PA by analyzing the demographic characteristics, population projections, current housing situations, and financial conditions. Furthermore, this project will assess the current availability of several housing options and various senior housing segments, along with a future trend analysis. It will also examine the affordability of senior housing with a breakdown of different household income levels. Finally, the study will include important implications and recommendations for policymakers and local governments.

A Comparative Analysis of Job Satisfaction and Intent to Leave Among Rural and Urban Caseworkers in Pennsylvania’s Child Welfare Agencies, Dr. Yoon Mi Kim, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

The goals of this mini grant funded project are to examine job satisfaction and intent to leave among child welfare caseworkers in rural and urban areas in Pennsylvania and to investigate potential disparities between the rural and urban workforce segments. Partnering with the Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators Association, Inc. (for public agencies) and the Pennsylvania Council

The grant awards continue on page 3.

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Chairman's Message



In December 2023, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors hosted their Board meeting in Mifflinburg, Union County. Board members visited various locations and discussed a variety of issues with local officials and stakeholders, developing and furthering ideas to help rural communities in the Commonwealth.

It was great to visit businesses driving the economy of Mifflinburg and surrounding rural areas, as they create work opportunities and generate place-based tourism. The Center is thrilled to see the ways rural communities like Mifflinburg are thriving.

The Center first stopped in downtown Lewisburg for a meeting and tour with local officials and Bucknell University staff. Upon arrival in Mifflinburg, the Center received a tour of the Rusty Rail Brewing Company and Ritz-Craft Corporation subsidiaries, and visited the 34th-annual Mifflinburg Christkindl Market, the oldest outdoor Christmas market in the United States. The location for the Board meeting was the historic Mifflinburg Buggy Museum, where the Center received a tour. The museum complex is preserving the only intact 19th-century carriage factory in the United States, as its purpose is to highlight the region's buggy manufacturing heritage.

Mifflinburg is a phenomenal example of a community preserving its social and economic culture while driving tourism. The Mifflinburg community's preservation of this historic area is a success and is needed in other rural areas of Pennsylvania.

On behalf of the board and staff, thank you to everyone who has supported the Center and its work over the past year, and we look forward to working with you in the year ahead. Happy New Year!

Senator Gene Yaw



The Center for Rural Pennsylvania pictured at the Mifflinburg Buggy Museum.

2024 Center Research Grant Awards Continued

of Children, Youth, and Family Services, Inc. (for private agencies), the researchers will administer a comprehensive statewide survey to collect data from both public and private child welfare caseworkers across all 67 counties.

Access to MOUD and Harm Reduction Services Across Rural Pennsylvania, Dr. Kristina Brant, The Pennsylvania State University

Slowing the overdose crisis requires expanding access to evidence-based treatment and life-saving harm reduction tools. This project examines access to MOUD (medications for opioid use disorder) and harm reduction services in rural Pennsylvania by triangulating the perspectives of county agencies, service providers, and people with lived experience. The researchers will collect information from the 47 Single County Authorities in Pennsylvania, conduct interviews with 30 rural service providers and 20 residents who use(d) drugs, and visit up to 10 harm reduction programs. Data analysis will identify disparities in MOUD and harm reduction access across PA, explore challenges faced by providers serving rural areas, and explore challenges faced by rural residents utilizing these services.

Short-Term Rentals in Pennsylvania, Dr. Alison E. Feehey, Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania

The project will conduct an in-depth inventory of Short-Term Rentals (STRs) in Pennsylvania, using AirDNA data from 2014-2023, and will map STR locations in a Geographic Information System (GIS), followed by cluster analysis to identify patterns and statewide trends. Also, 20 municipalities, both urban and rural, will be analyzed to inventory the types and characteristics of STRs and their potential impact on the local economy and housing availability. Interviews with zoning and planning directors of the sampled municipalities will gain insights into the types of existing regulations, along with the successes and challenges faced in their enforcement, and will support policy recommendations for the management of STRs in the state.

Natural Hazards, Losses, and Quality of Hazard Mitigation Plans in Rural Pennsylvania, 2000-2021, Dr. Jennifer Haney, Commonwealth University (Bloomsburg) of Pennsylvania

Losses from natural disasters in the United States are increasing and require a coordinated effort among state and local governments to reduce or eliminate future risks to life and property. Rural counties in Pennsylvania face unique challenges in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. This project aims to better understand the geographic patterns of natural hazards and losses and the quality of hazard mitigation plans in rural Pennsylvania.

