

## Center for Rural Pennsylvania Hosts Public Hearing Series on Data Centers



The Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors recently hosted the public hearing, *Data Centers: Part I — Mapping the Landscape Across State, Local, Industry, and Environmental Perspectives*, at the Deane Center for the Performing Arts in Wellsboro. The hearing convened Board members, elected officials, state agency representatives, industry leaders, environmental organizations, and local officials to examine the growing role of data centers in Pennsylvania.

Testifiers shared perspectives on the infrastructure, energy, environmental, and economic considerations associated with data center development, as well as the potential impacts on rural communities across the Commonwealth. The hearing provided a forum for discussion on topics including siting considerations, power demands, regulatory frameworks, community planning, and long-term development implications tied to the expanding data center industry.

The hearing marked the first in a multi-part public hearing series designed to help inform policymakers on this evolving issue, with the second hearing planned for July. The Center extends its sincere thanks to all of the testifiers for contributing their expertise and insights.

A livestream recording of the hearing, written testimony, and additional resources are available on the Center’s website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).

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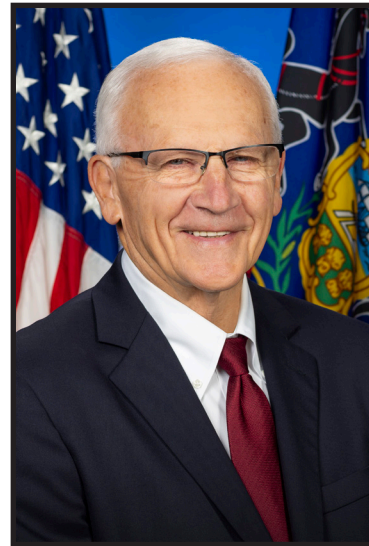
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## Chairman's Message



As Chairman of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors, I am pleased to share the latest edition of our newsletter, which highlights important updates affecting rural communities in the Commonwealth.

This edition begins with a recap of the Center's recent public hearing on data centers, held in Wellsboro, Tioga County. As data center development continues to expand, the hearing created an opportunity to hear from a range of voices on energy needs, infrastructure capacity,

environmental considerations, local planning, and the potential implications for rural communities. The hearing was the first in a multi-part series designed to help inform policymakers on this evolving issue, with a second hearing planned for July.

Readers will also find new Center research examining crime trends across rural and urban Pennsylvania. While the report shows an overall decline in crime statewide from 2013 to 2023, it also points to important rural-specific trends that deserve continued attention, including differences in violent crime, DUI, drug offenses, and regional variation across the Commonwealth.

This issue also highlights a Rural Snapshot on access to banks and credit unions, which examines changes in physical bank and credit union locations across Pennsylvania from 2015 to 2025. The analysis shows a steady decline in locations in both rural and urban areas and raises important considerations about access to local financial services and capital.

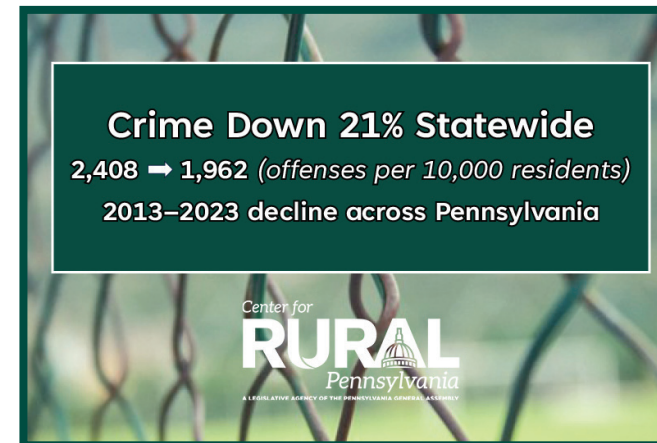
It also includes the Center's 2026 Research Grant Program Special Request for Proposals, focused on regionalized police services, and the release of the updated *Community Planning Handbook, Fifth Edition*.

In addition, this newsletter includes information on the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's Growing Greener Plus Grant Program and Pennsylvania's SUN Bucks Program, which provide environmental funding opportunities and summer food assistance resources for communities and families across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your continued support as we work together to empower rural communities throughout the Commonwealth. Together, we can make a meaningful impact and improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

Senator Gene Yaw

# Center Research Examines Crime Trends in Rural and Urban Counties



The Center recently published the report, *Analysis of Pennsylvania Crime Trends: An Updated Rural/Urban Comparison*, which examines crime trends across Pennsylvania's rural and urban counties from 2013 through 2023. The study was authored by Brandon Vick, Ph.D.; Robert Orth, Ph.D.; Emily Schumacher of Indiana University of Pennsylvania; and Angel Alcantara of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

The report found that overall crime declined statewide during the study period, with total offense rates decreasing by approximately 21 percent between 2013 and 2023. Property crimes account for one-third of all crimes in 2023; still, most of the decline in crime rates across urban and rural counties stemmed from falling numbers of property crimes and public order violations. Part I offenses, which include the most serious crimes, also declined substantially over time. However, the report identified several areas where rural crime trends differ from urban patterns.

Among the findings, rural counties experienced higher violent offense rates than urban counties, excluding Philadelphia County, in recent years. Rural violent crime rates have exceeded urban rates since 2017, reaching 77 offenses per 10,000 residents in 2023, compared to 65 offenses per 10,000 residents in urban counties. The report also found that rape rates remained consistently higher in rural counties throughout the study period and increased by 19 percent between 2013

and 2023. In addition, driving under the influence (DUI) and drug offenses remained more prevalent in rural counties over time.

The analysis also highlights significant variation across Pennsylvania's rural regions. The North Central region reported the highest overall crime rates, driven largely by higher rates of Part II offenses and public order violations, while the Northwest, Southwest, and Northern Tier regions consistently experienced lower overall crime rates. County-level analysis further found that several crime categories tend to rise together. Counties with higher DUI prevalence were also associated with higher rates of simple assault, rape, and homicide-related offenses. Economic stress and drug offenses were additionally associated with higher rates of violent crime, firearm injury hospitalizations, and property crime across counties.

The study updates prior Center research and expands the analysis to include additional offense categories, county-level variation, and comparisons across seven rural regions of Pennsylvania. It also outlines policy considerations related to region-specific strategies, expanded substance use interventions, strengthening protection-from-abuse implementation and tracking practices, and improving statewide data consistency to support planning and decision-making.

The executive summary and full report are available on the Center's website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).



## Declining Bank and Credit Union Locations in Pennsylvania

This fact sheet compares rural and urban access to local financial services provided by banks and credit unions. Using data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the National Credit Union Administration (NCUA), the Center analyzed the number and change in branch offices (i.e., physical locations) at the county level from 2015 to 2025.

Among the key findings were the following:

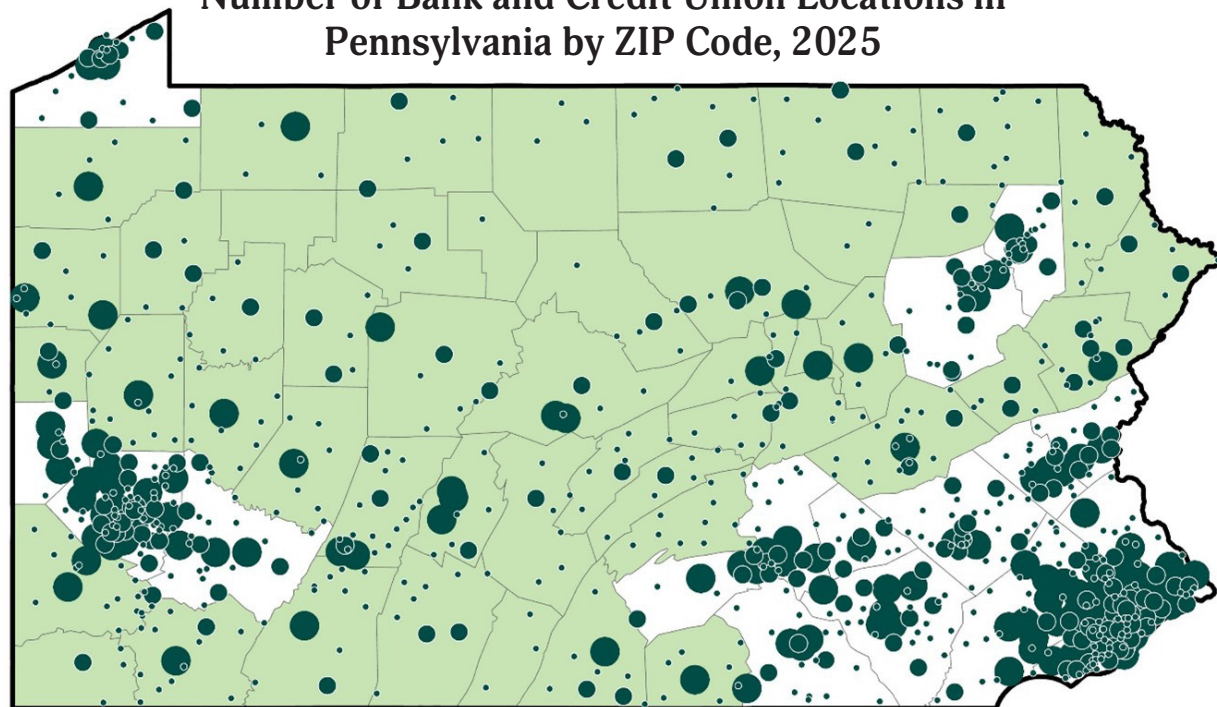
- Rural Pennsylvania had fewer bank and credit union locations than urban Pennsylvania.
- From 2015 to 2025, there was a steady decrease in the number of bank and credit union locations in rural and urban Pennsylvania, as well as the United States.
- Both rural and urban Pennsylvania experienced a decrease in the number of banks and credit unions whose headquarters were located within the Commonwealth.

In 2025, there were 4,316 bank and credit union locations in Pennsylvania. Thirty percent of these locations were in a rural county and 70 percent in an urban county. On a per capita basis, rural areas had more banks and credit unions than urban areas (38.0 and 31.2 per 100,000 population, respectively). Forest County is the only county in Pennsylvania with no bank or credit union; the last time an institution operated a physical location there was in 2023. Across the United States, in 2025, 26 counties had no bank or credit union. Most of these were in remote areas of Alaska, Hawaii, and the Midwest. However, all consistently had extremely low resident populations and were classified as rural based on the Center's definition. Pennsylvania was the only state in the northeast to have a county with zero banks or credit unions.

Access the full fact sheet at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).

Data Sources: FDIC and NCUA.

### Number of Bank and Credit Union Locations in Pennsylvania by ZIP Code, 2025

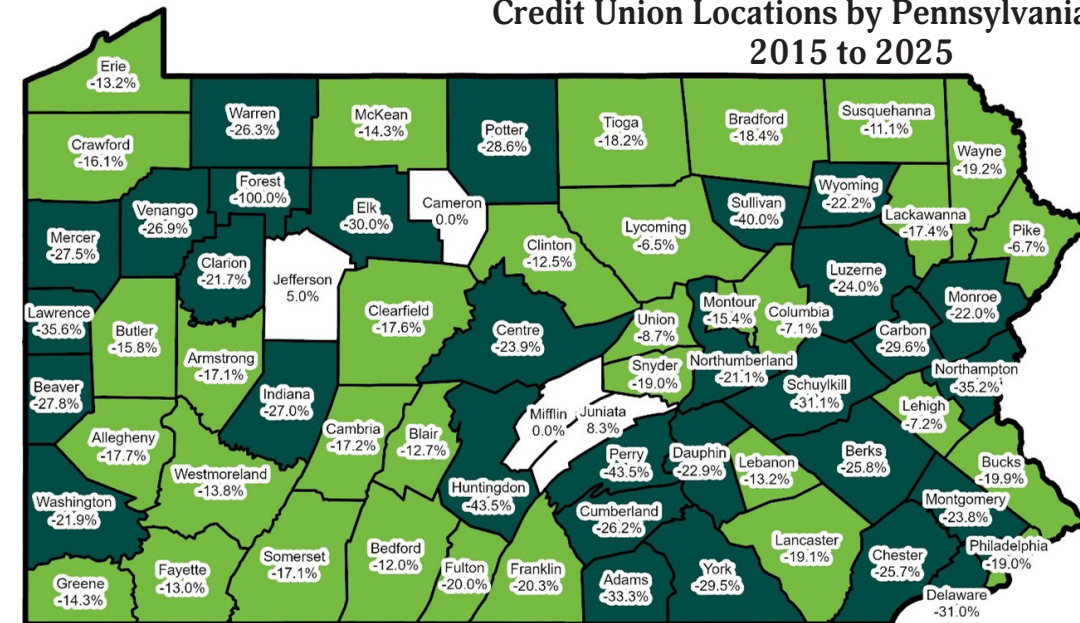


Statewide Total Number of Banks and Credit Unions = 4,316

- <5 Banks and Credit Unions
- 5 to 9 Banks and Credit Unions
- 10+ Banks and Credit Unions
- Rural County
- Urban County

