

OVERVIEW

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.

Counties are continuously working with PEMA, legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry, and other interest groups on improvements to the 911 system. 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.

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.

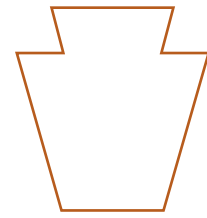
Coupled with growing caseloads and cost inflation, the community mental health system has been pushed to the point of collapse. Without long-term, sustainable funding for mental health services, residents will continue to suffer as it becomes harder and takes longer to find the support they need. Additionally, the impacts of underfunding trickle down to more costly systems, including hospitals, law enforcement, and corrections.

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 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.



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

For more information about any of the 2025 County Government Priorities, please visit www.pacounties.org and click on Priorities under the Advocacy tab or email PACountiesGR@pacounties.org.



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2025



County Government

PRIORITIES



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Adequate County Mental Health Funding



Vote-By-Mail Reforms



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



911 Surcharge Reauthorization and Statute Updates

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

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

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.



Vote-By-Mail Reforms

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.