



# The Office of Governor Robert Bentley

## 2015-2019 Strategic Plan



**February 1, 2016**

*"I believe in Alabama, a state dedicated to a faith in God and the enlightenment of mankind, to a democracy that safeguards the liberties of each citizen and to the conservation of her youth, her ideals and her soil. I believe it is my duty to obey her laws, to respect her flag and to be alert to her needs and generous in my efforts to foster her advancement within the statehood of the World."*

The Alabama Creed

# Alabama’s “Great State 2019” Plan

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## **First Term Focus and Results**

### **Putting Alabamians Back to Work:**

- Jobs Created – During my first term in office, my administration announced more than 63,000 new jobs including partial numbers from 2014.
- By 2014, Alabama’s wage and salary employment rose to its highest point since 2008.
- JobLink, Alabama’s free, online jobs database, registered record-high numbers of active job orders, surpassing the 20,000-jobs mark on several occasions.
- The Alabama Small Business Commission was created to serve as an advisory body in formulating policies, encouraging innovation, and discussing issues critical to small businesses.
- *Area Development Magazine* recognized Alabama as the #4 state in the nation for doing business in 2013 and 2014. Alabama was ranked in the top five each year of my first term.

### **Right-sizing Government and Fiscal Responsibility:**

- Road to \$1 Billion – More than \$1.2 billion in taxpayer dollars were identified and saved annually during my first term. Many savings came as a result of our efforts to make state government operate more efficiently.
- The Office of Information Technology was created to implement compatibility standards for technology throughout the state and employ simple cost-saving measures such as buying in bulk across state agencies.
- State Law Enforcement Consolidation – Increased efficiency in numerous state agencies resulted in savings to taxpayers and increased presence of law enforcement.
- Medicaid Transformation – Development of a regional care organization structure shifted the focus from a fee for service model to increased efficiency and higher-quality outcomes for patients.

### **Investing in the Future:**

- Pre-Kindergarten – A commitment to increased funding for the expansion of the state’s high-quality, voluntary Pre-K education program resulted in thousands of additional students receiving the opportunity and preparation to build a more solid educational foundation for the future.
- The Alabama Workforce Council was created to form a bridge between quality educational outcomes and achieving an enhanced workforce to meet state industry and business needs.
- Graduation rate at eighty-six percent, which is significantly higher than the target set for the end of my first term.
- Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP) – The state’s single largest investment in roads and bridges in Alabama history.
- Gulf State Park Improvements – Plans include developing a lodge and convention center that will create a direct and meaningful economic impact.

### **Listening to the People:**

- I visited all sixty-seven Alabama counties to listen to the needs of constituents, local business owners, and elected officials.
- Tornado Recovery – I took a hands-on approach to leading the state’s recovery efforts following each natural disaster. Over 4,000 safe rooms were added to homes and communities with the help of public grant dollars.
- Supporting Alabama Veterans – Created the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (ALAVETNET) to identify and implement opportunities to better serve Alabama service members, veterans, and their families.



# **Agenda Priorities**

## **Investing in Alabama's Education**

### ***Investment in High Quality Pre-Kindergarten***

Over the past four years, I have worked to promote and expand our investment in early education. In 2015, I restructured early childhood education by renaming the Department of Children's Affairs the Department of Early Childhood Education. The goal of this restructuring was to further develop a cohesive system that coordinates the efforts of providing high quality early learning.

Data has proven the positive impacts of high quality early education, and that is why I continue to push for expanded funding. Research shows that the majority of brain development occurs in the early years of life. A child's interaction and care within these first years greatly impacts a child's future. Corollary research also indicates that the skills a child gains in a high quality pre-kindergarten classroom not only aid in success of transitioning into elementary school, but also provide long-lasting effects that impact a student through high school and into the workforce. These important factors are the very reason I am dedicated to improving early childhood education opportunities in Alabama.