Center for Rural Pennsylvania

### Percent Change in Number of Bank and Credit Union Locations by Pennsylvania County, 2015 to 2025

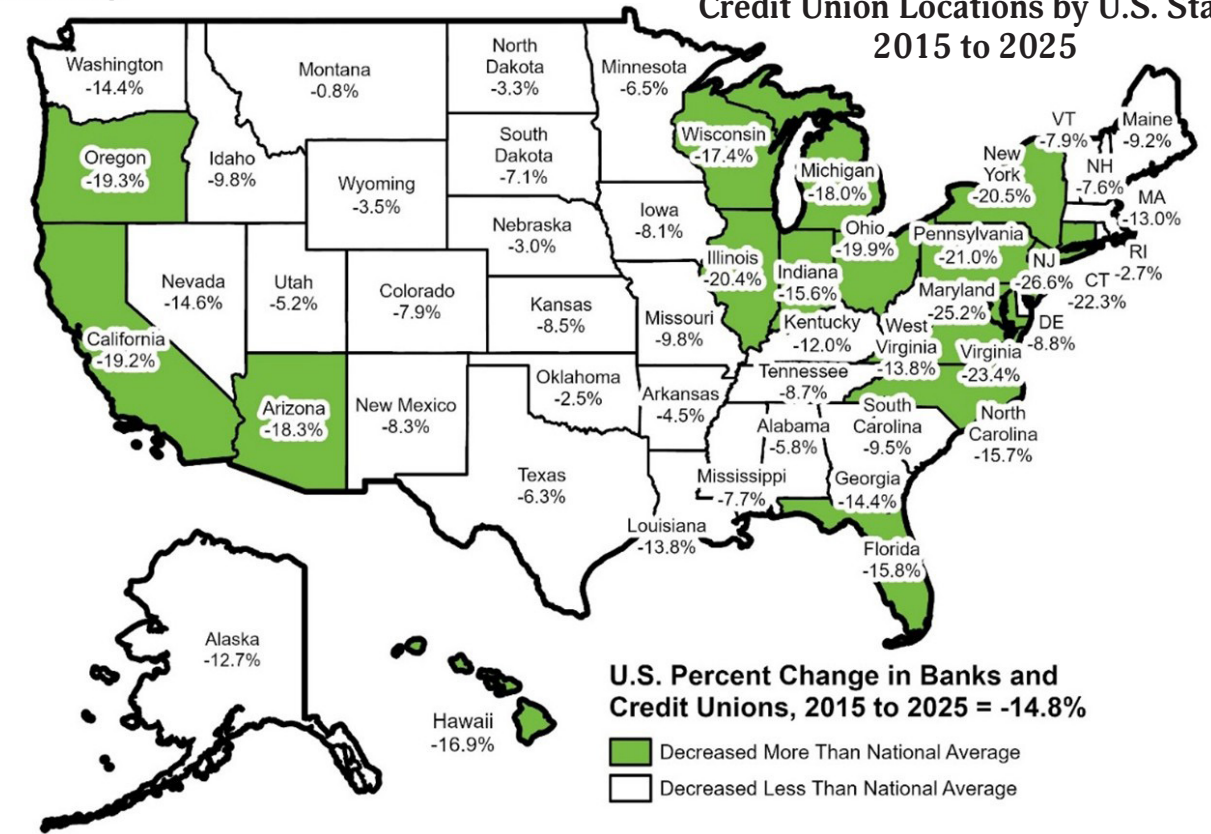


Statewide Percent Change in Banks and Credit Unions, 2015 to 2025 = -21.0%

- Decreased More Than Statewide Rate
- Decreased Less Than Statewide Rate
- Increase or No Change



### Percent Change in Number of Bank and Credit Union Locations by U.S. State, 2015 to 2025



U.S. Percent Change in Banks and Credit Unions, 2015 to 2025 = -14.8%

- Decreased More Than National Average
- Decreased Less Than National Average

Rural Perspectives May/June 2026

# 2026 Center Research Grant Program Special Request for Proposals

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is accepting proposals for its 2026 Special Request for Proposals (RFP), focused on the regionalization of police services in rural Pennsylvania. The research should examine why rural municipalities choose to regionalize, contract for, or change police service arrangements, as well as the outcomes, costs, benefits, and challenges of those decisions.

The Center is seeking research that will help inform the Pennsylvania General Assembly, rural municipalities, and other stakeholders about the potential benefits and challenges of regionalized or consolidated police services. Proposals should consider how police service arrangements have changed over time, the processes and agreements involved in regionalization or contracted services, and the capacity of rural municipalities to provide, assess, and measure police services.

Proposals may use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Applicants should clearly explain their research questions, data sources, and methods, including how they will address challenges related to data availability and comparability across municipalities. Research designs may also compare rural and small urban police departments or examine municipalities that maintain their own police services compared to those that regionalize or contract for services.

The selected project should provide policy-relevant findings that strengthen understanding of how rural municipalities organize and evaluate police services. This may include examining service quality, cost changes, governance structures, municipal capacity, and the practical challenges communities face when considering



regionalization, partnerships, or contracted services.

Proposals may request awards of up to \$60,000. Eligible applicants include qualified faculty members from Penn State, Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities, and regional campuses of the University of Pittsburgh. Partnerships with other academic institutions, community organizations, and public and private agencies are strongly encouraged.

Interested faculty may obtain a proposal submission form from the Center's Assistant Director, Dr. Laura Dimino, at [LDimino@rural.pa.gov](mailto:LDimino@rural.pa.gov). Questions or meeting requests should also be directed to Dr. Dimino.

Proposals are due June 22, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. Proposal review will occur in July 2026, with the Center's Board of Directors expected to select the project for funding in August 2026. Read more about the 2026 Special RFP on the Center's website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).



