

NORTHERN INDIANA ADVOCATES
UNITING FOR REGIONAL PROSPERITY



2021
Legislative
Agenda

Northern Indiana Advocates, December 2020

POLICY PRIORITY: EXPAND EMPLOYER ACCESS TO QUALIFIED WORKFORCE

PILLAR: 21ST CENTURY TALENT

Support delivery of telehealth and telephonic services and fees for diagnosis and basic treatment of all health care services, including mental health, substance abuse, expert consultation, and specialty care.

When the Governor issued the COVID-19 Emergency Declaration and issued Shelter in Place orders in March of 2020, many rapid changes were approved and implemented, including authorization of Telehealth and Telephonic services. All barriers to such treatment were removed or relaxed to enable treatment to continue while patients and providers Sheltered in Place. Additionally, Medicaid, Medicaid Managed Care, Medicare, and eventually, Commercial Insurance companies paid for these services at standard rates that they paid for in-person delivery of the same services. They continued to pay Facility Fees (which are basically an enhanced rate for Diagnostic and Treatment services) and required that the providers be hospital-based healthcare organizations.

POLICY PRIORITY: INVESTING IN RURAL INDIANA

PILLAR: WORLD CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE

Seek state funding to support NEIN REMC's efforts to bring 21st Century communications into all areas of the Region.

The March 2020 shutdown and shelter in place ordered by the Governor in response to the COVID-19 Virus and the resultant damage done to our economy provided ample evidence to all about the risk to non-urban areas due to the absence of true high-speed broadband. Throughout Northern Indiana, our children could not participate in distance learning unless "Hot Spots" were available to them. Our health care professionals were unable to provide adequate telehealth services, and countless employers were unable to have essential employees work from home as they lacked sufficient high-speed internet capabilities.

Under the CAREs Act, the U.S. Government provided the state of Indiana with well over \$2 billion for COVID related costs. One approach we want to monitor is the REMC model. Some REMCs have developed a plan whereby the REMCs would be able to commit their balance sheets to install fiber to accommodate legitimate high-speed broadband services.

A budget was proposed that would enable the REMCs to leverage a total of \$135 million, or 25% of the total cost to install the infrastructure, into a total investment exceeding \$405 million. The total cost incurred from Federal CARES ACT funds would be ¼ the cost of taxpayer cost per location of NEXT LEVEL Rural Broad Band installations while serving five times the locations.

Our goal is to secure these funds via Governor Holcomb's executive action from CARES Act funding or from the state budget.

POLICY PRIORITY: TRANSPORTATION

PILLAR: WORLD CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE

Secure \$20 million from the 2020-2024 STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PLAN (STTIP) from funds allocated for road construction to pay the cost of an environmental impact study (EIS) from the Ohio state line west to the Illinois line.

Businesses from throughout the U.S. 30 corridor expressed the need to upgrade this critical route from the Ohio State line west towards Chicago to provide improved access. This access is needed to facilitate deliveries of materials from supply chains and delivery of finished products to customers. It is also needed to improve the safety of the public in all of Northeast, North-central, and Northwest Indiana.

- Analysis of the corridor indicates that conversion of U.S. 30 from a Free-flowing highway to a Freeway will lead to 10,000 additional jobs and over \$900 million in Personal Income Growth
- Drivers along the corridor will see a reduction of 18,382 hours of delay per day
- With a freeway in place, there will be 323 fewer accidents and four fewer fatalities per year
- Improvements will provide more than \$1.3 billion in travel time savings for drivers, \$565 million in vehicle operating costs, \$715 million in accident cost while reducing carbon emissions.

INDOT divides the state into six districts. The nine county **NIA north region includes both the Ft Wayne and LaPorte Districts.**

The Fort Wayne Transportation District, is receiving \$29 million and the LaPorte District is receiving \$57.8 million from the Road Construction portion of the STIP from the \$ 4.122 billion allocated statewide. **This is only 2.1% of the total and is grossly inadequate for the Transportation Districts with the second and third-highest populations and the Districts with the most significant industrial output.**

\$20 million from the total \$4.122 billion can be repurposed to pay the cost of the Environmental Impact Study, which will increase our total to 1.59% of the total allocation (still grossly inadequate) but will secure a place in the long term plan of INDOT for this project.

NIA is not taking a position or advocating for the conversion of U.S. 30 from a free-flowing highway to a freeway. We are advocating only for the allocation of funds for an environmental impact study. A project of this nature will take years to be added to INDOTs list of projects to be funded. The completion of an economic impact study will serve to put U.S. 30 in the queue and speed up acceptance of this project should our region's leaders decide it is in our best interest to move forward.

POLICY PRIORITY: POST SECONDARY EDUCATION

**PILLAR: 21st Century Workforce
Competitive Business Environment**

Support Post-Secondary Education by retaining the Frank O'Bannon Grant Fund use by two-year and four-year public, private, and proprietary institutions for academic studies at current levels.

In 2018 the State budget included \$384,494,482 in grants and scholarships for a total of 72,164 students and a mean award of \$5,328. These funds are distributed to 4 year public schools (\$251,793,528 to 42871 students, a mean award of \$5,873), 2-year public (\$29,656,090 to 13,662 students, a mean award of \$2,171), Private (\$99,869,798 to 15,345 students, a mean award of \$6,508) and Proprietary \$3,154,392 to 1,126 students, a mean award of \$2,801). The O'Bannon funds have been largely used to support academic institutions and are considered vital to the 45% of students who are the first generation to attend post-secondary education and the 78% who are Pell Grant eligible.

We have been advised that all post-secondary educational institutions, 2-year, 4-year, academic, or vocational, could have budgets sharply curtailed in the upcoming 2-year budget cycle. This will not only damage our institution's ability to deliver services but could impair our students' ability to pay the costs for education beyond the typical k-12. We do not believe that this is beneficial to the long-term economic interests of the post-secondary institutions, the students themselves, the business of Northern Indiana and the State, nor the taxpayers of the State of Indiana. Such curtailment will set back our ability to expand our knowledge-based economy and could easily saddle Indiana taxpayers with additional long-term expenses for public assistance.

We support stability for the operating budgets of our post-secondary institutions.