For the next three years, it is my goal to have First Class Pre-K available to every parent who chooses to enroll their four-year-old child in a classroom. With First Class Pre-K, parents are provided a high-quality education option for their child. The First Class Pre-K program ensures that the child is gaining skills for the betterment of his or her future education. In the hands of a qualified and credentialed educator, the child will learn in an interactive environment that is not only safe, but also one that allows for the crucially important early development.

The effects of a high quality pre-k education are evident in academic performance, graduation rates, special education needs and even prison rates. Investing in early childhood education today makes for a brighter tomorrow. It is rewarding to see how far we have come with this program in the last five years and to continue to receive national recognition as the best Pre-K program with the highest standards in the nation.

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### ***Alabama's FUTURE Scholarship Program***

Alabama is blessed with a vibrant community college system with abundant educational opportunities. In 2015, the state restructured the community college system, creating a stand-alone board to oversee the system and empowering the chancellor to more effectively direct the system. To better utilize the resources of our community college system, I propose a last dollar tuition scholarship program to allow every Alabama child the opportunity to attend a community college.

Modeled after the GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) Program administered by the University of Alabama at Birmingham (<http://gearupal.com>), the FUTURE Scholarship program will target seventh-graders in the most under-served counties first and expand as results are proven and resources are identified. An "Education Advisor" will partner with the student, and their parents or guardians, beginning in seventh grade and will coach that student through high school graduation and into postsecondary education. Upon high school graduation, the students would receive a last dollar tuition scholarship to attend a community college in the state. With the potential for two years of education at no cost, participating students could then join the workforce or pursue additional education. Alabama would gain an educated, trained workforce with less school debt.

Program goals will include:

- Increasing the academic performance and preparation for postsecondary education for the enrolled and participating students
  - Increasing the rates of high school graduation and enrollment in postsecondary education for enrolled and participating students
  - Increasing the program's students' and their families' knowledge of postsecondary education options, preparation, and financing
  - Increasing the percentage of students who enroll in and succeed in postsecondary education
  - Increasing the preparation of the project teachers and staff to teach and serve these students
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### ***Workforce Development***

Education prepares students for the future. A great education provides for the necessary training to join the workforce. To that end, the state can fill a critical role by bridging the gap between the education system and the private sector.

In 2015, I signed Executive Order Number 6 to better connect education to the workforce by creating a statewide longitudinal data system to link information from early learning through postsecondary education and into employment. This will ensure that Alabama students graduate from school ready for college and/or a career. To oversee administration of the data system, I created the Alabama Office of Education and Workforce Statistics, under the Department of Labor, and an Advisory Board comprised of education and workforce stakeholders. However, codification and funding of this system are necessary in order to effectively capitalize on education and industry data. Taking this step will allow businesses to better communicate talent needs to education and education to better communicate the new talent pool to businesses.

Other workforce development initiatives include the creation of the new Alabama Workforce System and funding for an executive director at every Regional Workforce Development Council. A legislative strategy is required to ensure that the new Alabama Workforce System is sustainable over time. The five key tenets of the new system are as follows:

1. The new Alabama Workforce System must be driven by the private sector and demand the necessary criteria for skills and talent. A strong network of effective, funded and empowered regional workforce entities (currently Regional Workforce Development Councils) should be tasked with the central role in bridging business needs with a "talent supply chain." I recommend that these new entities report to the Department of Commerce and be supported by boards comprised of regional business leaders.
2. Consolidation of the Regional Workforce Development Councils and alignment of those consolidated regions with the efforts of community colleges is essential in order to eliminate redundancies, enhance ease of use and assure accountability to the business community.
3. An easy to navigate and comprehensive statewide education and training resource system should be established to enable each "supply point" (including K-12, community colleges, colleges and universities, AIDT, ATN and private training companies) to excel at meeting business needs effectively.

4. A new online “one-stop” resource must be designed to serve very clear and focused needs and must be accessible easily by business, government, education and public users. In addition to this online environment, a new global database is recommended to provide an analytical tool in order to benchmark performance and provide insight into user needs.

