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The Honorable Ryan P. Aument

Senate Box 203036

9 East Wing

Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senator/Representative \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_:

On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County, I am writing to share with you the 2022 County Legislative Priorities, as chosen through a process of discussion and deliberation by the leaders of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties. These seven priorities reflect the wide range of services counties provide to our residents. But more importantly, these 2022 priorities are our promise to the residents of this state to work together with the commonwealth on solutions that better meet the needs of Pennsylvanians, reduce costs, assure quality services and make sure every taxpayer dollar is utilized effectively.

Pennsylvania’s residents rely on their county government for daily needs – from a number of human services to assist with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, substance abuse disorders, child abuse investigations and nursing homes, to the administration of elections, 911 services, local infrastructure and much more. While the topics of county interest are wide-ranging, several rise to the very top as priorities for counties this year:

* **Appropriate Funding to Support the Crumbling Mental Health System:** Counties’ top priority for 2022 focuses on one of the most essential services counties provide, mental health services. Counties provide a plethora of support to our residents on behalf of the state, including crisis intervention, treatment, prevention. Although counties have invested local dollars towards quality care, state funding for these vital services has lagged behind needs for years. Both rising costs and a lack of state funding could put local governments at risk of losing critical services. While counties have experienced rising costs, the Behavioral HealthChoices program has kept costs down. It is imperative that this program continues to stay intact and, to do so, counties request a substantial investment in mental health services to assure the current safety net can be restored, along with a commitment for a sustained annual increase in the community mental health base in the years to come.
* **Human Services Workforce Crisis:** For years, counties have advocated for an increase in funding to support human services, which they provide on behalf of the state and federal governments, but the recent workforce crisis threatens counties’ abilities to meet service demands and protect the community since these jobs cannot be done with computers or 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. To address this crisis, counties support the development of programs and partnerships to streamline human services recruitment efforts and create county employment pipelines.
* **Broadband Expansion:** Counties also support the expansion of broadband, as high-speed internet access continues to be one of the commonwealth’s biggest obstacles and has been further spotlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. 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 must work together with federal, state, local and private stakeholders to develop strategies for successful broadband expansion that maximizes resources and minimizes overbuild.
* **Appropriate Funding and Reform for the Children and Youth System:** Counties deliver critical services to some of the state’s most vulnerable populations, specifically children experiencing abuse, battling mental illness, developmental disabilities and addiction. Counties provide children and youth services on behalf of the state, but despite the critical importance of this work, we continue to face funding and staffing shortages, leading to unsustainable caseload responsibilities for staff. To enable counties to appropriately serve the children and families in the commonwealth, we are requesting an increase in funding to maintain these vital services, reducing or removing regulatory barriers, developing better cross system collaboration and implementing a statewide program for complex cases that require specialized treatment.
* **Promote Election Integrity:** Counties takes pride in their responsibility to ensure the fair, efficient and accurate administration of Pennsylvania’s elections.The enactment of Act 77 of 2019 has made it clear that for counties to effectively implement elections, counties must have clear rules and guidance 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.
* **911 Funding and Reauthorization:** Counties provide one of the most fundamental functions in safety, the 911 call-taking and dispatch system, which is one of the most effective and efficient in the country. However, the system faces challenges, such as rapidly evolving technology requirements and a funding stream whose failure to keep pace with need requires counties to rely heavily and increasingly on the property tax. Pennsylvania’s current 911 statute sunsets on January 31, 2024 and the groundwork must be laid now to comprehensively reexamine needs and resources. Counties are actively working with state agencies, the General Assembly and other stakeholders on system reform that will provide the appropriate support to meet the current and future needs of Pennsylvanians.
* **Funding and Resources for Elections:** Under Act 77, the implementation of mail-in ballots caused many counties to see their election-related costs rise significantly for additional supplies, staff and growing overtime needs. These impacts fell squarely on county shoulders, as they are solely responsible for administration of elections at the local level and no new resources were provided to offset the new demands. In addition, more than a third of Pennsylvania counties experienced the loss of top election staff. Counties and the state must work together as new laws and policies are developed to assure any increased costs and resource needs, including supplies and staffing, as well as adequate time for implementation, are also considered. Appropriate resources and funding support must be provided by the federal and state governments to support counties in their critical task of administering elections.

Included with this letter is additional information on each of these priorities, how they impact counties and the changes we support. [ATTACH/MAIL PRIORITIES FACT SHEETS and/or PRIORITIES BROCHURE]

Counties cannot achieve any of these legislative priorities alone. We look forward to working in partnership with you and our colleagues across the state to better serve the residents of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ County and all Pennsylvanians. We welcome you to contact us at any time to discuss these priorities or other matters that impact county government.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]