Assessing Homeowner Perspectives and Barriers to Maintenance of Private Water Supply and Sewage Disposal Systems in Rural Pennsylvania, Dr. Faith Kibuye The Pennsylvania State University

Rural communities not connected to centralized sewer or water supply often rely on private on-lot wastewater and water supply systems. To characterize the motivators and barriers towards homeowner care, operation, and maintenance practices for these private wastewater and water infrastructures, the proposed study will conduct a qualitative survey of rural populations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania who are private septic and water supply owners and users. Additionally, well water quality testing will be conducted to assess the links between septic maintenance practices and water quality in private water supplies. Findings will be used to develop Penn State Extension education materials on the maintenance of septic systems and private wells.

Understanding and Quantifying Hospital Consolidations in Rural Pennsylvania: A Mixed Methods Analysis, Dr. Yunfeng Shi, The Pennsylvania State University

This project will conduct empirical analysis to examine and quantify the key factors contributing to rural hospital sustainability, along with the impact of healthcare market consolidations (i.e., mergers and acquisitions) on rural hospitals in Pennsylvania. The study team will use a mixed methods approach and focus on four sets of outcomes: 1) financial solvency; 2) employee recruitment, retention, and staffing; 3) healthcare access; and 4) health outcomes. The findings will provide key insights for policymakers and hospital administrators who are challenged with finding strategies to make rural hospitals in Pennsylvania sustainable.

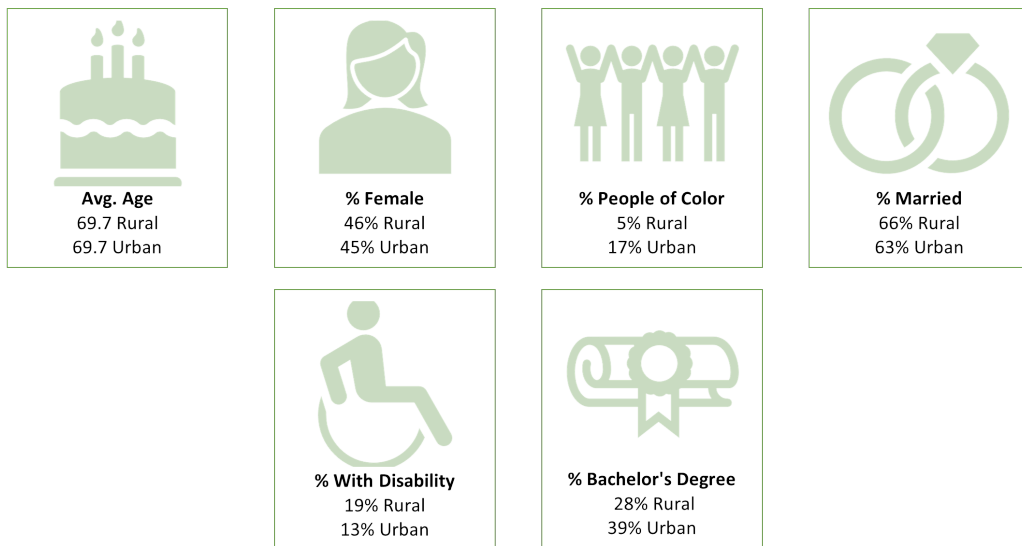
Analyzing the Impact of Warehouse Development in Pennsylvania, Dr. Moira A. Conway, Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania has emerged as a center of warehousing. These developments have provided economic benefits but present challenges. Using GIS analysis and media/public record analysis, this project will evaluate the growth of warehouses in the state and use five case study counties to explore employment trends, traffic impacts, and other community changes, such as land use and population, over the last ten years. These results will help inform land use, transportation, and economic development policies at local and state levels.

