



**TESTIMONY ON
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA (CCAP)**

Presented to the House Local Government Committee

By
Frank Mazza, Director of Government Relations
Melissa Gates, Government Relations Manager

April 19, 2023

About CCAP

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization representing all 67 counties in Pennsylvania. County commissioners and council members, chief clerks, administrators or their home rule counterparts, and solicitors are members of the association.

CCAP is the voice of Pennsylvania counties. CCAP provides county leaders with information and guidance related to legislation, education, media, insurance, technology and many other issues that help create and maintain crucial services for residents throughout the state.

CCAP supports county leadership that is responsive to the needs and circumstances of citizens. CCAP stands firmly against state and federal actions that limit fiscal, administrative or programmatic authority over those developed locally.

Founded in 1886, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties (NACo).

CCAP Governance and Leadership

The [Board of Directors](#) is responsible for administering Association affairs and coordinating policy functions. Voting members of the Board include the past president, officers, representatives of each of the seven districts, chairs of standing committees and representatives to the NACo Board. The Association's slate of officers includes a president, first vice-president, second vice-president and a treasurer.

CCAP has ten [standing policy committees](#) — Agriculture; Assessment and Taxation; Community and Economic Development; County Governance; Courts and Corrections; Elections Reform; Emergency Management and Veterans Affairs; Energy, Environment and Land Use; Human Services; and Technology. These policy committees examine issues and recommend positions to the membership for the Pennsylvania County Platform. The Association also has a Resolutions and Policy committee that reviews new policy resolutions and presents them to the membership for voting. A strategic planning committee, an education committee and a few ad hoc committees round out the list.

The [Platform](#) is the basis for all of CCAP's lobbying efforts. Every position in the Platform comes from a CCAP member and is adopted by the majority of CCAP voting members. Any member of the Association can propose a resolution for consideration by the voting members.

County Governance

County commissioners are elected to four-year terms and are vested with both administrative and policy-making powers. In the home rule counties, a governing body is established by a local charter. Currently, the counties of Allegheny, Delaware, Erie, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Northampton, and Philadelphia are home rule counties.

County officials are required to adopt a balanced budget, and the county fiscal year is congruent with the calendar year. Counties budget for normal service expenses, as well as capital outlays. The primary source of local general fund revenue for counties is the county property tax.

Pennsylvania's counties are responsible for the delivery of human services programs on behalf of the state and federal government, including children and youth agencies, mental health and developmental disability services, drug and alcohol prevention and treatment and long-term care services. County corrections and prison management also account for a large portion of the county budget.

In addition, counties are responsible for all aspects of running elections in Pennsylvania, provide funding for the lower judiciary and related support services, and operate assessment offices to maintain property values that are the basis of property taxation for the counties, municipalities and school districts. They are involved in other functions such as land use planning, transportation infrastructure, operation of 911 centers and emergency response planning, environmental issues and recycling, property and civil records management and agricultural conservation and preservation.

Affiliates

CCAP also provides legislative representation and staff support services for the following affiliate associations which cover many facets of the work of counties: Pennsylvania Children and Youth Administrators (PCYA); Pennsylvania Association of County Administrators of Mental Health and Developmental Services (PACA MH/DS); Pennsylvania Coalition of Affiliated Healthcare & Living Communities (PACAH); Pennsylvania Association of County Drug and Alcohol Administrators (PACDAA); Pennsylvania Association of County Human Services Administrators (PACHSA); Assessors Association of Pennsylvania (AAP); Society of County Human Resource Professionals of Pennsylvania (SCHRPP); and County Planning Directors Association of Pennsylvania (CPDAP).

Legislative Initiatives and County Government Priorities

Apart from schools and roads, counties are responsible for the implementation of nearly all federal and state policies here in Pennsylvania. The work of county government touches every single Pennsylvanian. Whether through administration of the courts and corrections system, provision of human services to people in need in our communities, emergency management and 911 services, elections, environmental and land use planning and protection of open space, maintenance of county bridges, or the county property assessment rolls, counties directly impact Pennsylvanians' quality of life each and every day.

Due to the scope and nature of the wide variety of services counties provide, CCAP is often involved in lobbying many different policy issues. The Pennsylvania County Platform provides the basis for all of the Association's lobbying activities. In addition, CCAP policy committee members select their legislative priority issues for the coming year each November. The [2023 County Government Priorities](#) include:

- 911 Funding and Reauthorization
- County Inmates with Mental Health Issues
- County Mental Health Base Funding Increase
- Addressing the Needs of Children and Youth Who Have Complex Behavioral Health Issues
- Broadband Access and Development

- Promote Election Integrity

Counties, as a key deliverer of services on the state's behalf, can be a valuable partner to General Assembly to provide critical background and context for how state-funded programs are operationalized locally, as well as suggestions for how available dollars can be used more effectively to provide needed programming. Strong relationships between state and county government has historically yielded positive results that benefits residents across all 67 counties, regardless of rural or urban, population size and geography. We strive to continue our close ties with members of the General Assembly to achieve common goals and strengthen our partnerships across state government in order to building long-term and sustainable programming to benefit our mutual constituents, the people of Pennsylvania.