5. A new, unified and universal brand for the Alabama Workforce System should be created and implemented. The new brand must encompass all of the current disparate provider and program brands and be complementary to co-branding partners (*i.e.*, *Go Build Alabama* or *Made in Alabama*).

## **Increasing the Number of Health Professionals in Rural Areas**

According to “America’s Health Rankings” for 2015, a report by the United Health Foundation (2015 Report), Alabamians tend to have access to fewer primary care doctors and dentists than people in most other states. Among the fifty states, Alabama had the third-lowest number of dentists per 100,000 people and the eleventh-lowest number of primary-care physicians per 100,000 people, according to the 2015 Report.

Access to care tends to be even worse in many of Alabama’s rural counties. Eight counties – Chilton, Cleburne, Coosa, Henry, Lamar, Lowndes, Macon, and Perry Counties – have no acute-care hospital serving the general public, according to the Alabama Hospital Association. In addition, three counties have no full-time dentist, according to the Alabama Rural Health Association.

Another measure of the lack of access to care in rural areas comes from the May 2015 report on Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas, released by the Alabama Office of Primary Care and Rural Health (May Report). The May Report showed that all or parts of thirty-six Alabama counties were geographic shortage areas. Each of these areas had less than one primary care physician per 3,000 residents, and some had less than one per 3,500 residents. Of those thirty-six shortage areas, thirty-four were rural counties or parts of rural counties, as defined by the Alabama Rural Health Association.

Health care in the state’s rural counties must be addressed. Alabama’s rural counties simply do not have proper access to health care providers. The high cost of education for health care providers is one of the primary reasons for this shortage. To encourage health care providers to practice in rural counties, I propose the creation or expansion of loan repayment programs for doctors, physician’s assistants, dentists, and nurse practitioners. Recipients would receive funds to repay student loans if they contract to practice in their fields of medicine for a certain amount of time in specifically defined, low-access areas of the state. In addition, my office will analyze and encourage the passage of state and federal tax credits that would create an additional incentive for health care professionals who are willing to practice in underserved areas.

I also plan to help Alabama hospitals create twelve residency programs for medical school graduates undergoing on-the-job training. Residents can practice medicine in hospitals under supervision by attending physicians, and many physicians practice near where they worked as residents. Thus, creating more residency programs could greatly boost the number of health care providers in Alabama.

Rural health care will also be enhanced by greater access to broadband. Telemedicine is an important tool used in other states and minimally in Alabama which can potentially drive health care costs down. However, telemedicine is only possible if patients and doctors have access to high quality, robust broadband. To encourage the use of telemedicine, the Governor’s Office of Broadband Development will work with hospitals and local communities to identify these needs (see more about the Governor’s broadband priorities on page 9).

Another important impediment to rural access to health care is the heightened risk of liability for health care providers serving in poorly-equipped environments. Marginal access to modern facilities hampers a health care provider’s ability to provide proper care to patients, increasing the risk of poor results and the corresponding risk of liability. I will form a study group to determine whether there are ways to minimize the heightened liability risk in underserved areas, so that liability will not deter medical care.

## **Addressing the Prison Problem with Long-term Solutions**

A well-functioning criminal justice system protects our society, including those incarcerated, by efficiently allocating a state's resources to address current crime and prevent future crime. Throughout my first term, I noted that our criminal justice system was not functioning well. With decreasing crime rates but an increasing number of inmates and correlating higher costs, our state could not sustain the path on which we were set. During my second term, I have already begun to address these issues and plan to do far more.

### ***Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative***

Our state prison infrastructure is crumbling. Maintenance costs for our aging prisons are growing exponentially, and sustaining the status quo can no longer be justified. In 2015, I directed the Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Corrections to analyze and develop recommendations on restructuring our prison system. Following months of research, the Commissioner submitted a proposal that will solve many of the problems facing our Department of Corrections. I propose the Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative, a major building and restructuring project that will expand the capacity and increase the efficiency of our Department of Corrections.

