

SENATE No. 244

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Daniel A. Wolf

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act establishing an Office of Rural Policy.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:
<i>Daniel A. Wolf</i>	<i>Cape and Islands</i>
<i>Stephen Kulik</i>	<i>1st Franklin</i>
<i>Paul W. Mark</i>	<i>2nd Berkshire</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>
<i>Timothy R. Madden</i>	<i>Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket</i>

SENATE No. 244

By Mr. Wolf, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 244) of Daniel A. Wolf, Stephen Kulik, Paul W. Mark, James B. Eldridge and others for legislation to establish an Office of Rural Policy. Economic Development and Emerging Technologies.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Eighty-Ninth General Court
(2015-2016)**

An Act establishing an Office of Rural Policy.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Mass. General Laws, as so appearing in the 2012 edition, are hereby
2 amended by adding after Chapter 23L, the following chapter:—

3 1. Chapter 23M
4 Office of Rural Policy

5 SECTION 1. There shall be established within the executive office for housing and
6 economic development, but not under its control, a state agency known as the Commonwealth
7 Office of Rural Policy. The Office shall be an independent public entity not subject to the
8 supervision and control of any other executive office, department, commission, board, bureau,
9 agency or political subdivision of the commonwealth. The mission of said Office shall be to
10 enhance the economic vitality of rural communities, defined as municipalities with a population
11 density of less than 500 persons per square mile, and to advance the health and well-being of
12 rural residents.

13 SECTION 2. The Office of Rural Policy shall be overseen by a permanent Commission
14 on Rural Policy, consisting of seventeen persons as follows: three persons appointed by the
15 governor; two persons appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives, one by the
16 House minority leader; two persons appointed by the President of the Senate, one by the Senate
17 minority leader; and one person appointed by each of the following regional planning agencies or
18 their successors: Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Cape Cod Commission, Central
19 Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, Franklin Regional Council of Governments,
20 Martha's Vineyard Commission, Montachusett Regional Planning Commission, Nantucket
21 Planning and Economic Development Commission and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.
22 Members of the commission shall be residents of the Commonwealth, and shall either live in
23 rural communities, or shall have at least five years of professional experience working to
24 advance the interests of rural residents. Members shall be subject to the provisions of chapter
25 268A as they apply to special state employees. The commission shall be an independent agency
26 of the government of the commonwealth and shall not be subject to the control of any other
27 department or agency.

28 (a) Initially, members of the commission shall be appointed to staggered three year terms,
29 so that six members are appointed for three-year terms, six members are appointed for two year
30 terms, and five members are appointed for one year terms. Thereafter, members shall serve terms
31 of three years and until their successors are appointed. Members may serve a maximum of three
32 consecutive terms or ten consecutive years.

33 (b) Vacancies in the membership of the commission shall be filled by the original
34 appointing authority for the balance of the unexpired term.

35 (c) Appointments shall be made in consultation with the regional planning agencies
36 identified in the first paragraph of this section. Nominations shall be solicited between August 1
37 and September 15 of each year through an open application process using a uniform application
38 that is widely distributed in rural communities across the state.

39 (d) The commission shall elect from among its members a chair, a vice chair, a treasurer
40 and any other officers it deems necessary.

41 (e) The members of the commission shall receive no compensation for their services, but
42 shall be reimbursed for any usual and customary expenses incurred in the performance of their
43 duties.

44 SECTION 3. The Office shall serve as a research and policy clearinghouse for issues
45 critical to the welfare and vitality of rural communities, including but not limited to economic
46 development, education, environment, health, housing, infrastructure, technology and
47 transportation. In furtherance of that responsibility, the commission shall: study, review and
48 report on the status of rural communities and residents in the commonwealth; advise the
49 legislative and executive bodies of the impact of existing and proposed state laws, policies and
50 regulations on rural communities; advance legislative and policy solutions that address rural
51 needs; advocate to ensure that rural communities receive a fair share of state investment;
52 promote collaboration among rural communities to improve efficiency in delivery of services;
53 develop and support new leadership in rural communities.

54 SECTION 4. The powers of the commission shall include but not be limited to the
55 following: (a) to use such voluntary and uncompensated services of private individuals, agencies
56 and organizations as may from time to time be offered and needed; (b) to recommend policies

57 and make recommendations to agencies and officers of the state and local subdivisions of
58 government to effectuate the purposes of subsection (3); (c) to select an executive director and to
59 acquire adequate staff to perform its duties, subject to appropriation; (d) to establish and
60 maintain such offices as it may deem necessary, subject to appropriation; (e) to enact bylaws for
61 its own governance; and (f) to hold regular, public meetings and to hold fact-finding hearings
62 and other public forums as it may deem necessary.

63 SECTION 5. The commission shall meet on a quarterly basis at members' discretion.
64 Meeting locations shall rotate between Boston, Cape Cod and the Islands, central Massachusetts,
65 and western Massachusetts. The (i) governor, (ii) speaker of the house of representatives, (iii)
66 president of the senate and (iv) designated members of the rural caucus of legislators, if active,
67 shall be invited to attend the quarterly meetings on a rotating basis. Meetings shall be open to the
68 public in accordance with the Open Meeting Law per Sections 18-25 of Chapter 30A as so
69 appearing in the 2012 General Laws and shall include time for public input and comment.

70 (a) The commission may request from all state agencies such information and assistance
71 as the commission may require.

72 (b) The commission may accept and solicit funds, including any gifts, donations, grants
73 or bequests or any federal funds, for any of the purposes of this section. Such funds shall be
74 deposited in a separate account with the state treasurer, be received by said treasurer on behalf of
75 the commonwealth, and be expended by the commission in accordance with law.

76 SECTION 6. The commission shall annually, on or before June 2, report the results of its
77 findings and activities of the preceding year and its recommendations to the Governor and to the
78 clerks of the Senate and House of Representatives.