

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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