The Initiative will include three main objectives. First, close Julia F. Tutwiler Prison for Women and build a new 1,200-bed women's facility. Second, consolidate most of the maximum and medium security men's facilities into three, new, 4,000-bed, state-of-the-art prisons. Third, repurpose and renovate the remaining, antiquated facilities into rehabilitation and re-entry centers focused on preparing inmates for release back into the community.

The consolidation of the facilities will result in significant efficiencies, a reduced maintenance burden and much lower operational costs. The new facilities will be designed to lessen overtime costs by decreasing the necessary number of corrections officers, to lower the risk of re-offense by including treatment and learning centers and to decrease medical costs by including modern medical facilities. In addition, the need to transport inmates to different facilities and the correlating costs will decrease, along with the energy efficiency losses from old facilities. By building a few new prisons, over a dozen of our oldest prisons can be shuttered or repurposed, negating the ever present need for maintenance and renovations. It is anticipated that the new facilities will add around 2,500 beds to our current capacity, which is estimated to decrease our percent over capacity by around thirty percent.

Certain existing facilities, whether prisons or work release centers, will be renovated to increase capacity and better provide rehabilitation services to inmates. These services assist inmates re-entering society, lowering the risk that the inmates will return to prison. By lessening the risk of re-offense, we can decrease costs to the state because treatment is more economical than the compounding cost of repeat offenders.

The Alabama Prison Transformation Initiative is a unique opportunity for Alabama to be a forerunner nationwide. This one-of-a-kind project will set Alabama apart from all other states, allowing the state to negate federal intrusion and gain a trim, efficient corrections department.

### ***Justice Reinvestment***

In 2014, I joined other state leaders in requesting assistance from the Council of State Governments (CSG) to analyze and make recommendations on righting our criminal justice system. Soon after submitting the request letter, the state was approved, and we joined the Justice Reinvestment

Initiative. Throughout 2014, my office, state leaders, and CSG representatives met with stakeholders across the state, identifying issues, collecting and analyzing data and developing recommendations. The work culminated in the Prison Reform Bill (Act 2015-185), which I signed into law in May 2015. Through the Prison Reform Bill, we seek to decrease the prison population while maintaining public safety, by focusing on three areas.

1. *Strengthening community-based supervision.* This will allow the state to be less reliant on prison facilities and enhance the resources in communities. An example includes requiring across-the-system use of assessments that measure risk of re-offense and treatment needs, which will allow the state to focus treatment and lower the risk of repeat offenders.
2. *Prioritizing prison for violent, dangerous offenders.* The Prison Reform Bill made changes and additions to the list of crimes to divert lower-level, non-violent property and drug offenders away from prison and into treatment. Studies show that outside-of-prison treatment lessens the likelihood that these offenders will learn additional and more serious criminal habits, lowering the likelihood of re-offense.
3. *Improving the parole process.* To better facilitate parole supervision, the Prison Reform Bill enacted measures to improve the efficiency and transparency of the parole decision-making process. For instance, the Board was required to adopt written guidelines for making parole decisions, and all inmates are now required to receive supervision upon release.

Following passage of the Prison Reform Bill, I signed Executive Order Number 8, creating the Criminal Justice Oversight and Implementation Council (Oversight Council) to oversee efforts to implement the Bill and ensure collaboration between state agencies on criminal justice matters. Once fully implemented, it is hoped that the Prison Reform Bill will allow the state to decrease our prison population by over 4,000 inmates, reducing the percent over capacity from 195 percent to around 165 percent. Funding the prison reform initiatives is necessary to achieving this success. My office is working closely with the Department of Corrections, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, the Board of Pardons and Paroles, the Department of Mental Health and state legislators to accomplish the objectives of the Prison Reform Bill, and I hope to combine these efforts with the Prison Transformation Initiative to make lasting change.

