

## Vote-By-Mail Reforms



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. The ongoing lack of clarity around provisions of Act 77 of 2019, the statute that expanded mail-in ballots, continues to create challenges for county election administration. This priority is especially urgent with the recent surge in "on-demand" requests of mail-in ballots during the 2024 General Election that inundated county staff and resources. In addition, pre-canvassing and unrealistic mail-in ballot application deadlines continue to remain important to all counties.

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. While technology improvements and more experienced county election operations led to faster counting by counties during the 2024 Presidential Election, 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.

Furthermore, 2024 saw an increase in voters using on-demand, in-person mail-in voting in the weeks leading up to Election Day. This led to a number of counties experiencing a significant influx of voters waiting in line to request, fill out, and return mail in ballots in one visit. Running what was effectively a third election, counties experienced significant delays and challenges due to the confusion this process caused and created additional stresses on county election administrators and staff while trying to prepare for Election Day. Counties need the support of the legislature and administration to update these and other key areas of the Election Code so that counties have clear rules ensure the public remains confident in the integrity of our elections.

### THE FACTS

- Since its enactment in 2019, Act 77 remains unclear, or in some cases silent, on how counties should address certain situations, such as what to do with naked ballots and whether voters should be contacted and permitted to cure defects with their mail-in ballot. Procedures for handling and processing un/misdated ballots have also become a point of great legal debate.
- The lack of clarity resulting from Act 77 continues to create new challenges for counties, including the influx of voters across the commonwealth engaging in on-demand, in-person mail-in voting during the 2024 General Election, placing additional stress on county election offices and staff that worked to remain in compliance with the Election Code despite the unclear rules for these situations.
- Changing court decisions, in addition to the statutory language or lack thereof, have led to a situation where counties have struggled to implement the law consistently.
- Giving counties the ability to pre-canvass will help with managing workloads on Election Day, particularly in a busy presidential year, where timely results will be anticipated given the high level of attention that will be paid to Pennsylvania on election night and beyond.
- Mail-in ballot deadlines, including the application window, create timing challenges with the postal service and within county election offices. Further clarification and extension of timelines will benefit voters by providing more time for the ballot to be able to get from the county to the voter and back again through the mail, creating less uncertainty over whether ballots were received by 8 p.m. election night.

### COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Resolving ambiguities and gaps in the Election Code for which counties need clarity and uniformity, including provisions related to the law on counties' authority to use drop boxes for mail-in ballots as well as clear and concise guidelines for curing ballot defects and third parties sending in mail-in ballot applications.
- 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 the county to voter and back again.
- Ensuring any changes to Act 77 or the Election Code are enacted and allow enough time for implementation well before the next regularly scheduled election.
- 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.

# 2025 County Government PRIORITIES

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



## 911 Surcharge Reauthorization and Statute Updates

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.



## Adequate County Mental Health Funding

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



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**CCAP**  
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
Association of Pennsylvania



# 911 Surcharge Reauthorization and Statute Updates



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 continuously working with PEMA, legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry, and other interest groups 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 will still be provided efficiently in situations of mass emergency to keep pace with the ever-changing technological advances to maximize emergency services delivery.

## THE FACTS

- 911, while separate from our police, fire, and EMS system, provides the first response to callers, often offering medical triage advice or other critical information to ensure the safety and outcome for all involved while physical first responders are dispatched.
- The 911 surcharge is a flat-rate fee placed on a phone service bill monthly or at the point of sale for a prepaid device that provides funding for the operation of 911 emergency telecommunications services in Pennsylvania.
- At a surcharge of \$1.95, counties, and ultimately county taxpayers, are still shouldering nearly 20% of the cost of the 911 system.
- Compared nationally, Pennsylvania has a relatively average fee that covers a significant majority of 911 operational costs—other states have percentage-based or locally derived fees, including some as high as \$5.
- 911 call volume is increasing while revenue from the 911 surcharge has failed to maintain pace with system costs over the last several years
- Even outside of funding needs, the 911 statute needs technical changes and clean-ups to ensure the law meets the current realities and needs of the NextGen system.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Reauthorization of the 911 surcharge at a rate that brings the county share of the 911 system costs to 10-12%.
- Continued strategic planning and investment for evolving technologies and GIS data to properly support and maintain NG911.
- Opportunities for system and funding consolidation, including regional resource sharing and collaboration to guarantee system and service continuity.
- Discussion among policymakers and stakeholders well before the January 2026 surcharge sunset to ensure the reauthorization accounts for the proliferation of applications, devices, sensors, and services capable of contacting 911 and the ability to accurately assess and collect 911 surcharge revenue on these rapidly evolving consumer communications technologies.

## THE BIG PICTURE

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# Adequate County Mental Health Funding



Counties deliver critical mental health services—such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care, and crisis intervention—on behalf of the state. These services must be properly funded to ensure that county residents can access the care that they need. The lack of adequate state funding has failed to keep up with demand. Coupled with growing caseloads and cost inflation, the community mental health system has been pushed 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 address specific needs in more meaningful and impactful ways, such as child and older adult mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer supports, and other diversion services. If the commonwealth cannot commit to long-term, sustainable funding for mental health services, residents will continue to suffer as it becomes harder and takes longer to find the support they need. Additionally, the impacts of underfunding trickle down to more costly systems, including hospitals, law enforcement, and corrections.

## THE FACTS

- Capacity within the currently available services is inadequate to meet the need in communities. Community members frequently report wait times of at least 6 months, often much longer. Stabilization of these existing services, like addressing workforce gaps, is a critical first step.
- Counties estimate the need for the community-based system is an additional \$1.2 billion to bolster, rebuild, and add programs that adequately meet community needs.
- One-time funding for mental health initiatives can be helpful in limited circumstances but long-term programs cannot be developed without sustainable, dependable long-term funding plans.
- Without sustainability, counties cannot plan or stand-up long-term services, which can result in unspent funds despite the critically high need for community-based services.
- Mental health-based funds allow counties flexibility to meet unmet needs which vary by community, including community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care, and crisis intervention.
- The unmet community need has created a growing population of individuals that become involved with emergency departments, law enforcement, and the criminal justice system. When no appropriate diversion exists, the remaining solutions are hospitals or incarceration, both of which are not appropriate settings for mental health treatment and are more costly.

## COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Increasing and sustaining annual investments in the state's mental health community-based system to help counties maintain and rebuild the existing safety net of services, before adding other additional programs and services needed by the community.
- 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 effectively.
- Ensuring that counties have a voice in all efforts to address behavioral health needs in the commonwealth.

## THE BIG PICTURE

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

For more information about any of the 2025 County Government Priorities, please visit [www.pacounties.org](http://www.pacounties.org) and click on Priorities under the Advocacy tab or email [PACountiesGR@pacounties.org](mailto:PACountiesGR@pacounties.org).