§ 164-b. State aid to rural areas: agency reports. 1. Legislative intent. The legislature hereby finds, declares and determines that:

(a) enhanced access to financial and technical assistance available from state agencies is of great significance to rural communities;

(b) grants and other forms of state assistance are not always easily attainable by rural areas with the greatest need;

(c) rural areas across the state continue to suffer from high levels of unemployment and poverty, limited access to health care and other human services, individual isolation, shortfalls in family income and educational attainment, as well as the inability to undertake infrastructure investment and business development;

(d) rural communities often lack sufficient expertise and staff to prepare and process applications for aid, as well as address the requirements associated with administration of any proceeds. This, coupled with disproportionate competition with large metropolitan and suburban communities for a diminishing number of grants often places a rural community at a disadvantage when attempting to advance the betterment of its citizens;

(e) improved awareness of the ways state agencies provide financial and technical assistance would enhance opportunities for rural areas to make use of such resources, strengthening their ability to respond to modern challenges.

2. Definitions. For the purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

(a) "Rural area" shall mean those portions of the state so defined by subdivision seven of section four hundred eighty-one of this chapter;

(b) "State agency" shall mean the following: office for the aging, department of agriculture and markets, office of alcoholism and substance abuse services, department of economic development, department of education, department of environmental conservation, environmental facilities corporation, department of health, division of housing and community renewal, job development authority, office of mental health, office of parks, recreation and historic preservation, department of social services, department of state, department of transportation, urban development corporation, and the division for youth;

(c) "Set-aside" shall mean a direct commitment of financial and/or

technical assistance by state agencies specifically for rural areas as herein defined;

(d) "Rural program development" means the systematic identification of special service needs of rural areas by a state agency and the utilization of said agency's financial, technical and other available resources to help meet such need;

(e) "Rural advisory committee" means a committee created pursuant to statute or through administrative action by a state agency for the purposes of assisting such agency to develop and implement programs for rural areas;

(f) "Regulatory flexibility" means the conscious consideration of the ability of affected individuals and/or groups in rural areas to respond to state agency rules and regulations and the state agency's attempt to mitigate any negative impacts which may result from such requirements on said individuals and/or groups.

3. Annual reports of state agencies.

(a) In addition to any existing requirements of state agencies for the submission of annual reports, such agencies shall also annually provide:

(i) a listing and description of any set-asides for rural areas in New York state. Such reports shall include the number of applications submitted, the number of applications approved, and the proportionate share of dollars and/or technical assistance rendered to public and/or private sector interests within rural areas of the state;

(ii) a listing and description of the activities and participation of any rural advisory committees which directly serve such agency, or of which the agency is a member;

(iii) a listing and description of existing and/or new rural program development efforts within the agency, or of which the agency is a part;

(iv) a description of existing and/or new rule-making or regulatory flexibility afforded to rural areas of the state; and

(v) recommendations for any statutory change, as well as financial and other resources to improve state agency assistance and responsiveness to rural areas of the state.

(b) In a form prescribed by the governor, all state agencies, as defined in this section, shall report the annual information required in paragraph (a) of this subdivision to the governor, with a copy also

submitted to the speaker of the assembly, the temporary president of the senate, the minority leader of the assembly, the minority leader of the senate, and the chairman and vice-chairman of the New York state legislative commission on the development of rural resources established pursuant to chapter four hundred twenty-eight of the laws of nineteen hundred eighty-two. The first such report shall be submitted on or before January first, nineteen hundred ninety-six.