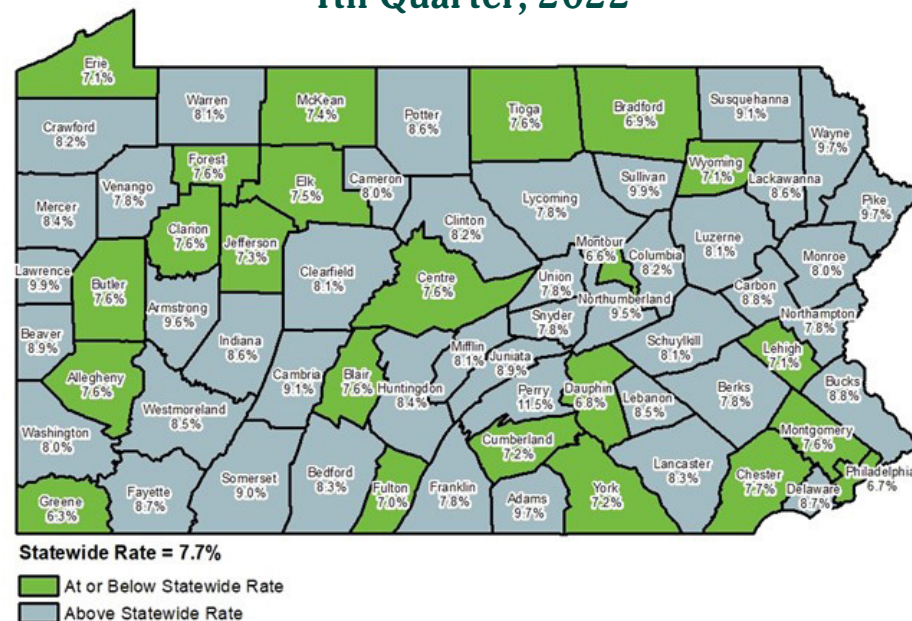
Visit www.rural.pa.gov and scroll to the bottom of the page to subscribe to our online newsletter and rural updates.

Rural Pennsylvania's Graying Workforce

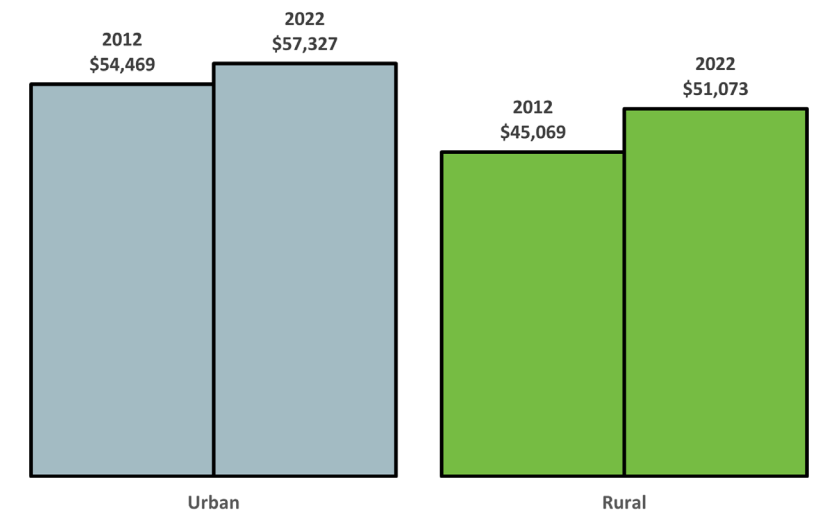
Demographics Characteristics of Employed Persons 65 Years Old and Older, 2022



