Roadmap for a Stronger Rural Virginia:
Building a Flourishing, Sustainable Rural Economy

Rural Virginia’s natural resources, environment, and over one million residents from the Eastern Shore to the Appalachian Mountains, are vital to the Commonwealth and economy. These communities make Virginia a beautiful place to live and attract thousands of visitors each year. They are also home to Virginia’s largest industry — agriculture and forestry — providing 440,000 jobs and over $90 billion a year in economic impacts.¹

However, once flourishing and home to tremendous manufacturing and industrial hubs, Virginia’s rural communities have been hit hard over the past several decades as manufacturing, tobacco production, textiles, and other industries have declined or departed and the Great Recession eliminated jobs that have never returned. Virginians living in rural communities experience lower wages and a lack of infrastructure like broadband that people need to pursue economic opportunity. Our rural health care infrastructure is chronically underfunded, and only 8% of Virginia’s physicians practice in rural areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these inequities, reversing progress made on fighting the opioid epidemic that had already disproportionately impacted rural Virginians.

As Virginia’s 72nd Governor, Terry worked to expand healthcare access and to create new opportunities for rural Virginians. He paved the way for Medicaid expansion, prioritized bringing good-paying jobs in these regions, and he’ll do it again as our next governor. Terry will build on this progress as Virginia’s next governor, first by ensuring that rural communities are key to our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. That includes getting every Virginian online and promoting access to virtual training and career opportunities, as well as making telehealth available throughout rural areas. Terry will elevate local solutions to attract

jobs and workers by launching Virginia’s first rural economic development hubs and establishing rural communities in Virginia as the energy innovation capitals of the East Coast. He will also invest in rural education and workforce development, and support the farmers that are vital to the success of our economy. Combined, Terry’s plan will create ecosystems that support families, rural economies and drive economic growth.

Prioritize Rural Economic Development
As Virginia’s 72nd Governor, Terry worked hard to attract new businesses and over 200,000 new jobs to the Commonwealth. Terry believes that the right investments in Virginia’s rural economy will unlock its economic potential. Rural Virginians are nearly twice as likely to be experiencing poverty or lack a high school diploma compared to their urban counterparts. We must renew our commitment to economic development for the forgotten corners of our Commonwealth by incentivizing education and job training programs. Terry’s plan will:

- **Create a pilot project to build Virginia’s first intentional rural economic development hub.** Virginia’s rural communities are ripe with opportunity and have the ability to serve as economic development hubs for the Commonwealth, offering residents a high quality of life, access to more affordable housing, and quality education. Unfortunately, these communities are also facing declining populations and a loss of highly-employable workers as residents are forced to relocate to seek opportunity. Terry recognizes that in order to build an equitable post-COVID economy that lifts up all Virginians, we must strategically drive resources into rural communities to create new opportunities. As Virginia continues to see federal relief and infrastructure dollars flowing into the Commonwealth, Terry will ensure that enough of those funds are specifically earmarked to create rural ecosystems that support regional economic development, and will establish a pilot project to create an economic development hub that benefits several rural jurisdictions.

This new pilot will deploy high-impact investments in up to four neighboring cities or counties within a region, creating Virginia’s first intentional rural economic development hub that will support sustainable economic growth. Terry will establish a public-private regional consortium to oversee the process, incorporating local voices and local solutions to address the region’s needs. In order to create the ecosystems needed to sustain growth in the region, the consortium will develop and execute a plan that may include efforts to revitalize local main streets, invest in broadband infrastructure, support business development or expansion, support affordable childcare, and infuse resources to meet workforce needs, Terry will build a strong foundation that will allow him to attract new industries, create jobs, anchor regional development, promote tourism, and generate sustainable economic growth.

- **Establish rural communities in Virginia as the energy innovation capitals of the East Coast.** As Virginia continues to move toward a 100% clean energy standard by

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2035 and away from non-renewable energy sources, there is a tremendous opportunity to drive investment into the development of clean energy technologies while lifting up regions of the Commonwealth that have been impacted the most by this transition. Virginia’s rural communities have the natural resources, education and workforce capabilities, and talent to lead major innovation in this area, which will not only advance the Commonwealth’s goals, but will also create good jobs and opportunity in the region. As governor, Terry will partner with local leaders, the newly established Southwest Virginia Energy Research and Development Authority and the associated energy innovation lab, community colleges and institutions of higher education, and private sector partners to establish Virginia’s rural communities as national leaders in the transition to clean energy. Doing so will create educational opportunities for K-12 students, bolster workforce development programs to produce graduates to step into these new jobs, and create opportunities in the region.

