

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

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COUNTY PRIORITIES SPOTLIGHT: PEMA RELEASES 2023 ANNUAL 911 REPORT

The Pennsylvania Emergency Agency (PEMA) 2023 **Annual 911 Report** highlights the significant progress in modernizing the state's 911 system. As of 2023, 65 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties are actively operating on the Next Generation 911 (NG911) platform, with full statewide implementation anticipated by the end of the first quarter of 2025.

NG911 represents a transformative upgrade to the infrastructure that routes 911 calls to Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), enhancing location accuracy through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) integration and improving workflows for call processing and dispatch. In 2023 alone, Pennsylvania's 61 PSAPs handled over 14.4 million 911 calls. To support this growing demand, PEMA has prioritized telecommunicator recruitment and the adoption of new technologies for the more than 2,500 professionals staffing 911 centers across the state.

Recognizing the critical need for statutory updates to support NG911's implementation, the Governor signed **Act 147** into law in November 2024. This act introduces key changes to Pennsylvania's 911 statute, including amendments to Right-to-Know provisions for NG911, stricter penalties for misuse of the 911 system, and new requirements for communication providers to report service outages. It further extends the financial audit cycle for PSAPs from two years to three, streamlining oversight for these vital emergency

services.

Despite these advancements, the financial sustainability of Pennsylvania's 911 system remains a pressing concern. The 911 surcharge, which funds emergency telecommunication services, has not kept pace with rising operational costs. To address this shortfall, the General Assembly passed **Act 34** in December 2023, raising the uniform monthly 911 fee from \$1.65 to 1.95, effective March 1, 2024. However, counties and taxpayers continue to bear a significant portion of the financial burden, covering an estimated 20-25% of the 911 system's costs. As 911 call volumes rise and NG911 technology evolves, the need for long-term, sustainable funding becomes increasingly urgent.

The surcharge increase is set to sunset in January 2026, and counties remain committed in their advocacy for a higher, more permanent fee to address the ongoing demands of the system. The modernization of Pennsylvania's services is a critical investment in public safety, but without sufficient and sustained funding, counties will struggle to meet the technological and operational needs of these essential services. Ensuring the surcharge is raised to align with rising costs remains a top priority for counties to safeguard the future of Pennsylvania's emergency response infrastructure.

24/7 CRISIS WALK-IN CENTER OPENS TO SERVE TRI-COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

The Connections Emergency Behavioral Health Crisis Walk-In Center, a 24/7 mental health facility, officially opened on December 11 in Dauphin County. This tri-county initiative, developed in collaboration with Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry counties, serves individuals aged 14 and older. Operated by Connections Health Solutions, an Arizona-based firm specializing in mental health crisis intervention, the center aims to stabilize clients within 24 hours and connect them to long-term treatment options as needed. The facility was established with funding from a Community Mental Health Services Block Grant, awarded to Cumberland and Dauphin counties in 2022.

This center offers a range of critical services to address mental health crises. Walk-in patients are guaranteed a professional psychiatric assessment within 90 minutes. Additionally, the center operates two mobile crisis response units and provides on-site crisis response across the three counties. These teams can be dispatched through 911, the state's 988 crisis hotline, or county-level crisis teams. To streamline the process for first responders, the facility includes a secure drop-off area for police, EMS, and other emergency personnel.

The opening of the Connections Crisis Walk-In Center represents a significant step forward in addressing the growing need for community mental health services across the Commonwealth. By uniting resources and efforts, Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry counties are leading the charge in improving Pennsylvania's mental health infrastructure, demonstrating the profound impact of county-level leadership in delivering comprehensive care to residents across the state.

DHS DRAFT REGULATIONS ON YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PLACEMENTS

In early November, the Department of Human Services (DHS) introduced new **draft regulations** for residential treatment facilities serving youth with mental health challenges. The proposed regulations include limiting the use of restraints, requiring staff to develop discharge plans for youth at the time of admission, shortening the timeframe for serious incidents, and reducing staff-to-resident ratios in treatment facilities.

Counties recognize the importance of ensuring high-quality care for youth with complex needs but have raised concerns about the potential impact of these changes on service delivery. Specifically, counties note that implementing these regulations could present operational challenges for providers and potentially strain county human services systems, which are already managing significant pressures related to placement shortages.

For years, counties have faced increased difficulty in securing appropriate placement for children with complex behavioral and mental health needs who are in the custody of child welfare agencies. This longstanding issue, compounded by current resources limitations, has reached a critical point. In response, CCAP formed a Complex Case Work Group, comprising of county commissioners, county executives, solicitors, and human services staff.

The work group developed **recommendations** to address these challenges, with a central proposal advocating for the establishment of a “no eject/no reject” program to ensure that all youth in need of care have access to safe, appropriate placements, regardless of the complexity of their needs. The recommendations also include strategies to strengthen the service continuum and enhance support for providers. Counties remain committed to collaborating with DHS and other stakeholders to balance the need for quality care with the practicalities of implementation, ensuring that all youth receive the support they need.

IFO REPORTS ON THE FIVE-YEAR ECONOMIC AND BUDGET OUTLOOK

Under Pennsylvania statute, the State’s Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) is required to annually produce a report assessing the Commonwealth’s current fiscal condition and projected five-year outlook by November 15. This annual report applies neutral economic conditions and current trends in policies and demographics to provide potential outcomes for the state’s fiscal standing over the next few years.

Based on the factors assumed in the analysis, the IFO projects that state revenues will increase at an average rate of 2.7% per year from FY 2024-25 through FY 2029-30. State expenditures, on the other hand, are projected to increase at an average rate of 3.4% a year during the same period, assuming most General Fund dollars are appropriated to maintain the current level of service. Of particular interest, expenditures in Human Services programs are expected to increase on average by 4.8% each year from FY 2024-25 through FY 2029-30, with the largest projected increases going towards Long-Term Living services (6.5% average annual growth).

The full report with more details on the IFO’s analysis can be found on their [website](#).

IFO ISSUES NOVEMBER REVENUE UPDATE

The IFO also released the monthly revenue **update** for November 2024, showing that General Fund collections for the month totaled \$2.93 billion, which was \$8 million (0.3%) less than the IFO’s official estimate. November 2024 collections were \$130 million (4.2%) lower than during the same month of the previous year.

Despite November revenues falling short for a second consecutive month compared to the IFO’s estimate, year-to-date state revenues for FY 2024-2025 through the end of November are still exceeding the IFO’s official estimate by \$119 million (0.7%) for a total of \$16.4 billion. This is the result of higher-than-expected collections from the inheritance tax and corporate net income tax that are exceeding the IFO’s predictions by \$42 million and \$24 million, respectively. Additionally, year-to-date collections are \$255 million (1.6%) higher compared to this time last year.

NACo ACCEPTING INTERIM POLICY RESOLUTIONS

The National Association of Counties (NACo) 2025 Legislative Conference will be held in person in Washington, D.C. March 1-4, 2025. During the conference, NACo's ten policy steering committees will meet to consider adoption of interim policy resolutions that will guide NACo advocacy until the Annual Conference in July. NACo invites submissions for interim policy resolutions via email to resolutions@naco.org. Additional details are available on the NACo Legislative Conference [webpage](#).

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