§ 480. Declaration of purpose. The legislature finds and determines that:

1. The public perception of the state's rural regions has been characterized by inaccurate awareness or understanding; therefore many existing laws, regulations, policies and programs have not completely addressed the real needs of people living within the state's rural environs.

2. The state's rural territory is vast in size, exceptionally diverse, possesses abundant natural and cultural resources, and, together with its economic, human and community resources, contributes greatly to the quality and maintenance of life of all people of the state, and hence to a healthier, more prosperous state.

3. The state's rural areas are decentralized and unique; their enhancement and protection require special attention in order to effectively address distinct rural conditions, needs, and strengths.

4. Improvement in the well-being of individuals and families in the state's rural areas has, in many instances, been unbalanced, and characterized by a growing inequality or relative deprivation. Additionally, such indispensable community needs as transportation; housing; public facilities; business and industry; education and culture; governmental and environmental management; health and human services; require further study and state action if proper responses to unique rural needs are to be developed.

5. The state has demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of rural localities and has attempted to preserve the viability and quality of life in rural areas. Such commitments to rural preservation and development have to be continued and broadened to encompass a wide range of rural endeavors.

6. Federal, state, and local resources and individual effort available to address rural needs are often isolated and limited to individual symptoms of blight and deterioration. Related programs are frequently

inaccessible to rural residents they are designed to serve. The placement of such programs within the various organizational structures is indistinct and many rural localities have inadequate numbers of managerial, professional or technical personnel to pursue such assistance. Additionally, many public and private agencies also lack adequate staffing to adapt programs and services to the special needs and requirements of rural citizens and their environs. This situation has contributed to a growing confusion and disintegrating force that discourages coordinated individual policy and program development and delivery of services intended to address the needs of rural localities and citizens. Consequently, the energies and resources of the many individual federal, state, and local, and public and private initiatives that could help answer rural needs and capitalize on the strengths of rural areas, are often frustrated or diminished in their effect.

7. An important role and challenge for state government, therefore, is to get diverse groups to work together for the betterment of rural New York, and to combine their efforts in imaginative ways to the end that all regions of the state may always offer the highest possible quality of life, cultural and material standards of living, without sacrificing individual freedom or responsibility. The legislature believes that such individual efforts can be significantly enhanced, and support and sustain each other in the public interest; and many useful and innovative responses to rural needs will be possible, if a more focused and coordinated interdisciplinary approach for addressing rural problems and opportunities is made available through state government.

8. The development of proper responses to rural needs, including the capability to anticipate and respond to individual needs on a broad scale, would also be promoted if a more sharply defined rural affairs avenue within state government was made available to policymakers. Specifically, the legislature seeks to amplify the efforts of existing agencies and individuals who are interested in such rural policy areas as human services and community life; health care; education; business, economic development, and employment; agriculture; environment, land use, and natural resources; transportation; community facilities, housing, and community revitalization; local government and management.

9. No permanent state agency has been specifically created, empowered and funded to promote, harmonize or assist such efforts of existing agencies and individuals that address the unique needs, conditions, and strengths of rural areas of the state. It is, therefore, the intent of the legislature to create a state office of rural affairs. The agency shall serve as a one-stop contact point for rural governments, service providers, state and federal agencies, and for individuals interested in rural policies and programs of the state; and strive to promote cooperative and integrated efforts among such agencies and programs that are designed to address rural needs; and shall recommend to the governor and the legislature the suitable use of policies, programs, long-range plans, laws and regulatory mechanisms in order to meet such needs.