- **Expand the Tobacco Commission’s Talent Attraction program to keep workers in rural communities.** Today, people wishing to live and work in rural communities are often forced to leave their home communities and move to seek opportunity. This in turn further stifles economic growth, contributes to declining populations, and prevents people from enjoying the high quality of life rural communities can offer. Terry recognizes that in order to prevent this Virginia must invest in rural economic development initiatives that build the ecosystems to support businesses, families and workers. In addition to creating rural economic development hubs through a pilot program, Terry will build on the Tobacco Commission’s Talent Attraction program, and invest in paying off student loans for people who live, work in in-demand fields, and are socially engaged in communities with declining populations. By paying a percentage of student loan debt for recent grads in these fields, in exchange for multi-year commitments to remain actively part of rural communities, Terry can support schools and businesses that need new talent, communities that need new leaders, and student borrowers who need a way to build a stable financial future without the burden of student debt. He will also explore every opportunity to leverage federal funding and public-private partnerships to attract and retain workers in rural communities, including access to capital and technical assistance for entrepreneurs, and workforce training programs. As governor, Terry will bring the investment we need to build rural Virginia's 21st century economy.

**Get Every Virginian Online**

Terry understands the hard work we must undertake to get every Virginian access to high-speed, affordable internet service. Over 300,000 Virginia homes have no broadband internet access at all, while hundreds of thousands have only limited speed and provider options or options that are unaffordable. As governor, Terry will marshal the energy of our vibrant Commonwealth to finally bring broadband to every corner of Virginia. Terry’s plan will:

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• **Leverage federal, state and local funds, as well as public-private partnerships to achieve universal broadband.** Terry launched his campaign with a **bold plan** to invest a record $2 billion into our education system to finally deliver every Virginia student an equitable, world-class education. In his education plan, Terry commits to getting every student and 387,000 households online. He'll do this through innovative investments in free-to-access networks in dense areas and ongoing investment to reduce costs for families who cannot afford access and who can't be reached by new networks. For those without adequate infrastructure to get online, Terry will build on progress the Commonwealth has already made and maintain current state investment of $50 million per year in the VATI program. Terry recognizes that access to broadband is integral to success in a 21st century economy, and that is why he will build on his plan and guarantee universal broadband coverage across the Commonwealth by the end of his term.

**Revitalize the Quality and Accessibility of Rural Health Care**
Rural health care is in crisis. Chronically underfunded and working against an uphill economic playing field, it has failed to meet the basic needs of Virginia’s rural communities. As rural hospitals have closed, rural Virginia’s aging and chronically ill populations have had reduced access to affordable healthcare and much greater travel times. In fact, only 8% of the state’s physicians are located in rural areas.\(^5\) In Southwest Virginia and rural counties all across the Commonwealth, there has been a hollowing out of hospital infrastructure and the medical workforce. As governor, Terry led the fight for healthcare reform in Virginia by pushing hard for Medicaid Expansion and affordable healthcare for every Virginian. As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will:

• **Improve health care access and outcomes for rural Virginians.** Over one million Virginians live in a rural community, and for too long they have lacked access to basic health services and have experienced significant health disparities. Nationwide, people who live in rural communities are more likely to die prematurely from every one of the top leading causes of death in America.\(^6\) In Virginia, we know that rural communities do not have enough providers to meet the needs of their residents.\(^7\) This is especially true when it comes to dental care, as some rural communities in Virginia may have only one dentist per 5,000 residents, and no safety-net provider.\(^8\) Terry attended the Remote Area Medical clinic each year when he was governor, which provided free medical and dental clinics in Southwest Virginia. Terry saw firsthand the depth of unmet need in the thousands of citizens lined up for hours to receive basic medical and dental care. No Virginian should lack access to necessary care because of where they live. As governor, Terry will partner with the Biden administration to expand access to coverage and care by increasing the availability of telehealth services, investing in Virginia’s federally

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qualified health centers (FQHC) that provide care to those most in need, expanding access to basic health care services in schools, improving access to transportation, ensuring medical students get the training they need to support rural populations and developing innovative regional solutions that get Virginians the care they need. He will also work to expand loan repayment programs and provide state income tax credits for medical professionals who stay and work in a rural area.

