

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2007**

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HOUSE BILL 1954

Short Title: Robeson County Appropriations Bill. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Pierce, Sutton, and Yongue (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to: Appropriations.

May 8, 2007

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

1 AN ACT TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS TO ROBESON COUNTY FOR THE SMALL
2 BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT FUND OF ROBESON COUNTY, TO ESTABLISH
3 THE ROBESON COUNTY FOOD PLANNING ASSOCIATION AND
4 COMPLETE A COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT, AND FOR
5 ASSET-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING.
6

7 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

8 **SECTION 1.** The General Assembly makes the following findings:

- 9 (1) In August 2006, the U.S. Census released its report "Income, Poverty,
10 and Health Insurance Coverage: 2005." The report indicates that
11 Robeson County, North Carolina, has the third highest poverty rate in
12 the United States (p. 29) and with the third lowest median household
13 income (p. 25) among all counties with a population between 65,000
14 and 250,000 (Source:
15 <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/2006/Webcast.pdf>).
- 16 (2) Between 2000-2005, poverty in Robeson County grew at an alarming
17 rate of forty-four percent (44%) rising from twenty-two and eight-
18 tenths percent (22.8%) to thirty-two and nine-tenths percent (32.9%).
19 This ten and one-tenth percent (10.1%) increase in the poverty
20 population is more than the combined increase of the four other
21 poorest counties in the country of similar population.
- 22 (3) The significant rise in poverty in Robeson County is directly related to
23 the massive job loss in its manufacturing sector from 1993-2003.
24 During these 10 years, Robeson County lost 8,708 jobs, more than any
25 other rural county in North Carolina and perhaps the nation. The ripple
26 effect of the loss of these manufacturing jobs in the region was over
27 four billion seven hundred eighty million dollars (\$4,780,000,000).
- 28 (4) Robeson County is the third poorest county among midsize counties in
29 the United States. The appropriations made by this act provide support

1 for strategies needed to develop small businesses, small farms, and
2 local markets which are the backbone of Robeson County's and North
3 Carolina's rural economies. Many rural and urban counties throughout
4 North Carolina are experiencing major losses in manufacturing
5 employment. This bill includes model programs that, once
6 implemented and evaluated, can be replicated in both rural and urban
7 counties that are plagued by job loss and are seeking effective
8 strategies to grow their small business, agricultural, and/or tourism
9 sectors.

10 **SECTION 2.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County
11 of Robeson the sum of six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal
12 year and the sum of six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal
13 year to be used for the Small Business Development Fund of Robeson County as
14 provided in this section. Of these funds, five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in
15 each fiscal year may be used only for early-stage, start-up funding for small businesses
16 and farms.

17 **SECTION 2.(b)** The Small Business Development Fund of Robeson County
18 will provide business counseling and coaching with businesses that receive funds. The
19 fund will provide seed monies for early stage, start-up funding, and expansion funding
20 of small businesses and small farms.

21 The Small Business Development Fund will be investment funds in new and
22 expanding enterprises of a small business and agriculture nature that are locally owned
23 and operate in Robeson County. Competitive grants up to ten thousand dollars
24 (\$10,000) will be awarded on a fifty percent (50%) matching basis of cash or in-kind
25 services. For example, if an individual receives a ten thousand dollar (\$10,000)
26 development grant, that individual must match it with five thousand dollars (\$5,000) in
27 cash, in-kind services, or a combination of both. All applicants will be required to
28 complete a small business certification program approved by the Robeson County
29 Board of Commissioners.

30 The Small Business Development Fund will encourage development in
31 business and agricultural sectors that build on the region's heritage, natural resources,
32 and cultural assets, as well as help stabilize or strengthen downtown retail business
33 environments, and/or do not jeopardize the character of our communities. This fund will
34 not provide funds for any business within the following sectors: adult entertainment,
35 gambling, payday lending, or check cashing. The fifty percent (50%) match funding
36 requirement ensures that grants are not given to projects that businesses do not invest in
37 with their own money.

38 Decisions regarding grants will be made by an Advisory Board that will have
39 representation from government, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors and diverse
40 geographic areas across Robeson County. The Advisory Board will be appointed by the
41 Robeson County Board of Commissioners based on criteria developed prior to
42 appointments. All grants will receive final approval by the Robeson County Board of
43 Commissioners. This program will be closely monitored and evaluated in order that it

1 may serve as a model program in small business and farm development for other
2 counties and the State as a whole.