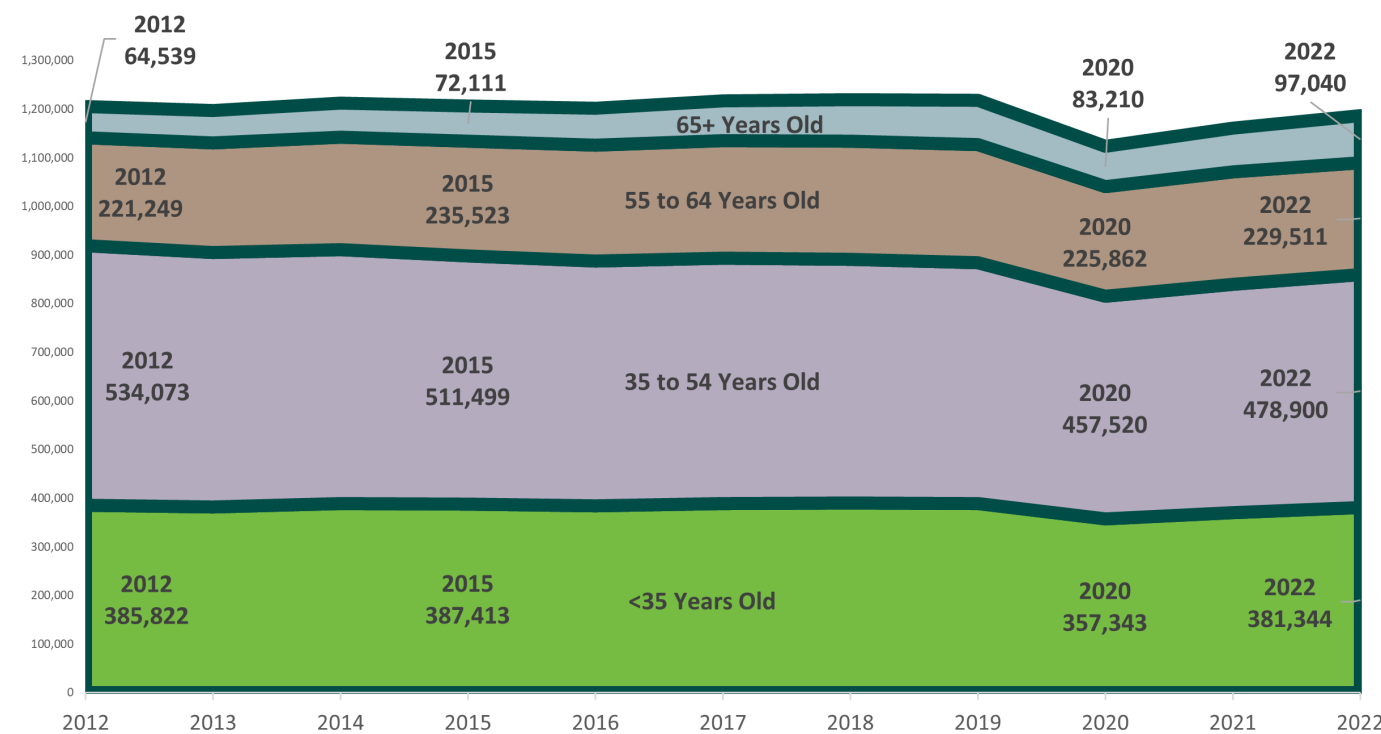
Percentage of Workers 65 Years Old and Older by County, 4th Quarter, 2022



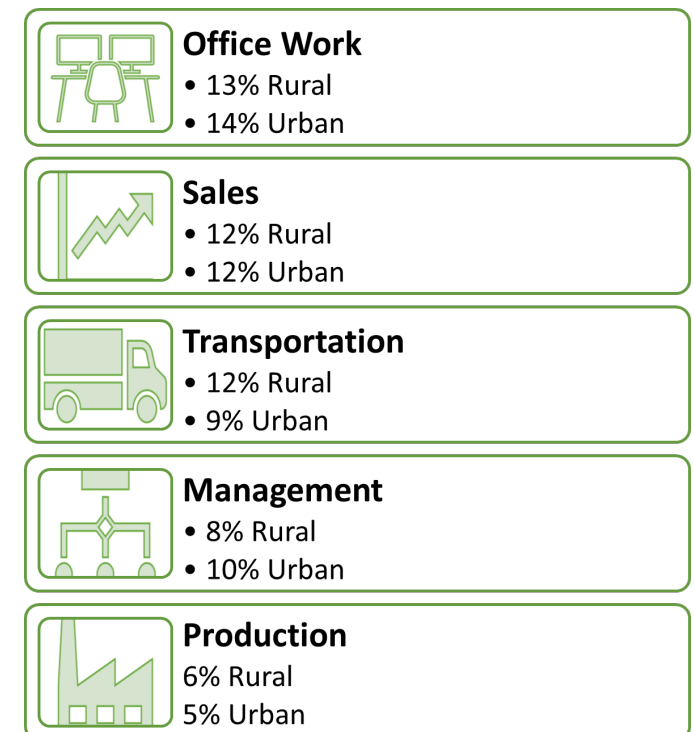
Median Earnings for Rural and Urban Seniors Employed Full-Time/Year-Round, 2012 and 2022



Rural Pennsylvania Employment by Age, 4th Quarters, 2012 to 2022



Top Five Occupations for Rural and Urban Senior Workers, 2022



Methodology

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania defined a working senior as an employed person 65 years old and older. A full-time worker was defined as a senior who worked on average 32 hours a week. Part-time workers worked on average less than 32 hours a week. Year-round workers are employed 50 or more weeks a year. Data sources include the Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), U.S. Census Bureau, and the 2022, 1-year Average, American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample, U.S. Census Bureau.

Research Examines College Promise Programs

College "Promise" programs have spread rapidly across the higher education landscape over the past two decades, but there is little consensus about what they are or how they work.

