



2022 County Government Priorities Status Report March 2022

CCAP members identified a total of seven priority issues for 2022. Grassroots activity on the priorities began following their adoption at the 2021 Fall Conference. After a formal announcement in January, officers and staff launched efforts to work with the General Assembly and the administration to introduce and advance proposals.

CCAP's traditional Priorities Work Day went virtual again this year, marked by a virtual press conference and *Legislative Bulletin Special Edition* on January 27 announcing the seven priorities and the critical need to accomplish these budgetary and legislative fixes this year. Further, CCAP officers and several chairs of the CCAP policy committees of jurisdiction over the 2022 priorities have been participating in meetings with legislative leadership throughout February and continuing into March to describe the priority issues, critical needs for counties and highlight examples of what is happening under current circumstances that counties seek help from our legislative partners to change.

With legislative hearings on the commonwealth budget for FY 2022-2023 underway in the General Assembly, CCAP has been engaging regularly with key committee chairs and members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to ensure that legislators are equipped with information on the critical issues counties are facing and advocating for changes via legislative efforts and increased funding to address multiple areas where counties do not have appropriate state funding to carry out these services they provide on behalf of the state.

Appropriate Funding to Support the Crumbling Mental Health System

In February 2022, the Governor proposed his Commonwealth budget for FY 2022-2023, which included a request for \$36.6 million in additional funding for the mental health base, which if adopted by the General Assembly, will bring funding levels back to two-thirds of FY 2011-2012 appropriations. Consistent with the counties' request for funding increases, these critical dollars will allow for better planning and contracting for services that will support our communities. Counties report increasing demand for even more complex services, increasing suicide rates, difficulty in purchasing services from struggling contract agencies and spill over impacts felt by our schools, hospitals, law enforcement, and others.

CCAP has engaged a major grassroots campaign to bolster efforts inside the Capitol. While CCAP leaders and staff continue meeting with key legislators and administration officials, CCAP members have been asked to gather a community coalition of hospital administrators, local behavioral health providers, school leaders, law enforcement and county mental health administrators to support the message and to tell the local story. Counties have been provided with materials to help refine their message and explain the local impacts that continue to

worsen without critical support. CCAP has also engaged with various health care, school and other community partners at the statewide association level to provide information and educational resources on the importance of jointly advocating to fortify the community mental health base over bifurcated requests to stand up individual programs or line items.

Counties and the state will partner on additional messaging to support increased mental health funding as well. Additionally, CCAP has been engaging with local media outlets to ensure this critical need is heard, as well as engaging with White House representatives on President Biden's recently announced plans to support mental health care at the federal level.

Human Services Workforce Crisis

In the Governor's proposed FY 2022-2023 budget, there is a significant emphasis on education and workforce development, proposing \$3.2 million toward the creation of a statewide longitudinal data system that will link data sets across the childcare, education and workforce continuum to better understand education and workforce outcomes, with the data to be used to inform policy and programming decisions.

CCAP is planning to offer a seminar on the human services workforce at its upcoming Spring Conference. This breakout session will educate members on recruitment and retention surrounding human services and strategies counties might consider to successfully navigate recruitment and retention issues they have been facing. Additionally, another breakout session is centered around building a better workplace culture to provide additional support to counties in attracting and keeping human talent in an increasingly competitive hiring market.

Broadband Expansion

With the promise of significant federal funding that can be used for broadband expansion and other infrastructure projects to the state and counties, CCAP has continued to engage the General Assembly, administration and other stakeholders in targeted conversations to share the work of counties in broadband expansion efforts and identify opportunities to partner in education, planning and deployment initiatives.

A key component to securing federal funding and investing in Pennsylvania's broadband infrastructure was the creation of the Statewide Broadband Development Authority established under [Act 96 of 2021](#). The authority, which held its first meeting February 15, serves as the one-stop-shop for broadband in Pennsylvania and is responsible for strategic planning and funding for broadband development to unserved areas and underserved areas, including access to millions in federal funding allocated to the commonwealth in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Pennsylvania is guaranteed at least \$100 million for broadband under the federal infrastructure law, with the prospect of applying competitively for more dollars under the act's \$42 billion Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program. To access funds, the authority must develop a statewide broadband plan, which is required to include local government input, and will further be creating a broadband project repository, which will help provide a more complete

picture of ongoing projects and infrastructure available for deployment in the commonwealth. Members of the authority include the secretaries of Agriculture, Department of Community and Economic Development, Education, General Services and Budget; the Public Utility Commission chair, Center for Rural Pennsylvania executive director and four legislative caucus appointees, Sen. Kristin Phillips-Hill (R-York), Sen. John Kane (D-Philadelphia), Rep. Carl Metzgar (R-Somerset) and former CCAP member Rep. Pam Snyder (D-Washington). CCAP has engaged many authority members in conversation about how counties have invested in broadband, including providing local stories and examples that demonstrate counties are ready to help the authority with their work to bridge the digital divide in the commonwealth.

Relatedly, CCAP recently submitted comments to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) request for comments on their Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) implementation efforts, specifically related to policy and program considerations associated with new broadband grant programs authorized and funded by the BIL, including the BEAD Program, the Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program and the State Digital Equity Planning Grant Program. Comments focused on the need for county and local level input in decision making in broadband development and deployment plans as well as highlighting the work of counties in deployment initiatives. We anticipate further guidance issued by the NTIA on these programs later this spring.

In early March, CCAP hosted a County Virtual Broadband Forum, which provided a networking opportunity for counties to share information on their broadband deployment projects and share ideas and ask questions related to ongoing projects, next steps and opportunities for partnerships. This virtual networking opportunity, coupled with the broadband poster session and state agency office hours that are to be held during the CCAP Spring Conference, is the next step in ensuring counties have the ability and capacity to share best practices and local experiences with their peers. Additionally, CCAP is continuing to identify other areas and opportunities where counties can showcase their ideas and learn from other counties' successes and challenges, and be better positioned to share their efforts with the state and with the public.

Appropriate Funding and Reform for the Children and Youth System

In the FY 2022-2023 proposed budget, the Governor requested \$2 billion toward the children and youth system, with the child welfare budget specifically proposed to increase by \$181 million. The budget proposed an increase in funding for Community Based Family Centers. The implementation of the Family First Act will begin during this budget cycle, which adds some upcoming uncertainty to the budget process.

During upcoming Spring Conference, a breakout session will focus on helping counties better understand and respond to the impacts of complex cases in the children and youth system where mental health, addiction and criminal justice concerns collide in a way that requires highly specialized treatment for some children and resultantly often requires expertise and resources that counties simply do not have or have the funding and capacity to build. CCAP continues to seek assistance from its state partners to assist with a statewide response and treatment system for these complex child welfare cases.

Promote Election Integrity

While prospects for moving legislation to improve Act 77 appear slim while litigation is pending on the constitutionality of the act, CCAP has continued to take advantage of opportunities to advocate for resolving ambiguities and gaps in the Election Code, as well as supporting measures related to pre-canvassing and mail-in ballot application deadlines. The Senate State Government Committee held a hearing on February 15 on bipartisan election reforms. CCAP president Daryl Miller and CCAP Elections Reforms Committee chair Sherene Hess presented [testimony](#) on CCAP's two 2022 elections reforms priorities, noting the challenges that counties have been facing related to elections since the implementation of Act 77 of 2019 and that, ultimately, the voters must have the utmost confidence in the integrity of the election process and that existing ambiguities in election laws must be resolved so that counties have clear rules that can be implemented across the commonwealth.

The Bipartisan Policy Center, which also testified at the hearing, is working to try to put together a work group including legislators, the administration, CCAP and county representatives in an effort to bring everyone to the table to find common ground for legislative movement.

CCAP continues to monitor the multiple sets of litigation related to redistricting and Act 77, and at the direction of the Board CCAP filed an amicus in the state redistricting case to educate the court on the impacts the timing and decisions are having on county administration of the May primary. A messaging and public relations by CCAP and counties supplemented the filing.

911 Funding and Reauthorization

CCAP has also begun outreach to pertinent agency secretaries, staff, legislators and their staff on the implementation of 988, the three-digit suicide hotline, on current 911 systems as well as potential future impacts on the ability to increase the 911 surcharge fee if needed. While we understand the intent of 988 is to create a separate (or even co-located) call-taking and dispatch system, there are many unknowns of exactly how the two systems will be connected or work in partnership. Additionally, the state has received federal authorization to implement a surcharge fee to fund 988, which may significantly hinder the ability for counties to seek a surcharge fee increase to fund the growing costs for 911 system maintenance and operation. CCAP staff will continue to discuss impacts with the Department of Human Services, PEMA and the General Assembly to ensure 988 can be implemented while mitigating negative consequences to 911 system service and capacity.

Funding and Resources for Elections

With so many additional processes and procedures resulting from the implementation of Act 77 of 2019, CCAP has been working to assure that any legislative proposals with new elections requirements for counties consider and include appropriate resources to cover new or increased costs as well as appropriate time to implement any new procedures. Even though no additional state funding for county election operations was proposed in the Governor's FY 2022-2023 budget, CCAP has found several opportunities to continue to promote this need and to call attention to the additional costs that may be added due to circumstances beyond counties' control.

Specifically, in the amicus brief CCAP filed with the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, the Association urged the Court against setting two primary elections. Having two separate primaries would add considerable costs to counties' election expenses, such as renting additional polling places, printing ballots, postage, voting equipment and more, with those costs ultimately borne by the county property taxpayers. CCAP also urged the Court, as it considered possible changes to the election calendar, to make timely and clear decisions since the longer those decisions take, the more pressure will be on counties and the more costs they will face for emergency help (workers, printing needs, supply chain shortages) to be ready for May 17.

In addition, Lycoming County elections director Forrest Lehman was invited to participate in a panel discussion before NACo's Finance, Pensions and Intergovernmental Affairs Committee at the Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., specifically to talk about what counties should be aware of and prepared for headed into the May Primary. The panel emphasized funding and resource matters that all counties should have in mind, such as supply chain issues with paper, which impacts inserts and envelopes as well as ballots and the impact of ongoing uncertainty from litigation on redistricting cases, and emphasized the need for additional, sustainable funding that needs to be focused on the fundamentals of county election operations, not just new requirements and not just one-time grant funding.