



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
Association of Pennsylvania

THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

2022 County Government PRIORITIES



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



Appropriate Funding to Support the Crumbling Mental Health System

The commonwealth must effectively collaborate with its county partners to fully support the needs of

our most vulnerable citizens who are affected by mental health issues, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Counties deliver critical mental health services on behalf of the state, which must be properly funded to ensure that the residents are able to access the care that they need.

Community-based mental health services – such as community residential programs, family-based support, outpatient care and crisis intervention – are critical to the well-being of our constituents and communities. Funding levels for county mental health services have direct impacts on whether these important community and family supports will be available. This includes increasing mental health base funds for expanded services, beds and diversions, as well as abandoning

efforts to dismantle Behavioral HealthChoices, which has provided important behavioral health services to some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable community members.

Counties have been able to coordinate and invest in those programs and services that meet local needs and challenges, and clients and their families have been highly satisfied with these local services.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- Advocating for an increased, sustainable investment 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.
- Making annually increased investments in the mental health community base to help counties ensure that the existing safety net of services is fortified and sustainable, prior to adding additional programs and services.
- Preserving programs such as the Behavioral HealthChoices program, so that counties can continue to provide local mental health services in an effective way.



Human Services Workforce Crisis

Counties are responsible for providing critical services to support the needs of our citizens and our communities that are impacted by drug abuse, mental illness, developmental disabilities, and child abuse and neglect.

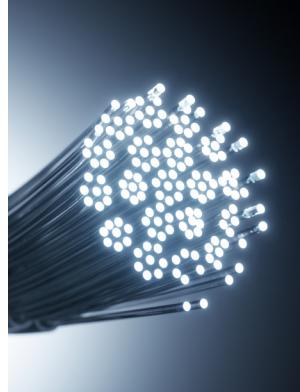
Without an adequate workforce to provide these services, some of Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens and communities may be left behind.

While counties have continued to advocate for increased funding to support services that protect our most vulnerable citizens for years, the recent workforce crisis has only compounded an already dire situation, threatening counties' abilities to adequately meet increased service demands and fulfill community needs.

While all industries are suffering workforce shortages, human services are unique, as they rely entirely on people to deliver those services. These roles cannot be performed by computers or other machines. Without our human services employees, we are unable to investigate child abuse, help someone find housing, or provide mental health supports and substance abuse treatment. As some of the most important services counties offer to their constituents, it is critical to ensure this workforce is adequate and sustainable now and into the future. From recruitment to retention, we owe it to our employees and those we serve to continue finding innovative ways and best practices to bolster and support this special workforce area for years to come.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Development of programs and partnerships to streamline human services recruitment efforts and create county employment pipelines.
- Permitting professionals to operate within their scope of practice and expertise, regardless of regulatory or degree requirements, to aid in service provision and delivery.
- Further reduction or elimination of regulatory barriers to ease burdens on county human services staff.



Broadband Expansion

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.

Although the need for internet access continues to increase across the nation – as the backbone of business, and as a tool for education, health care, emergency services, economic and business development and other key parts of our everyday lives – broadband access continues to be recognized at all levels of government as one of the biggest hurdles of the 21st century. Even before the pandemic, counties have been leaders on expanding access, including investing in projects and identifying local solutions. The pandemic has only further exposed the lack of availability and the need of Pennsylvanians for high speed and reliable internet access.

Counties can share their best practices and innovative ideas, such as regional cooperative models, that have seen success in Pennsylvania and throughout the country, to create and build meaningful collaborative partnerships. With the promise of billions of dollars in federal investment under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the development of the statewide Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority, we have come a long way in addressing the digital divide, but these steps are just the beginning of implementing strategic, thoughtful approaches to move all Pennsylvanians forward together.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Working together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful broadband expansion that maximizes resources and minimizes overbuild.
- Identifying successful approaches and sharing best practices that can be replicated with other comparable communities.
- Partnering with higher education and research entities to leverage data, develop needed informational resources and build on technological innovations that aid in advancement of broadband infrastructure deployment and service provision.
- Identifying funding resources and partnering with stakeholders to ensure deployment of resources are responsibly allocated to best fit the areas of greatest need.



Appropriate Funding and Reform for the Children and Youth System

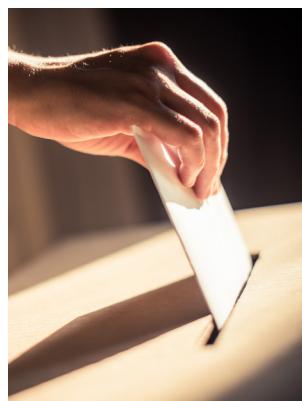
Counties have the critical responsibility of assuring child welfare in the commonwealth through

investigating allegations of child abuse and providing other services to the children and families in their communities. To effectively address the growing number of caseloads throughout the commonwealth and staffing shortages facing many human services agencies, the county children and youth system must receive adequate funding to keep pace with demand.