A new research study, *College Promise Programs and Alternative Tuition Strategies in Pennsylvania and Beyond*, introduces these programs, discusses prior research findings about their effects, and conducts empirical analyses using several data sources. This research was conducted by David Monaghan, Crystal Almanzar, Allyson Ritchey, and Madison Laughman of the Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania.

"Promise" programs are state and local higher educational scholarship programs. They are widespread, but there is much confusion about what they are and how they work. In this report, the researchers provide a working definition, discuss their design, and profile a set of established and cutting-edge Promise programs. They thoroughly review prior findings about Promise programs and then conduct four empirical analyses.

First, the researchers compile a data set of existing state and local Promise programs and identify common program features. Next, they detail the various design elements according to which programs vary and discuss which elements are common. Today, most Promise programs are funded and operated by states and public colleges rather than by private-sector actors. They are designed to achieve maximal apparent cost reduction while minimizing expenditure through last-dollar awards, guaranteeing tuition but restricting applicability to community colleges, and limiting the pool of eligible students who qualify for funds.

Second, the study surveys Promise programs regarding designers' reasons for creating the program and choosing design elements. Program staff present their programs as advancing egalitarian goals and being designed efficiently to achieve them.

Third, it uses national data to examine the effect of introducing a local Promise program on college enrollment and retention rates. Findings suggest that Promise programs boost enrollment but not retention, and that enrollment effects are most robust for first-year students at community colleges.

Fourth, the researchers profile two Promise programs in Pennsylvania and estimate their effects on



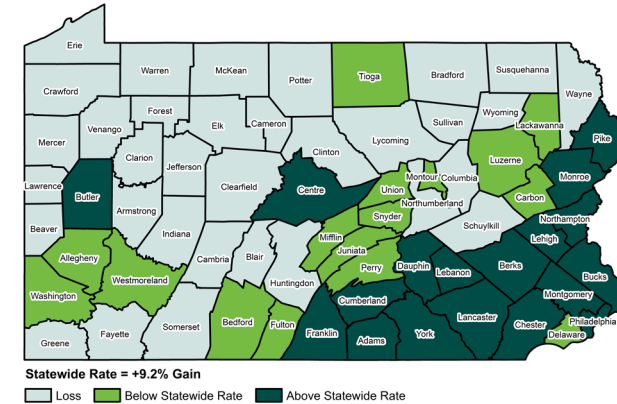
student educational outcomes. The Morgan Success Scholarship, located in the small industrial town of Tamaqua in rural Schuylkill County, has strong estimated effects on college-going, community college attendance, and associate degree completion, while it temporarily diverts students from four-year colleges and degrees. Findings suggest the community college of Philadelphia's 50th Anniversary Scholars Program has no impact on college attendance.

The study concludes with implications for policy. A statewide Promise program, it concludes, can accomplish several policy goals. Researchers recommend that such a program: 1) be simple in its construction, 2) reduce uncertainty about college costs, 3) produce substantial college cost reduction for students and families, and 4) fund four- and two-year public college attendance.

Finally, the researchers of the study caution policymakers to be realistic about what such a program is likely to accomplish. A well-designed, comprehensive, and generous state Promise program is likely to modestly boost postsecondary participation and attainment, shift students towards eligible and away from ineligible colleges, and boost enrollment at eligible institutions. The researchers do not expect such a program to appreciably close gaps in educational attainment by race, gender, or socioeconomic background, rapidly increase the college-educated share of the workforce, retain college-educated workers in-state, or revitalize economically struggling areas. However, because many of Pennsylvania's public postsecondary institutions are in rural communities and are central to the communities' economic well-being, buttressing these institutions' enrollments will contribute to stabilizing these areas.

JUST THE FACTS: DRIVER'S LICENSES

Percent Change in Licensed Drivers from 2003 to 2023, by County as Compared to Statewide Rate



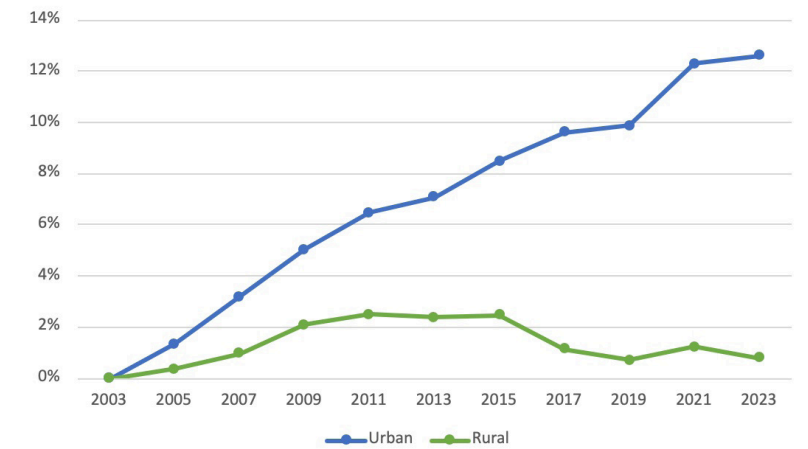
The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation collects data on the number of active driver's licenses throughout the Commonwealth. In December 2023, there were over 2.5 million licensed drivers in rural Pennsylvania, representing 82 percent of eligible drivers (population age 16 years or older). In urban Pennsylvania, there were 6.7 million licensed drivers, or 79 percent of individuals age 16 years or older. The share of individuals age 16 or older with a driver's license declined statewide about 5 percentage points since 2003. The contraction was stronger for rural counties (-7 percentage points) than for urban ones (-4 percentage points).

The figure below presents the total percent change in the number of licensed drivers for rural and urban areas since 2003. Over the past two decades, the number of licensed drivers located in rural counties increased at a much slower rate than in urban counties (1 percent and 13 percent, respectively).

In December 2023, the vast majority (87 percent) of licensed drivers in Pennsylvania had a Class C license (automobiles), followed by Class M (motorcycles, 8 percent) and Class A (heavy towing vehicles, 3 percent). Rural drivers were more likely to have a Class M (11 percent) and Class A (4 percent) licenses, compared to urban drivers (2.1 and 6.9 percent, respectively). The share of licenses which were for school bus drivers were relatively the same for rural (0.5 percent) and urban counties (0.4 percent).

In 2021, data from the Federal Highway Administration showed that New Hampshire (85 percent), Delaware (84 percent) and Alabama (80 percent) have the highest percentage of population with a driver's license. (Total population was used because states differ in the driving ages). The states with lowest percentage of licensed drivers were Hawaii (63 percent), Texas (62 percent), and New York (60 percent). Among the 50 states, Pennsylvania had the 34th highest rate of licensed driver as percent of the population.

Percent Change in Licensed Drivers Since 2003, Rural Versus Urban Counties



Data source: Bureau of Driver Licensing, PennDOT.

Center Welcomes New Staff

In January, the Center welcomed a new employee, Michaela Miller, as a Quantitative Data Analyst. Michaela will provide data and analysis on rural policy issues, help organize workshops on rural community development issues, review grant proposals for the Center, contribute to the Center's publications, and maintain and expand the Center's rural database.

Formerly, Michaela worked in state government as a Fiscal Analyst for the Pennsylvania Independent Fiscal Office. Michaela has a bachelor's degree in Public Policy with a minor in Applied Economics from The Pennsylvania State University.

Please join us in welcoming Michaela to the Center.





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Rural Policy Symposium

The *Global Pathways for a Thriving Rural Workforce* symposium will be held at the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport, PA, on March 8, 2024. This symposium is supported through a generous grant from the U.S. Department of State and the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. The goals of the event are to: 1) inspire rural innovation and policy recommendations for rural communities in need of skilled labor forces to boost local livelihoods, 2) fill industrial gaps, and 3) build inclusive communities that will encourage local leadership or international migration.

While this symposium will take place in Pennsylvania, its content will be applicable to rural communities across the U.S. The symposium will include research on current best practices, mapping out opportunities with participants, and presentations of case studies where international workers have successfully been integrated into the rural community's workforce. Symposium sessions may include,

but are not limited to, practices regarding education and apprenticeship training (both in the U.S. and abroad), support systems within the rural community (e.g., social networks, transportation assistance, finding housing, etc.), inclusivity and integration initiatives, solutions for existing rural workforce development, and avoiding displacement of existing residents, among other topics.

This flagship symposium was proposed by a team of rural policy advocates and researchers: Dr. Kyle Kopko (Center for Rural Pennsylvania), Zoe Swarzenski (Brookings Institution), and Alena Klimas (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities). The program was awarded funding by the U.S. Department of State's initiative to engage rural areas of the U.S. in international exchange.

Learn more on the Center's website at www.rural.pa.gov, or by **scanning the QR code below**.



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