More information about CCAP, the Pennsylvania County Platform and current county priorities is available at www.pacounties.org.

We would like to thank you again for the opportunity to submit these comments and would be happy to address any additional questions.



Committed to the core responsibilities of county government – and ultimately to the people and communities of Pennsylvania

911 Funding and Reauthorization

Counties are proud to provide one of the key functions in public safety—the operation of the 911 call-taking and dispatch system. As technologies continue to evolve and funding streams no longer align with current realities, counties need to be able to rely on consistent and sustainable funding to maintain their responsibility as the first line of emergency response.

Counties are actively working with PEMA, legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry and other interests on improvements to the 911 system. Center to this effort is forward movement and investment in Next Generation 911 (NG911) to take into account both current and future ways that people can communicate in an emergency, improvements in system efficiency through shared infrastructure and network connection for 911 public safety answering points statewide, accurate GIS information and data and better regional systems to assure availability and reliability. A strong, connected 911 system is critical to ensuring services can still be provided efficiently in situations of mass emergency and can keep up with the pace of ever-changing technological advances to maximize emergency services delivery.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Development of a funding formula, well ahead of the January 31, 2024, sunset of the state's 911 statute, that adequately supports current county needs and also ensures that funding sources and distribution support needs into the future.
- Continued strategic planning and investment for evolving technologies and GIS data to ensure NG911 is properly supported and maintained.
- Opportunities for system and funding consolidation, including regional resource sharing and collaboration to ensure system and service continuity.

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would ensure all Pennsylvania residents and visitors will continue to have a quick and efficient connection to a 911 operator and services in any situation, regardless of geographic location or time of day.

County Inmates with Mental Health Issues

County jails have become de-facto state hospitals following years of deinstitutionalization of individuals with mental illness. When unmet behavioral health challenges lead to criminal charges, individuals are often committed to jails that are not equipped to address needs of people who need mental health treatment, resulting in poor outcomes for those individuals and for their communities.

County jails are reporting a steady growth in the population of inmates within the jail who have mental health issues. Further, more of those same inmates are experiencing severe mental illness, making it very difficult to address their needs in the jail setting. Without community-based resources and appropriate funding to support them, individuals may continue to cycle through the corrections system when adequate behavioral health supports would be a more appropriate and cost-effective solution.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Working closely with the Shapiro administration and the legislature to find alternatives to placing inmates who have mental illness in jail.
- Working with our partners to create better diversion and re-entry options in order to avoid jailing people as a result of their illness.
- Assuring that counties have access to state hospital beds when they are needed and stopping unrealistic measures to control beds at the expense of county jail inmates who need them.
- Cooperation with other providers to maintain continuity of care for inmates returned to the county.

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would mean individuals with mental health issues would have access to services and diversion programs to keep them out of jail. Further, those who end up in the correction system could have services to help rehabilitate them and reduce further costly interactions with the criminal justice system.

County Mental Health Base Funding Increase

Counties deliver critical mental health services – such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care and crisis intervention – on behalf of the state, and these services must be properly funded to ensure that the residents are able to access the care that they need. Lack of adequate state funding that has failed to keep up with demand, coupled with growing caseloads and cost inflation, have pushed the community mental health system to the point of collapse.

Counties currently administer direct services to support their community's mental health system. Thanks to the flexibility of the county mental health base funding allocated by the state, counties have been able to continue to serve their residents, but are stretching ever more limited state funding to its breaking point. With additional state funding for the county mental health base, counties would be able to better and more fully address specific needs such as children's mental health and older adult mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer supports and other diversion services. If the commonwealth cannot make a commitment to long-term, sustainable funding for mental health services, residents will suffer as it becomes harder and takes longer to find the supports they need.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Increasing annual investments in the state's mental health community base funding to help counties maintain and rebuild the existing safety net of services, before adding any additional programs and services.
- Investing substantial state dollars to rebuild and strengthen community crisis services, residential mental health programs and other locally provided care that will stabilize mental health services and assist hospitals with capacity concerns.
- Maintaining local flexibility and preserving programs such as the Behavioral HealthChoices program, so that counties can continue to provide local mental health services in an effective way.
- Prompt action to allocate the \$100 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds to mental health in line with the Behavioral Health Commission's recommendations, while continuing to work toward a longer term, sustainable funding solution.

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would mean anyone in the commonwealth would be able to access appropriate mental health treatment and services where they are without undue burden.

Address the Needs of Children and Youth Who Have Complex Behavioral Health Issues

When a child is unable to remain in his or her own home due to complications created by complex needs, such as acute substance abuse, mental health and/or developmental disabilities that occur simultaneously, counties have extreme challenges in obtaining a safe place for the child to stay while receiving the right services. Often referred to as "complex cases," the prevalence of youth in these situations are a growing concern where counties have few, if any, resources for referrals and treatment, leading to youth being held in settings that are not able to meet their unique set of needs.