Counties continue to advocate for increased state funding to maintain the children and youth services they provide on behalf of the state. However, despite the critical importance of this work, counties continue to face staffing shortages and caseload increases that we are struggling to find the capacity to handle effectively. Exacerbated by the stress and isolation of the pandemic, counties saw a rise in caseloads and the severity of injuries children sustained, as less frequent exposure to school and other mandated reporters often left abuse and mental health issues unnoticed. Combined with more complex cases of abuse that also involve mental health, substance abuse or other needs for services, the children and youth system requires better cross-system collaboration and training, as well as strengthened partnerships with law enforcement to appropriately serve the children and families within the commonwealth.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Securing adequate funding from the state to enable hiring necessary caseworkers to address increasing caseloads.
- Reducing or removing regulatory barriers that would ease burdens on county children and youth staff, increase training and collaboration with law enforcement and work to eliminate cross-systems barriers.
- Taking steps to encourage the state to play a more active role supporting counties by implementing a statewide program and resources to assist counties in addressing the most complex cases that require specialized programs and treatment options.



Promote Election Integrity

Counties take their responsibility for the fair, efficient 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.

Since the enactment of Act 77 of 2019, it has become clear that additional adjustments to the Election Code are critical to assist counties in providing smooth election administration and efficient results. Counties continue to pursue changes and clarifications recommended in CCAP's January 2021 elections reform report, including clarifications to ambiguous provisions, expanded pre-canvassing time and moving back the deadline for mail-in ballot application. Addressing these issues would significantly improve the voter experience, as well as the likelihood that results could be provided in a more timely manner.

Overall, counties must have clear rules to help restore the public's confidence in the integrity of our elections and must be at the table with the General Assembly and administration to help develop solutions that can be implemented clearly and consistently, and to assure appropriate resources are available to do so.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Promoting election integrity by clarifying elements of Act 77 recommended by counties, including drop boxes, permanent voter lists, ballot signatures and other fatal flaws.
- Extending the pre-canvassing period for mail-in and absentee ballots to allow ample time for counties to prepare 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 to allow sufficient time for the 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 the development of any election law reforms to create positive, meaningful and effective election policy clarifications moving forward.



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 become out of line with current realities, counties

need reliable, sustainable funding to provide 911 response services that meet the growing demands of Pennsylvania residents and visitors.

As technologies and the way people access 911 continue to evolve, funding and regulations need to account for upgrades to the system to ensure that standard of service is maintained and adequately funded, including the transition to Next Gen 911 (NG 911). Comprehensive, strategic planning and reexamination of the 911 system that will set Pennsylvania up for a sustainable future must begin now to ensure counties have the resources they need well ahead of the January 31, 2024 sunset of current funding formula.

Counties are actively working with Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry and other interests on system reform. Center to this effort is forward movement and investment in NG 911, which includes accommodation of current and future communications devices, improvements in system efficiency through shared broadband backbones for 911 public safety answering points, shared network switching, accurate GIS information and data and better regional system redundancy. Outcomes will encompass all current communication technologies, including social networking platforms, ability to anticipate future technologies, consolidation of some system elements, and improvement in and consolidation of funding streams.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Development of a funding formula, well ahead of the 2024 sunset, 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 NG 911 is properly supported and maintained.
- Opportunities for system and funding consolidation, including regional resource sharing and collaboration to ensure system and service continuity.



Funding and Resources for Elections

Changes to elections administration in Pennsylvania from Act 77 of 2019 have resulted in significant increases in the costs and resources needed for counties to administer successful elections. The state and counties must work together to provide appropriate support for our elections, and anticipate the potential costs to counties related to any future Election Code reforms.

The implementation of mail-in ballots for all Pennsylvanians was a significant change to election administration, causing a significant increase to county budgets for elections-related costs in 2020 and 2021. To properly administer the elections, counties needed additional supplies and staffing and overtime needs grew to address workload requirements, which were further compounded by the significant loss of election directors and staff due to the stress of the job during a pandemic and highly contentious presidential election. These impacts fell squarely on county shoulders, as they are solely responsible for administration of elections at the local level, without any new resources to offset these new requirements.

We must learn from this lesson as the General Assembly and administration continue to consider additional Election Code amendments. Counties and the state must work together as new laws and policies are developed to assure any increased costs and resource needs are provided to support counties in their critical task of administering elections.

COUNTIES SUPPORT

- Ensuring that appropriate financial resources are allocated from the state to counties to support any new changes in election procedures, requirements or equipment.
- Allocating sufficient time, in consultation with counties, to implement any new requirements, training or procedures for elections administration.
- Supporting efforts to recruit and retain county elections staff, including establishing reasonable workload expectations with new laws and policies, to continue efficient and effective elections operations across the commonwealth.