## **Alabama's HOPE (Helping Our People Excel) Through Broadband**

A fundamental cornerstone of a vibrant economy is affordable, fast internet. High-speed, high-capacity internet, or broadband, spans borders, impacting rural as well as urban communities. Promoting a robust broadband network will lead to a stronger education system, increased capabilities for health care, a more efficient, connected law enforcement network and enhanced economic development opportunities.

In 2015, I created the Office of Broadband Development and the Advisory Board on Broadband via Executive Order Number 9. With assistance from the Board, the Office serves as a resource and focal point for state and local government, as well as a partner for internet providers and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the Office and the Board were tasked with providing me with information related to the challenges, opportunities, funding needs and public policies and procedures that enhance or hamper broadband in the state.

Since establishment, the Office and the Board have worked diligently to cultivate relationships with broadband stakeholders, identify resources and needs, and develop recommendations. Now, the state is poised to make tremendous strides in providing quality broadband access for our schools, our hospitals and our law enforcement and first responders.

I propose that we look for ways to leverage the federal e-rate program to heighten our education capabilities. The e-rate program allows a state to invest state dollars and receive a tremendous match in federal funds. Providing state funds to match the federal funding will be crucial in expanding access to affordable and sufficient broadband within schools and could lead to partnerships with internet providers to further increase broadband capabilities to rural and low-access communities.

Our health care industry would also benefit from greater access to broadband. Telemedicine is a growing trend in today's health care industry and can potentially drive health care costs down and increase access to underserved areas. However, telemedicine is only possible if patients and doctors have access to the internet. To encourage the use of telemedicine, the broadband needs of hospitals and communities must first be identified, and the Governor's Office of Broadband Development will work with hospitals and local communities to identify these needs.

Fast, high quality internet is also important for our state's first responders. The ability of our first responders to effectively communicate is vital to their safety and the service they provide to the citizens of our state. By collaborating with local agencies, we can leverage state funding to unify coverage by local systems across our state and provide adequate communications for our first responders.



# **Other Priority Initiatives**

## **Gulf State Park Project**

For many years, the Gulf State Park has been a landmark destination for Alabama residents. With a diversity of ecosystems from white sand beaches to coastal pine forests, the Gulf State Park is truly a gem of our state. Until it was destroyed beyond repair by hurricanes, the Gulf State Park Lodge provided premier access to the Gulf to generations of Alabamians. After the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, I recognized the opportunity to replace and rebuild, not only with a Lodge and Conference Center, but also educational opportunities and environmental restoration.

Consisting of five sub-projects, the Gulf State Park Project is designed to restore some of the Park's naturally resilient resources and to provide enhanced opportunities to enjoy and appreciate the broad array of resources that the Park has long provided. The five key components are:

- 1) *Park renovations.* Visitors to the park will see greatly enhanced trail ways, with nearly ten miles of new walking, cycling, or running trails and approximately three-and-a-half miles of improvements to existing trails.
- 2) *Dune restoration.* Almost fifty football fields of dunes will be restored with native plantings, providing for the natural habitat of wildlife such as the beach mouse and sea turtles.
- 3) *Building an environmental information center.* To better educate visitors on the unique environment, an interactive exhibit space will be built with meeting and educational spaces.
- 4) *Building a Learning Campus.* To provide additional educational and research programs for student groups and researchers, a learning campus will be built in the Park with lodging options and a dining facility.
- 5) *Rebuilding a Lodge.* The reconstruction of an overnight stay and meeting facility will occur within a smaller blueprint than the original lodge. The new lodge will allow better access to the Park and serve as a model of resilient, environmentally friendly coastal development.

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## **Supporting Our Veterans**

Veterans make up approximately eight percent of Alabama's population. In my previous term, I worked diligently to serve our veterans, and as a veteran myself, I understand the sacrifice of those who have served our country so selflessly in the armed forces. In Executive Order Number 42, I created the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet), which brought nonprofits, state agencies and businesses together in a central forum to collaborate and develop cohesive policies that best serve our veterans.

By the end of 2016, an AlaVetNet website will be created as a one-stop-shop to assist veterans in finding the services they need. Because the people of Alabama are always looking for ways to assist our veterans, many existing organizations already provide a broad range services; however, with such a wide range of available services, locating and navigating to the needed assistance can be difficult and time consuming. The AlaVetNet website will serve as a repository for all the different possible services, providing a way for veterans to find the services they need in a much faster and more user-friendly manner. In addition to being able to search for the needed services, veterans will be able to determine the location of those services.

I also plan to reduce the number of unemployed veterans by expanding a tax credit for businesses that hire unemployed veterans. Currently, the tax credit is only available to veterans who have actively served and returned home from deployment within the previous two years. Expanding the tax credit to all unemployed veterans will incentivize businesses to hire veterans and ensure that those who have served our country in the armed forces will not fall through the cracks.

To promote the thousands of veteran-owned businesses in Alabama, I have initiated a statewide awareness campaign that specifically acknowledges businesses that are owned by veterans. Business owners that are veterans will have the option to display a decal at their place of business. It is my hope that identifying the business to those outside will attract patrons looking to support veterans. Alabamians take pride in supporting our veterans, and this small token of gratitude will help Alabamians continue to show their support.

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### **Assessing Our Water Resources**

Water is a vital resource affecting the lives of every Alabamian. Not only does it add to the beauty of the state, water enables population and economic growth. Water crises facing other states highlight the need for effective management of our different types of water resources to ensure its availability for future generations. To address Alabama's water needs, I created the Alabama Water Agencies Working Group (AWAWG). In 2013, the AWAWG delivered a report that provides guidelines on how to develop a comprehensive water management plan and policy. Based on the report's recommendations, we will continue to glean data on our water resources through assessments and to reach out to stakeholders so that issues are identified.

To fulfill a recommendation in the AWAWG report, I approved the creation of Focus Area Panels (FAP). Each panel focuses on a different issue or set of issues on water, such as instream flows or riparian rights. These panels bring together subject matter experts and engage a diverse group of stakeholders to provide a balanced understanding of water issues in Alabama. These FAPs will create reports that should lead to better water policy.

In conjunction with AWAWG and the Focus Area Panels, the Alabama Office of Water Resources (OWR) and the Geological Survey of Alabama began a large-scale assessment of water resources in 2014. The assessment project will gather a base set of scientific data on our water resources from which the state can make informed decisions. The assessments will be used in conjunction with the FAP reports to develop a comprehensive water management policy for the state.

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### **Supporting Small Business Development and Success**

Small business is the engine of job growth, creating three-out-of-four jobs, and small businesses are an integral part of the framework in the American economic system. In 2014, I established the Alabama Small Business Commission (SBC) by Executive Order Number 47.

The SBC was planned and conceived as a body made up of owners and managers of small businesses from around the state. The SBC promotes small business development in the state through legislative and executive policy recommendations, including increased access by small businesses to resources and information and enhanced communications between the state and the small business community.

To assist the SBC in navigating the government and policy environments, I organized an advisory committee, which consists of executive branch agency heads, economic development leaders, representatives from local government and other corporate association members. These individuals

serve as a material resource to the SBC, providing valuable input on matters relating to state government practices, existing policies and procedures and local government relationships.

The SBC serves as an advisory body to the Governor by:

- Formulating policy recommendations
- Evaluating issues critical to the economic growth and expansion of existing small / independent businesses and their interests
- Exploring best practices and areas of reform
- Assessing current procedures required for establishing a start-up business and discussing ways to help start-up businesses thrive in the Alabama economy
- Communicating key issues and small business concerns
- Encouraging innovation in the state's many regulatory relationships with small business
- Encouraging new and existing businesses to expand and grow
- Developing recommendations focused on executive branch practices, legislative priorities, and other rules and regulations affecting small businesses

In the 2015 regular session, I signed into law Act No. 2015-450, permanently establishing the Alabama Small Business Commission and Advisory Committee. The Commission and Advisory Committee will continue to promote the success of small businesses throughout the state and will continue upon their first year of successes, pushing for additional government reforms that will help provide for a more business-friendly environment in Alabama.

Another evolving milestone of which I am most proud is Atlas Alabama (<https://www.atlasalabama.gov/>), a website to provide a single, comprehensive and authoritative guide to small business services and development. The goal of the website is to simplify and streamline the process for obtaining basic, comprehensive information related to the full life cycle of a business. The website includes checklists and helpful links to state and local agency websites so that entrepreneurs can follow the steps required to launch or manage an existing business. The state has many valuable resources focused on small business development, and Atlas Alabama presents a tremendous opportunity to market those capabilities to the citizenry in a more focused, integrated fashion.

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### **The Alabama Transportation Institute**

In the previous four years, Alabama made great strides in improving transportation. One of the most notable projects is the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (ATRIP), which improved roads throughout the state. Over the next four years of my administration, I will continue to invest in improving transportation across Alabama. By leveraging better information, detailed analysis and the host of resources offered by a public research institution, such as the University of Alabama, government can more effectively provide the transportation and infrastructure needs of the state. In order to enhance transportation decision-making in Alabama, the Alabama Transportation Institute (ATI) will be established.

As a research institute with a broad interdisciplinary focus, ATI will identify Alabama's transportation needs through planning, research and development, safety, and job growth. To be housed at the University of Alabama, ATI will collaborate with university departments, peer institutions, and regional centers. Initially, ATI will be comprised of four centers. The first center, the Transportation Policy Research Center, will focus on the development of strategic and long-range plans for the state's complex transportation infrastructure. The Center for Advanced Vehicle

Technologies will be dedicated to the advancement of vehicle technology with a major focus on autonomous vehicle technology. The University Transportation Center of Alabama will concentrate on safety and management of transportation systems. The fourth center, the Center for Advanced Public Safety, will serve as an information producer, a system integrator and technology research organization, with the goals of supporting safety data analytics and of developing novel roadside reporting, screening and enforcement.

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### **Assessing Affordable Coastal Insurance Options**

Alabama's coastal residents have experienced increasing and burdensome costs of property insurance for many years. The availability of affordable property insurance for coastal residents is an issue that impacts the entire state far beyond the coastal communities. It is important to continue to develop and support sound public policies and initiatives that effectively address the cost of property insurance to consumers in Alabama's coastal counties.

Coastal homeowners can realize savings in their homeowners' insurance premiums by strengthening the construction of their new or existing homes. The Alabama Department of Insurance (ALDOI) administers the Strengthen Alabama Homes (SAH) program which provides grants to personal property owners for retrofitting their property against hurricane damage in order to improve community resiliency to weather events. Mitigating existing homes and fortifying new homes will reduce the damage and economic impact to communities from wind storms and reduce property insurance premiums through mitigation discounts.

The State of Alabama will also pursue other innovative efforts to provide relief and assistance to its citizens to prevent damage due to weather events. The ALDOI will continue its efforts to increase competition in the insurance industry in Alabama by recruiting insurance companies to do business in our state. Within the last five years, efforts by the Department have resulted in twelve new insurance companies writing property insurance in Alabama's coastal counties alone. Currently, more than eighty-two property insurers and thirty-seven surplus lines insurers now write property wind insurance in coastal Alabama.

Upon recommendation from the Alabama Homeowners Insurance Commission, I also created the Alabama Center for Insurance Information and Research (ACIIR) via Executive Order Number 41. The Center provides highly credible information and research insight for the benefit of stakeholders across Alabama. Working with the ACIIR as well as local governments and stakeholder groups, I will engage in public outreach efforts to educate citizens on the insurance cost savings and benefits available to consumers.