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May 29, 2025

Dear Leaders,

Our communities are no strangers to hard work, resourcefulness and resilience—and neither are we. Whether we’re preparing our students for their futures, caring for patients, advocating on issues that impact our members or fighting for the resources our communities need, as rural union members, we are doing the kind of work that sustains an entire country.

We are also no strangers to feeling isolated and unheard. But that won’t happen here.

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Rural Matters*, a quarterly newsletter designed specifically for the AFT’s rural leaders. This newsletter has one clear purpose: to make sure rural voices are not just heard, but valued, amplified and acted upon. It is also a call to action and a reminder that rural locals are not on the margins of this union—we are at its heart.

We created this resource to:

- Amplify how the AFT lifts up all of its members, whether they live in Miami or McDowell County, W.Va.—[where the AFT mobilized yet again after the third 100-year flood in 20 years](#)—to do what unions do: show up where they are needed most.
- Provide resources for rural leaders to advocate for the issues, policies and institutions that allow our communities to thrive, like [Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), [public schools](#), hospitals, libraries and post offices.
- Encourage rural leaders to engage with the union at the state and national levels, so we can build a movement that is as broad and deep as the communities we serve.

But most importantly, this newsletter exists to help rural members see ourselves in the AFT, and the rural caucus exists to help the AFT continue to see and support rural members in return.

The challenges we face in rural areas, whether it's recruiting teachers, dealing with the rapidly decreasing number of rural hospitals and clinics, or fighting for funding for schools and public services, cannot be overlooked. If we want to preserve the institutions that bind our communities together, we must step up and speak out.

This is where you come in.

As a rural leader, you have an essential role to play. After you read this newsletter:

- Share it with your members and colleagues.
- Join the rural caucus by [signing up for future editions](#) if you're not already on the list.
- [Tell us your story](#). We want to feature the work your local is doing. Your story can inspire and inform others across the country.

Real change in policy comes when rural voices are at the table. Let's make sure ours are heard—loud, clear and united.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa Cropper".

Melissa Cropper, AFT Rural Caucus  
President, Ohio Federation of Teachers  
Vice President, AFT