3 **SECTION 3.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County
4 of Robeson the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal
5 year and the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal
6 year to: (i) establish the Robeson County Food Planning Association and complete a
7 Community Food Assessment (CFA); and (ii) plan and design the development of a
8 local food system and the sustainability of the Southeastern North Carolina Farmers
9 Market.

10 **SECTION 3.(b)** Both Food Planning Associations and CFAs are
11 collaborative processes, utilized by U.S. Department of Agriculture funded programs.
12 These two initiatives systematically examine a broad range of community food needs,
13 issues, and assets and design plans to develop local food markets and systems. The Food
14 Planning Association will conduct short- and long-term planning activities related to
15 local food, nutrition, and agriculture needs and markets. The Association will perform a
16 Community Food Assessment and plan strategies to increase and strengthen locally
17 produced food and markets. Membership of the Association will include farmers, food
18 suppliers, institutional buyers, public and private service providers, community leaders,
19 educators, and business representatives.

20 The Community Food Assessment will:

- 21 (1) Engage a broad and multisector group of people in the assessment
22 process through participatory methods including community meetings,
23 focus groups, surveys, and the mapping of food resources.
- 24 (2) Research and analyze existing data and information on local food
25 needs and assets.
- 26 (3) Recommend programs, policies, and market strategies to develop a
27 locally integrated food system.

28 **SECTION 3.(c)** During fiscal year 2007-2008, the funds appropriated by
29 this section shall be used to establish the Robeson County Food Planning Association
30 and complete a community food assessment, as well as (i) recruit diverse members, (ii)
31 meet on a monthly basis, (iii) provide education and training, and (iv) complete a
32 community food assessment of Robeson County.

33 **SECTION 3.(d)** During fiscal year 2008-2009, the funds appropriated by
34 this section shall be used to develop a plan for establishing a local food system and
35 sustaining the Southeastern North Carolina Farmers Market, as well as to: (i) identify
36 and recruit additional members based on fiscal year 2007-2008 food assessment, and (ii)
37 develop a plan for establishing and implementing a local food system in Robeson
38 County that includes developing and sustaining the Southeastern North Carolina
39 Farmers Market.

40 **SECTION 4.(a)** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the County
41 of Robeson the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal
42 year and the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the 2008-2009 fiscal
43 year for Asset-Based Economic Development Planning.

1 **SECTION 4.(b)** The funds appropriated by this section shall be used to
2 assess, design, and plan the development of an asset-based economy in Robeson County
3 that builds on existing resources – natural, historical, cultural, agricultural, and
4 structural-to create valued products and services that can be sustained for local benefit.
5 Robeson County's assets and resources are a beacon for its future economic growth. The
6 region's natural, historical, cultural, and structural assets are its unique calling cards that
7 need to be preserved and promoted for its enduring prosperity. As the region shifts from
8 manufacturing to a more service-based economy, communities and businesses must
9 offer value-added benefits for customers while guarding against overuse of assets and
10 outside ownership. Keeping the tangible and intangible benefits local is important.
11 Asset-based economic development is measured in the traditional ways: job creation,
12 job retention, per capita income, and tax revenues. There are also many indirect benefits
13 of asset-based economic development: increased community pride, spruced-up
14 downtowns, traditions continued, former residents returning to the region, and new
15 activities or public services for citizens. Asset-based – also called place-based –
16 development is the foundation for growth in the recreation and tourism sectors and
17 small businesses in the local economy. The creation of a countywide asset-based
18 development plan will identify present and emerging small businesses and new
19 opportunities for small business development in Robeson County over the next 10
20 years.

21 **SECTION 4.(c)** During fiscal year 2007-2008, the funds appropriated by
22 this section shall be used to complete an asset-based assessment of Robeson County's
23 natural, historical, cultural, agricultural, and structural assets and resources, and to:

- 24 (1) Recruit diverse members to the Asset-Based Development Committee.
- 25 (2) Meet on a monthly basis.
- 26 (3) Provide education and training.
- 27 (4) Complete an asset-based assessment and map of Robeson County's
28 diverse resources.

29 **SECTION 4.(d)** During fiscal year 2008-2009, the funds appropriated by
30 this section shall be used to design and develop an Asset-Based Economic Development
31 Plan based on the fiscal year 2007-2008 resource assessment, and to:

- 32 (1) Identify and recruit additional members to the Asset-Based
33 Development Committee based on the Year 1 resource assessment.
- 34 (2) Develop a design and 10-year vision and extensive plan for
35 countywide, Asset-Based Economic Development.

36 **SECTION 5.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2007.