

ST. CLAIR COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-18

**A RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE CLASSIFICATION OF ST. CLAIR COUNTY AS A
METROPOLITAN AREA FOR PURPOSES OF RURAL HEALTH TRANSFORMATION
PROGRAM FUNDING AND URGING RECONSIDERATION TO REFLECT THE COUNTY'S
RURAL LAND AREA, CHARACTER, AND NEEDS**

WHEREAS, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) issued a press release on July 8, 2026, announcing grant funding opportunities (GFOs) under the Rural Health Transformation (RHT) Program's Workforce for Wellness Initiative, with approximately \$34,231,500 available across five funding streams to support recruitment, retention, training, and integrated care in Michigan's rural health workforce, including Maternal Health Provider Training (\$5,000,000), the University-Led Master of Social Work Award Program (\$7,000,000), the Rural Health Provider, Recruitment, and Retention Program (\$14,731,500), the Limited License Master of Social Work Supervision Stipend Program (\$2,500,000), and the Bachelor of Social Work to Clinical Master of Social Work Stipend Program (\$5,000,000); and

WHEREAS, these opportunities are supported by a Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) financial assistance award totaling \$173,128,201 and form part of Michigan's broader rural health transformation efforts, with a pre-application conference scheduled for July 15, 2026, and applications due in late July/early August 2026 via the EGrAMS system; and

WHEREAS, in connection with the state's rural health plan and associated federal funding application, St. Clair County was not included among the counties eligible for RHT Program funding, creating barriers to eligibility for St. Clair County communities with significant rural characteristics and documented rural health challenges; and

WHEREAS, St. Clair County (population approximately 160,400 across a land area of approximately 700 square miles) is predominantly rural in land area and character, with low-density development patterns across many townships and substantial farmland and open space, as reflected in its County Master Plan's emphasis on Rural and Agricultural Conservation Districts, and where transportation barriers to care (especially in the western portions of the county), provider shortages, and distance to essential services are well-documented for the significant share of residents living outside the Port Huron urban core; and

WHEREAS, St. Clair County's ineligibility for these funds arises from MDHHS's application of Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP) census-tract classifications, under which St. Clair County was found to contain no qualifying rural tracts notwithstanding the

substantial rural character, low population density, and documented access barriers of its western and northern townships; and

WHEREAS, this outcome reflects a commuting-based methodology under which a number of the County's low-density tracts are held just above the rural threshold not because of any urban character of their own, but because a substantial share of their residents commute outward to employment centers in Port Huron and the greater Detroit area, thereby penalizing St. Clair County for the commuting necessity of its predominantly in-person workforce — whose long commutes are a hallmark of rural communities lacking a large local employment base — and counting the very patterns that reflect the County's rural character as evidence of urban integration; and

WHEREAS, the uniform application of MDHHS's chosen standard produces a result that cannot be defended on the program's own terms: Oakland and Wayne counties — among the most populous and urbanized in the State — received partial rural designations on the strength of a handful of census tracts containing little or no residential population, including tracts encompassing a state recreation area, a regional metropark, and an international airport, thereby extending rural health eligibility to two large metropolitan counties, while St. Clair County — with its substantially greater rural land area and rural population as measured by population density — was denied that eligibility altogether; and

WHEREAS, the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners supports the objectives of the RHT Program and believes local entities—including the St. Clair County Health Department, Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), hospitals and clinics, 501(c)(3) nonprofits, educational institutions, and other eligible applicants—should have full opportunity to compete for these critical workforce development resources to address ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining physicians, nurses, social workers, maternal health providers, and other professionals in rural and underserved areas of the county;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners hereby opposes the classification of St. Clair County as a metropolitan area for purposes of determining eligibility, priority, or allocation of funding under the RHT Program and any similar rural health initiatives or plans; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board urges MDHHS and all other relevant state and federal partners to re-evaluate St. Clair County's rural designation for these purposes, to apply more nuanced metrics — such as recognition of rural census tracts consistent with the practices the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and FORHP already apply to partially rural metropolitan counties — and to ensure that St. Clair County and its eligible local partners are not disadvantaged in accessing vital rural health workforce investments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board encourages and supports applications by eligible St. Clair County organizations for the Workforce for Wellness funding opportunities announced July 8, 2026, and directs the County Administrator, Health Department Director, and appropriate staff to provide assistance where feasible and to report back to the Board on pursuit of these resources; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that copies of this resolution be transmitted to the Director of MDHHS, the appropriate CMS and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) officials, including the Administrator of HRSA and the Director of FORHP, members of Michigan's U.S. Congressional delegation, the State Senators and State Representatives representing St. Clair County, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), and such other officials or entities as the Chair may direct; and

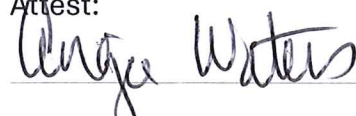
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners hereby direct Corporation Counsel to provide the necessary legal support to the St. Clair County Administrator to immediately initiate any and all legal and legislative means to challenge and rectify the injustice created by the recent actions of The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) designation of St. Clair County as a "metropolitan" region under the Rural Health Transformation (RHT) Program.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that nothing in this resolution shall be construed to waive, limit, or prejudice any right, remedy, position, or claim otherwise available to the County; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

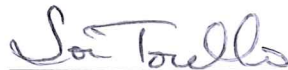
Adopted this 23 day of July, 2026, at a regular meeting of the St. Clair County Board of Commissioners.

Attest:



County Clerk

ST. CLAIR COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Reviewed and Approved by:



Gary A. Fletcher
County Corporation Counsel
1411 Third Street, Suite F
Port Huron, MI 48060