# Community Planning Handbook, Fifth Edition

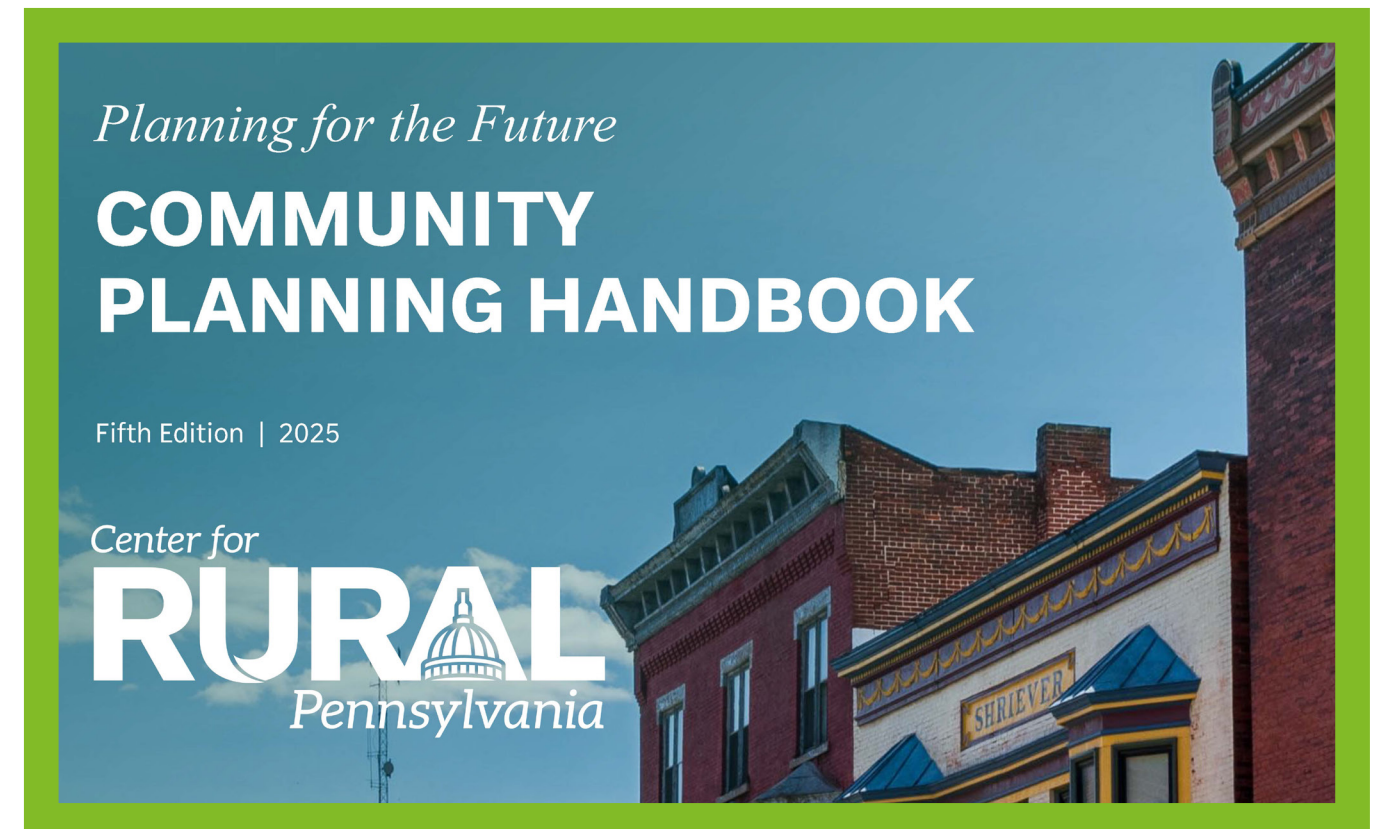
The Center for Rural Pennsylvania is excited to share the release of its *Community Planning Handbook, Fifth Edition*, developed in partnership with Jon Stover & Associates, Inc., a resource designed to support effective planning efforts across the Commonwealth. The updated handbook continues the Center's commitment to providing practical, research-based tools that help communities strengthen long-term vitality and resilience.

The handbook offers information, guidance, and strategies to assist state policymakers, local officials, planners, and other stakeholders in understanding and addressing community planning issues. It is intended to help readers better understand the planning process and the role it plays in supporting strong, sustainable communities.

This edition translates planning concepts into clear, actionable steps and includes real-world examples demonstrating how communities are applying these principles in practice. Topics covered throughout the handbook can help communities think through local needs, future growth, land use, infrastructure, economic development, housing, transportation, natural resources, and other factors that shape long-term community well-being.

By combining evidence-based information with practical application, the handbook serves as a useful resource for informing state and local policy discussions, supporting community decision-making, and addressing long-term planning challenges across Pennsylvania. It also provides local leaders and stakeholders with a framework for considering how planning decisions today can affect community vitality, resilience, and quality of life in the years ahead.

The full handbook is available on the Center's website at [www.rural.pa.gov](http://www.rural.pa.gov).





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## Resources

### **PA Department of Environmental Protection Growing Greener Plus Grants**

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is accepting applications for its 2026 Growing Greener Plus Grant Program. The program supports watershed restoration, stormwater management planning, nonpoint source pollution reduction, abandoned mine drainage reclamation, and other environmental improvement projects across the Commonwealth. Funding is intended to help protect and restore Pennsylvania's waterways, reduce pollution, and support local environmental planning and conservation efforts. The program can assist communities and organizations working to address local environmental challenges and improve long-term water quality. Applications are due June 22, 2026. For more information, visit [www.pa.gov/agencies/dep](http://www.pa.gov/agencies/dep).

### **SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) Food and Nutrition Service**

Pennsylvania is participating in SUN Bucks, and applications are now open. SUN Bucks provides households with a SNAP-like benefit to purchase food for the summer months when school is not in session. The program is intended to help families continue to access nutritious food during the summer, when children may not have access to school breakfast and lunch programs. Most children who will receive SUN Bucks are automatically eligible and do not need to apply. Families can use the SUN Bucks Eligibility Navigator to determine whether they need to apply or if they are automatically eligible. The navigator can help families understand eligibility, next steps, and whether an application is needed. Learn more about SUN Bucks, eligibility, and the application process at [www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs](http://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs).