

# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

## COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

### COUNTY PRIORITIES SPOTLIGHT: COORDINATION IN MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES INVESTMENTS IS CRITICAL

Counties have continued to call for an increase in funding for county mental health services, for many important reasons. In particular, the availability of services is far outweighed by demand, which has a multitude of far-reaching impacts. For instance, emergency department wait times have increased as individuals seek treatment without knowing where else to go. Students are having trouble accessing appropriate services, creating issues within our schools and children and youth systems. And law enforcement is being called to respond to more crisis calls and suicide rates have tragically increased. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to a \$250 million increase in county mental health services as part of the FY 2024-2025 state budget, counties are seeking a commitment of coordinated and comprehensive investments in county mental health system over the next several years. Until that commitment is realized, counties will face ongoing competition for limited mental health funding, resources, and workforce, operating within a siloed system that struggles with chronic underfunding.

Counties are not alone in their call for bolstering the community system with additional investment. In a recent [op-ed](#) co-authored by CCAP and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, counties and schools agreed there should not be competition among counties and schools for funding, but rather a coordinated effort to ensure resources are available to children and families. Counselors and mental health professionals have also cited the need for investments in prevention and the larger overall base to provide for whole-family mental health and broader community-based prevention services during legislative hearings, including the House Education Committee [hearing](#) on student mental health earlier this year. District attorneys shared this concern in a [recent hearing](#) of the Senate Republican Policy Committee.

Investment in county community mental health funding will ensure any other investments the state makes, including for school or crisis-based services, are not made in silos and can be supported by the broader overall mental health services continuum.

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### GOVERNOR AND PA DEPARTMENT OF AGING RELEASE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

On May 31, Gov. Shapiro and Pennsylvania Department of Aging Secretary Jason Kavulich announced a 10-year strategic plan to aid in and transform service delivery for older adult needs and services.

[Aging Our Way, PA: A Plan For Lifelong Independence](#), was developed to prioritize critical strategies and tactics to ensure government is receptive and responsive to the changing needs of a larger older adult population.

The plan identifies five priority areas, including unlocking access, aging in a community, gateways to independence, caregiver supports and education and navigation. These priorities guide efforts to foster independence, promote inclusivity, and provide support systems for older adults, caregivers, and care partners. They will serve as a roadmap for programs, policies, and services to meet the evolving needs of Pennsylvania's demographics.

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### JUNE LEGISLATIVE ACTION CONTINUES IN HOUSE AND SENATE

During recent weeks of legislative session, **SB 1099**, introduced by Sen. Doug Mastriano (R-Adams), was approved by the Senate **unanimously**, sending it to the House for consideration.

This legislation reauthorizes the Fire Company & EMS Grant Program through 2029 as the current law is set to expire on June 30, 2024. In addition to Sen. Mastriano's reauthorization legislation in the Senate, **HB 2407** (Rep. Solomon, D-Philadelphia) was introduced in the House on June 11 and also reauthorizes the Fire Company and EMS Grant program through 2029. Unlike SB 1099, HB 2407 further expands the grant programs to align with Governor Shapiro's proposed \$30 million increase in funding for this program, providing higher awards for eligible companies, and allowing basic life support squads and quick response services to receive grants. Furthermore, HB 2407 creates new grant programs to support volunteer rescue companies, hazardous materials teams, and specialty teams, as well as setting up a county-based fire service modernization grant to explore consolidation, shared services and address workforce issues. The House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee held a hearing on HB 2407 after its introduction and further amendments are anticipated to be considered during an upcoming committee meeting when the House returns to session.

On June 12, **SB 1138**, introduced by Sen. Lynda Schlegel Culver (R-Columbia), was unanimously approved by the Senate. This bill extends the sunset of the State Geospatial Coordinating Board (GeoBoard) by four years as the board is set to sunset on June 30, 2024. Counties support this legislation as geospatial data is critical in informing decisions related to 911 and emergency services, workforce development, and land management.

**Senate Bill 739**, introduced by Sen. Elder Vogel (R-Beaver), was reported by the House Insurance committee on June 3 and was considered by the full House the following week, though it has not received a final vote in that chamber. This bill enhances the understanding of telemedicine services, providing clarity around insurance company reimbursement for services and guidance for the provision of services. Further, the bill clarifies behavioral health services are included in the definition of a "health care service" for diagnosis, prevention, treatment, cure or relief of a health condition, illness, injury or diseases. Additionally, it clarifies that a county or multicounty agreement with the Department of Human Services (DHS) for behavioral health is captured under the umbrella term of provision of services in agreement with DHS, solidifying counties collaboration with the Department to regulate and administer telehealth services throughout the commonwealth.

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## RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW REFORM BILL MOVING IN SENATE

On June 12, the Senate took the next step toward advancing a bill addressing a key legislative priority for counties, which means the bill could be up for a final vote as early as the week of June 24.

**Senate Bill 525**, sponsored by Sen. Cris Dush (R-Cameron), would create a new process by which agencies may petition the Office of Open Records (OOR) for relief from a vexatious requestor. Once the review process is completed, if OOR determines that an agency's petition for relief should be granted, OOR must put out a final opinion with appropriate relief that includes, but is not limited to, an order that the agency does not need to comply with future requests from the vexatious requestor for no more than one year. Vexatious requesters are defined as those who use the Right-to-Know Law (RTKL) with malicious intent to intimidate, harass, or punish an agency, which results in slowing the agency from completing other important work and wasting taxpayer resources. SB 525 now sits before the full Senate for consideration.

Reforming the RTKL is a top **priority** for counties in 2024. Counties believe that government has a responsibility for transparency and accountability to its residents and stakeholders. There is a balance that must be maintained among access, privacy and security concerns. Counties and other local governments have seen a steady increase in recent years in the number of individuals using the law in this manner, which was never contemplated by the General Assembly when the original statute was passed.

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## MAY STATE REVENUE UPDATE RELEASED

The State's Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) released the monthly revenue **update** for May. General Fund collections were \$3.36 billion, slightly below the IFO's official estimate by \$7 million (-0.2%). This was primarily attributed to lower-than-anticipated corporate net income tax (CNIT) receipts, which were counterbalanced by increased sales and use tax (SUT) revenues, notably driven by non-motor vehicle sales.

May collections were \$64 million (+2%) higher than collections for May 2023. Year-to-date revenues for fiscal year 2023-2024 reached \$41.84 billion, which is \$320 million (+0.8%) higher than expected. The increases can be largely attributed to the overage in non-motor vehicle SUT, and increased inheritance tax collections and Treasury collections, which significantly outperformed initial estimates by the Office.

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## IFO ISSUES NATURAL GAS UPDATE FOR Q1

Additionally, the IFO recently released the natural gas [update](#) for the first quarter of 2024. According to the report, production volume totaled 1,881 billion cubic feet, which is an increase of 1.9% from the prior year. There were also 100 new horizontal wells drilled, a decrease of 20 new wells (-16.7%) from the prior year. This was the sixth consecutive quarter with a year-over-year decline in new wells drilled.

For 2023, production growth in Pennsylvania lagged most top-producing states. For the first quarter of 2024, Pennsylvania production growth continued to lag behind Texas, and the U.S. nationwide production growth has outpaced Pennsylvania in recent quarters due to gains in Texas, Alaska and West Virginia.

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