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of children in need of mental or behavioral health services outside of the home whom no provider is willing or able to accept because they require more intensive treatment or create a safety threat to themselves and others. This has created many situations where there have been no appropriate places capable of meeting the needs of these children. In these cases, the county agencies with custody of the children are forced to find any possible placement, including less-than-ideal settings such as hotels or hallways of the children and youth office. Additionally, the caseworkers and staff providing supervision are not trained mental health counselors or residential staff and cannot provide the youth with the services or environment they need.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Working closely with the Department of Human Services to develop a partnership role for addressing complex cases and plans to educate the General Assembly and request needed support.
- Developing contracting standards for "no eject, no reject" policies.
- Providing adequate support to county mental health base funds to better ensure services to address children's mental health needs are available within their communities.

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would mean children with mental health issues are able to have appropriate placements where they can have adequate oversight and proper treatment based on their individual needs.

Broadband Access and Development

The collective future of Pennsylvanians hinges on addressing the challenges to broadband expansion that are preventing access to opportunities and information to many of our residents. Counties have been engaged in assessing availability and connections as well as working with community partners to ensure the commonwealth's communities have safe, affordable and reliable connection to the internet.

Many counties have taken a leadership role in working with local partners to identify gaps in broadband service and have developed best practices and innovative ideas, such as regional cooperative models, to address them. We have come a long way in addressing the digital divide, but funding remains one of the greatest needs to expand access to broadband. With the promise of billions of dollars in federal investment, the development of a state broadband plan, and maps now publicly available from the FCC, Pennsylvania is on the path forward, but these steps are just the beginning of implementing strategic, thoughtful approaches to bring broadband access to all Pennsylvanians.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Working together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful broadband expansion that maximize resources and minimize overbuild.
- Identifying successful approaches and sharing best practices that can be successfully used by other communities.
- Partnering with the state and other stakeholders to leverage data, develop needed informational resources and build on strategies that help increase broadband infrastructure and services.
- Identifying funding and working with stakeholders to ensure those investments are responsibly allocated to best fit the areas of greatest need.

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would mean every Pennsylvanian would have the ability to adequately, safely and affordably access the internet, regardless of income, geography or individual circumstance.

Promote Election Integrity

Counties take their responsibility for the fair, secure and accurate administration of Pennsylvania's elections very seriously, and need clear rules that enable consistent implementation across the commonwealth. Reforms to Pennsylvania's Election Code are needed to resolve ambiguities and help counties continue to promote the integrity of our elections. Pre-canvassing and extending the mail-in ballot application deadlines remain the most important changes counties are seeking to improve election administration.

Since the enactment of Act 77 of 2019, counties have identified areas of the Election Code that need to be addressed and clarified in the wake of multiple court decisions and appeals to help counties meet their responsibilities for election administration and to provide efficient and accurate results. Pre-canvassing and unrealistic mail-in ballot application deadlines remain two of the most important changes that would significantly improve the election experience for both counties and voters, without sacrificing ballot security or access to voting. But counties also need the support of the legislature and administration to update other parts of the Election Code so that counties have clear rules to help restore the public's confidence in the integrity of our elections.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Extending the pre-canvassing period to allow ample time for counties to prepare mail-in and absentee ballots for tabulation so that accurate results can be provided as soon as possible.
- Moving back the deadline for absentee and mail-in ballot applications to 15 days prior to an election, so that voters can be confident there is plenty of time for their county to process the application and for the ballot to be mailed from county to voter and back again.
- Ensuring that counties are involved in discussions on any election law reforms at the earliest possible point, to create positive, meaningful and effective election policy moving forward

THE BIG PICTURE

Achieving this priority would give counties the tools they need to continue to run fair, secure and accurate elections, while restoring public trust in the election system.



CCAP is the recognized leader for Pennsylvania county government.

County governments are responsible for a wide variety of critical services, including provision of human services (mental health, intellectual disabilities, children and youth, long-term care, drug and alcohol services, housing) to people in need in our communities. In addition, counties are responsible for emergency management and 911 services, administration of the courts and corrections system, elections, maintenance of county bridges, and the county property assessment rolls, and also are involved in environmental and land use planning, protection of open space and community and economic development.

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), a non-profit, non-partisan association, advocates as the unifying voice of all 67 Pennsylvania counties and provides leadership and support for excellence in county government. CCAP members include county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators, chief clerks and solicitors. CCAP advocates as the unifying voice of all Pennsylvania counties and provides leadership and support for excellence in county government. Founded in 1886, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties (NACo).

For more information about any of the 2023 County Government Priorities, please visit www.pacounties.org and click on Priorities under the Advocacy tab or email PACountiesGR@pacounties.org.



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Association of Pennsylvania
THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania
PO Box 60769 • Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
www.pacounties.org • @PACountiesGR