- **Expand opportunities for telehealth and make current flexibilities permanent.** The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated the many benefits of telemedicine in providing care when individuals might not have the opportunity to visit their provider in person. Additionally, telehealth opportunities save both the patient and the provider time. In fact, telemedicine saves patients over 100 minutes of time compared to an in-person visit. This is especially critical for rural communities that are already more likely to face provider shortages, especially in specialty care, and transportation challenges. Telehealth has been shown to vastly improve outcomes for rural communities. As governor, Terry will work within the flexibility provided by the federal government to maximize virtual care options for those with Medicaid or state-regulated health insurance plans, eliminate unnecessary restrictions on practitioners, expand Virginians’ access to specialists, and leverage technology so that every Virginian can benefit from telehealth. He will also work to drastically expand broadband and technology literacy so that every community can not only access telehealth, but can effectively navigate the technology to take advantage of it. If a community doesn’t have access to broadband to access telehealth, Terry will bring the clinic to the community through a one-stop-shop mobile health unit.

- **Allocate new funding for substance use disorder prevention, harm reduction and treatment.** Virginia has been fighting the opioid and addiction epidemic for years, especially in rural communities, but the COVID-19 pandemic has upended years of progress. The Virginia Department of Health reported a 66% increase in overdose deaths in 2020, projecting it to be the worst year on record with more than 2,000 deaths. During his administration, Terry championed efforts to address the opioid and addiction epidemic in rural areas and throughout Virginia by creating the Governor’s Task Force on Prescription Drug and Heroin Abuse, declaring the opioid overdose epidemic a public health emergency, hosting a multi-state summit to coordinate regional solutions, adopting numerous bills to reduce over-prescribing and increase accountability, securing millions in funding, and increasing access to life-saving naloxone. As our next governor, Terry will continue to invest in new mechanisms for addiction prevention and treatment services with a focus on rural communities, and he will fight to expand evidence-based comprehensive harm reduction strategies like syringe access programs and naloxone distribution in every corner of the Commonwealth. Terry will also break down barriers to

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employment and housing for people in recovery, ensuring that recovery-friendly services are prioritized.

Create Equitable Access to Education in Rural Communities
Too often, leaders fail to recognize the regional inequities and need to invest in rural communities. Our rural communities in Virginia are rich with talent and opportunity, but COVID-19 has highlighted the regional disparities affecting our students. Lack of access to broadband is repeatedly highlighted as one of the biggest issues facing our rural communities, and it further drives the economic divide when businesses are looking for new locations and students are acquiring the skills they need to step into the jobs of tomorrow. It’s time to address this inequity. Terry’s plan will:

- **Improve school infrastructure in Virginia.** Many of Virginia’s schools are in dire need of being repaired or rebuilt due to outdated or crumbling infrastructure, with billions of dollars in needs across the Commonwealth. More than half of Virginia’s school buildings were over 50 years old in 2017, and almost 30 percent were over 60 years old. In Lee County, the average age of school buildings is 65, compared to 44 nationally. This results in our local school divisions losing money because of inefficient and outdated infrastructure, poorer educational outcomes and our students being exposed to potentially dangerous environmental hazards. Each year the Commonwealth fails to act, schools fall further into disrepair and the cost of addressing the needs go up. As Virginia continues to see influxes of federal relief and infrastructure dollars, it is critical that these funds are used strategically to address long-standing needs that will benefit Virginians for years to come. As Virginia’s next governor, Terry will commission a comprehensive, statewide assessment to clearly identify the scope of the problem and develop a long-term strategic plan to invest in school infrastructure across the Commonwealth. While that assessment will be critical to ensuring that the job gets done, Terry will get to work immediately. He will ensure that schools with the most dire needs get support right away, even as the overall assessment is being conducted. Terry will partner with President Biden to ensure localities have access to the resources and flexibility they need to leverage these dollars for long-term sustainable solutions, and he will also pursue public-private partnerships to address this growing issue. In order to take politics out of the equation, Terry will implement a SMART SCALE-style process like he did for transportation to use a clear, consistent process to determine how projects will be selected for funding.

- **Partner with the business sector to engage students early and create virtual internships and apprenticeships.** A key part of reimagining our K12 education system and making sure every student has equitable access to a quality education is making sure we are equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Virginia has taken important steps to engage students as early as 7th and 8th grade about academic

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and career planning as part of Terry’s high school redesign, but we have to continue to
invest in high-quality internships and apprenticeships. Virginia must leverage the
innovative virtual learning opportunities that have emerged during this pandemic and
proceed with equity at the forefront. There is no reason that a student in Bristol or on the
Eastern Shore cannot partner with an emerging technology company or another growing
sector through a virtual internship or other program. Now is the time to think big and
create a pipeline of workers for high-demand jobs.

Support Virginia Farmers
Agriculture is Virginia’s largest industry and contributes nine percent of the Commonwealth’s
employment across farmland spanning over 8 million acres. One of Terry’s first acts as
governor in 2014 was to sign a law creating more economic opportunities and cutting red tape
for family farms. He boosted consumer access to locally produced food, gave farmers access to
new markets, and launched the Virginia Grown—Homegrown By Heroes program to support
military veteran farmers. Healthy ecosystems are the backbone of Virginia’s rural economy, and
Terry’s support for Virginia farmers has meant leading the way on conserving our natural
resources, including as chair of the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Council. Terry will also fight
to end rural food insecurity and has released his food security plan, Ensuring that Virginians
Have Access to Regular, Nutritious Meals. To support Virginia farmers, Terry will:

- Establish Virginia as a major supplier of specialty crops, particularly specialty
grains used in craft beverage production. Virginia has a strong history of agricultural
excellence and is well-positioned to serve as a national leader in the production of
specialty crops and grains. Virginia’s craft beverage industry continues to grow and
blossom, ranking 12th in the nation for the number of craft breweries in the
Commonwealth. Unfortunately, Virginia continues to import much of the specialty
grains and malt needed to produce craft beer and distilled spirits from other states and
internationally. As a state as rich in natural resources as we are, there is no reason that
Virginia should be importing these grains. In fact, Virginia should be a major supplier to
craft beverage industries around the nation. As governor, Terry will work with local
farmers to build this industry. He will support local and regional initiatives by providing
new revenue opportunities to small and family farms, create the next generation of
farmers, and reduce food miles. He will also support locally-driven initiatives to identify

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and protect land for farming, partner with community colleges to create additional career pathways in agriculture through new course offerings and certifications, and market Virginia products around the globe.

- **Invest in smart farming and partner with community colleges to increase access to education and credentials.** Technological innovations in farming have made it possible for farming to be more efficient, sustainable, profitable and environmentally responsible. However, rural communities in Virginia need better access to adopt these systems, from training to funding. As governor, Terry will unlock the benefits of smart farming technology by offering low or no-interest loans to small farms for implementing improvements rooted in modern information technology. He will also work with community colleges to promote smart farming education programs, building off of his first-in-the-nation Workforce Credential Grant Fund and Program to offer credentials that will support rural Virginians in the workforce. As governor, Terry also directed hundreds of thousands in grants to upgrade career and technical education program equipment at rural community colleges. Terry will make big investments in rural Virginia’s farmers, technology, and workforce development.

- **Support new farmers and family farmers.** Virginia should be the best place in the nation for small, new farms to succeed and grow. Unfortunately, there may be significant barriers preventing people from entering the industry and being successful. As governor, Terry will lead the way on initiatives to make it easier for Virginians to start a farm and for farmers to grow their business. He will market federally-funded programs to Virginians, like the federal [microloan program](#) for beginning farmers and the USDA’s [farm ownership and operating loans](#) for family farms of growing families. Terry will also pursue state opportunities to support these efforts by reducing the barriers to starting a new farm, coordinating across agencies to reduce the burden of red tape in all state and local procedures, forms, licenses, and permits, as well as creating easy-to-read online guides and a single list of all requirements to start a business. He will also explore offering student loan forgiveness to entrepreneurs starting new farms in rural areas in Virginia.