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CHARLIE CRIST
GOVERNOR

February 21, 2008

The Honorable Edward J. Dixon
Chairman, Gadsden County Board of Commissioners
Post Office Box 1799
Quincy, Florida 32353

Dear Chairman Dixon:

I am concerned with the unique challenges faced by Florida's rural counties and have asked executive agencies to begin evaluating ways we can more effectively meet these needs. It seemed fitting that we reach out to our neighboring county in our efforts to develop strategies to assist small counties be successful. I certainly understand that Gadsden County, as with other rural counties, faces many difficult decisions in these austere budget times. As we discussed in our meeting November 29, 2007, the county has many pressing needs, particularly in the areas of community health, public safety, youth, and infrastructure.

Thank you for meeting with my Office of Policy and Budget. I am pleased that the proposals the staff developed meet with your approval. While the assistance we are providing does not directly address your community budget issue requests, it does provide, in most cases, technical assistance to help you identify and access state resources that can help you achieve your goals and objectives.

I understand that your major concern is the county hospital. We had discussed the need to secure the Critical Access Hospital designation as a requirement to reopen the hospital. While I cannot assure the designation, I am happy to assist you by reiterating to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services my support for rural hospitals and the unique service they provide to citizens in underserved areas of the state, in addition to the fact that the Critical Access Hospital designation is very important to those hospitals. In the mean time, I am pleased to tell you that Wakulla and Leon counties are going to provide a mobile health unit through June to assist the county in providing medical services to residents through the current fiscal year. In addition, in late March the Wakulla County Health Department will provide limited dental services as well. I have included in my budget recommendations to the Legislature

funding to purchase mobile health units for selected counties, including Gadsden. I encourage you to work with your legislative delegation to ensure the recommendation is funded by the Legislature.

Gadsden County is located in one of three Rural Areas of Critical State Concern. This establishes the county as a priority of the Rural Economic Development Initiative and provides me the authority to waive criteria, requirements, or other similar provisions of any economic development incentive. I will favorably consider doing so as you develop economic initiatives for the county. I encourage you to continue working with my staff, particularly the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, as you move forward.

I understand that Secretary Walt McNeil, Department of Corrections, is going to provide transportation to relocate some of your excess prisoners to other county facilities and also has offered to help the sheriff construct 30 additional bed spaces for females prisoners. I am sure this will help in the near-term to reduce over-crowding in the county jail. Please continue to work with Secretary McNeil as you explore the possibility of obtaining his help in constructing a minimum security dormitory to increase capacity.

After working with your staff on this initiative, it became apparent that we needed a dedicated staff resource to help rural counties identify state resources, including programs and services, grants and loans, and provide assistance with application processes. The Office of Policy and Budget plans to dedicate such a resource in the Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development to provide this assistance to rural counties.

Finally, I also understand your concerns regarding your transportation and environmental infrastructure. I am instructing Secretary Stephanie C. Kopelousos, Department of Transportation, to work with your staff to determine if the state can assist you with bridge replacement and/or rehabilitation. Secretary Michael W. Sole, Department of Environment, will work with your staff to identify potential funding assistance for the county's water and wastewater needs.

Please know that I am committed to helping our rural counties through these difficult times. I hope that our efforts target your needs and provide the assistance needed to help you move Gadsden County forward as one of Florida's rural county showcases.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist