



**House Financial Services Committee Hearing  
Perspectives on the Livable Communities Act, H.R. 4690**

**The Honorable Julia W. Gouge  
President, Board of Commissioners  
Carroll County, Maryland**

**On behalf of the  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
September 23, 2010**

Chairman Frank, Ranking Member Bachus and members of the Financial Services Committee. My name is Julia Gouge, and I am President of the Carroll County Board of Commissioners, Member of the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Board of Directors; Environment, Energy and Land Use Steering Committee; and Rural Action Caucus. I thank you for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing on the Livable Communities Act, H.R. 4690. It is my privilege to represent NACo and our President, Tarrant County, TX, Judge Glen Whitley here today. We appreciate Chairman Frank holding a hearing on this important legislation introduced by Representative Ed Perlmutter (D-CO) which ensures rural, mid-size and urban communities can benefit from The Livable Communities Act.

NACo, the only national organization representing America's 3068 counties, supports the Livable Communities Act, which provides incentive grants to local areas for regional planning around housing, transportation, environmental, energy, and land use and health initiatives. NACo has long advocated for flexibility, regionalism, and direct funding to local governments and regions as proven methods for enhancing communities. NACo believes that sustainability initiatives are most effective when they are multi-jurisdictional and involve multi-dimensional collaborations across communities of all sizes. NACo passed a resolution supporting the Livable Communities Act.

Rural, suburban and urban counties have been pursuing local strategies to create livable communities and implement sustainable development for decades. NACo has worked to support our members in achieving sustainable development for more than 15 years through assistance on issues including smart growth and planning; sustainable economic development and business

retention; improving citizen health through obesity prevention initiatives and promoting active living; as well as increasing efficiency and transparency in development; and in housing and home ownership opportunities. NACo's initial efforts in the mid 1990s focused on city - county collaborations and priorities now include clean energy development and disaster resiliency.

In July, NACo released a draft of its survey on 2010 Counties Sustainability Efforts at our Annual Conference. NACo began this effort to better define, prioritize, and more fully assess the landscape of county sustainability strategies. The survey captures almost 600 counties differing levels of sustainability knowledge, interest, commitment, and barriers to the development of specific sustainability goals—including energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, water conservation, green job creation, and integrated waste management. While the publication is still being finalized, survey highlights include that energy efficiency and renewable energy generation, and waste management are the most common sustainability efforts counties are pursuing.

In general, counties in the Western and Northern regions are pursuing all sustainability strategies with greater intensity than Southern and Midwestern counties. If given the opportunity, the majority of counties surveyed would further invest in sustainability efforts, including energy efficiency/renewable energy regeneration; green building construction/renovation, waste management and water conservation; green purchasing, local food systems and green economic development. Overwhelmingly, funding is the most significant challenge inhibiting counties from accomplishing all sustainability strategies. The second most cited challenge is staff time.

NACo began the Green Government Initiative in 2007 to provide comprehensive resources for local governments on all things green. The NACo Green Government Initiative is a:

- hub for county leadership on all things green,
- public/private partnership to provide information, training and assistance to counties, and
- catalyst to facilitate county green policies, practices, and products that result in financial and environmental savings.

We have focused on a variety of topics including:

- Energy efficient buildings
- High mileage and alternatively fueled fleets
- Environmentally preferable purchasing
- Waste management and recycling
- Water quality and conservation
- Land use and conservation
- Climate protection and adaptation and
- Community sustainability

The priorities for 2010 are:

- Cost-Saving Strategies through “going green”
- Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy, especially implementation of the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant

- Green Jobs and the Local Economy and
- Local food supply and community gardening

In May 2010, NACo's Green Government Initiative completed a new guidebook on the role counties can play in growing their local green economies. *Growing a Green Local Economy: County Strategies for Economic, Workforce and Environmental Innovation* serves as a resource for counties interested in assessing the unique attributes of their local green economy and tapping into its tremendous potential.

Planning for sustainable communities is by its nature a regional effort. Counties are unique in that they are at their core a regional form of government, especially in rural America. Whether acting individually, with neighboring jurisdictions, or through regional councils, counties have the primary role in land-use planning and economic development decisions that impact and determine the growth, development and livability of communities.

However, many counties, especially rural and mid size counties would like to begin sustainable planning and development but lack the resources to do so. Many other counties have developed strong sustainability plans, but need extra funding to implement. This legislation will be effective because it meets communities where they are – at the planning or implementation stage. Also, the grants are available to meet the needs of counties of all sizes, including rural ones.

In my county of Carroll County, MD population of 175,000 we have created three LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certified Green Buildings. These buildings are oriented for site optimum natural day lighting and solar control; solar heating for domestic water; occupancy sensors for lighting; extensive storm water management structures; geo-thermal mechanical systems; and the use of high-recycled content materials such as steel, carpet, acoustical ceiling panels, drywall and concrete. To help reduce our carbon footprint, we have also invested in the purchase of hybrid cars for our fleet, as well as hybrid vans for our local transportation system.

Carroll County is one of the twenty one governmental entities participating in the “Energy Management Initiative,” provided through partnership with the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC). In Fiscal Year 2009, Carroll County estimated an electricity savings from BGE of \$900,000. Carroll is an active participant on the regional Sustainability Council of the BMC, which promotes coordinated policies amongst the regional jurisdictions to: realize smarter, more efficient energy purchases and utilization; share best practices relating to sustainable growth and development; and, adopt model alternative energy and sustainability plans from successful examples gained from other metro areas. We are also actively participating in the regional ‘Vision 2060’ effort which is a long-term visioning exercise being conducted by the BMC. The effort is designed to develop long term plans for transportation alternatives in the Baltimore metro area - fifty years in the future. The BMC member jurisdictions hope to create a plan that will place sustainability and livability at the top of the future priorities list (*i.e. expanded transit system, reduction of single occupant vehicles on crowded roadways, and reduction in vehicle miles travelled, by promoting efficient land use and development*).

In an effort to preserve our rural history, Carroll County has implemented an Installment Purchase Agreement (IPA) for farm preservation. This program allows us to purchase development rights, by leveraging our money, so that we can buy more land at today's prices. To date, we have placed over 60,000 acres into permanent agricultural preservation.

NACo continues to believe that sustainability should be voluntary and encouraged through a federal grant program that rewards regions and communities that undertake sustainable programs, like what is proposed in the Livable Communities Act. We do not believe that sustainability should be a condition for receiving housing, transportation and other traditional sources of federal funding.

We believe that all communities should be eligible for the program. Under the initial proposed legislation, some rural and remote communities would not have been eligible. We support a fix to set aside funds for a sub-category of rural areas that are not part of an otherwise eligible micropolitan area, such as the one included in the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee passed version.

These rural communities have undertaken sustainable development projects at a scale that is realistic based on resource and geography constraints. These communities represent the majority of the nation's land mass and should play a critical role in federal efforts to encourage sustainable development. For example, only 122 counties have populations over 500,000. About 180 counties fall in the 200,000 to 500,000 population range and 2,835 counties (over ninety percent) have populations below 200,000.

NACo's Rural Action Caucus (RAC) advocated for passage of the Livable Communities Act during their legislative fly-in on April 28, 2010. On June 9, 2010, I testified at Senate Banking Chairman Chris Dodd's Committee hearing on this legislation. Also, Brookings County, SD Commissioner Don Larson, Chair of the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and member of RAC spoke at the Senate briefing on The Livable Communities Act Rural Benefits on April 30, 2010. RAC is the voice for America's rural counties in Washington. It is a bipartisan coalition of rural elected officials, who strive to enhance the quality of life in rural counties through effective federal legislation. The caucus is not only the advocacy arm of the organization, but also serves as the conduit for technical and programmatic assistance through the NACo County Services Department.

The legislation also creates the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities to coordinate federal policies and initiatives on livable communities which will provide information on best practices and technical assistance. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has already started this office and has grant money available for Fiscal Year 2010 on sustainable planning. The bill would also formally establish the Interagency Council on Sustainable Communities, a partnership amongst U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Transportation, and Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). NACo supports HUD taking the lead on breaking down silos within the federal government, and coordinating these efforts between federal agencies. Representative Perlmutter's legislation supports this intergovernmental sustainable coordination.

NACo believes it is the right time for passage of the Livable Communities Act because of the difficult economic and fiscal environment in our counties, and the pressure of new social, economic and environmental imperatives. The goal of sustainability compels all levels of government to regroup, and to demand innovative multi-jurisdictional, multi-dimensional and fiscally sound approaches that will lead to better transportation choices, equitable and affordable housing, and social equity and enhanced opportunities for our communities.

When federal funding is involved, efforts at integrated local and regional planning are often hindered by the states when funds are not granted directly to local governments. Therefore, NACo appreciates that the bill allows local entities to receive funding directly.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with Chairman Frank, Representative Perlmutter and other members as this legislation moves forward to ensure that small metro and rural communities are active participants along with urban ones. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.