

2025 County Government Priorities Key Talking Points for Counties

Counties should tell their local stories, including examples of relevant impacts to their programs and those they serve, within each of the following priorities as appropriate. Consider using the below talking points and county example prompts to highlight why these priorities are important to your county and showcase what positive outcomes would look like for those you serve.

BACKGROUND

- Each of these priorities showcases counties' commitment to the core services they provide to improve the well-being of the people and communities of Pennsylvania.
- Counties deliver services in partnership with the state and seek partnership in decision making regarding their programs and responsibilities.
- Collaboration between the state and counties is necessary to arrive at more effective solutions.

911 SURCHARGE REAUTHORIZATION AND STATUTE UPDATES

Ensuring swift and efficient 911 access for all residents and visitors in Pennsylvania, regardless of location or time of day.

- **911 Service is a County Responsibility:** Counties are the backbone of Pennsylvania's 911 services, ensuring public safety for all who travel, work, relax and live here.
- **Surcharge helps fund 911 services:** For over three decades, funding from a dedicated phone bill surcharge has helped support county 911 operations. **911 system costs not covered by the 911 fee are typically funded by county property tax dollars**
- **Despite recent surcharge increases, funding cannot keep pace:** Act 34 of 2023 reauthorized the 911 surcharge for two years, increasing the surcharge from \$1.65 to \$1.95. The increased surcharge took effect on March 1, 2024 and only covers 80% of the system costs.
- **Rising costs are natural:** Since upgrading the 911 system into the NextGen environment (NG911), technology upgrades, the need to address growing cybersecurity challenges, and the need for a well-trained workforce are driving up system costs, further straining county budgets.
- **Surcharge expires Jan. 31, 2026:** Without reauthorization of the surcharge, counties will bear 100% of the cost of the 911 system. It is estimated that failure to reauthorize the surcharge will cost counties, and ultimately property taxpayers, \$447 million in 2026.
- **Modernizing the 911 Statute is Necessary:** The General Assembly must address statute updates to meet the evolving demands of today's 911 systems, including changes that address the impact of the "Internet of Things".
- **Call to Action:** Counties urge state leaders to engage in meaningful discussions as soon as possible and swiftly pass a surcharge reauthorization that includes an increase in the surcharge amount to bring the county share of the cost of the 911 system to within 10-12% and continues to make necessary investments in one of the most crucial public safety services.

Tell Your County Story

- Consider using call data to showcase the magnitude of the service that is provided.
Ex: Last year, _____ County answered over ____#____ calls to 911.
- What does NG911 mean to your residents? What can they expect when they call 911?
- What do increased investments into the 911 system look like for your county?
Ex: With implementation of NG911, residents will be able to _____.
- Don't be afraid to discuss what an increase to the surcharge will provide for your residents.

ADEQUATE COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH BASE FUNDING

Realizing accessible and timely mental health treatment and services for all in the commonwealth, without undue burden.

- **Counties are key providers:** Counties play a pivotal role in delivering essential community-based mental health services on behalf of the state.
- **County mental health base funds support vital programs:** These funds support prevention, education, and services tailored to local needs, often not provided elsewhere/by private entities, yet funding levels remain critically insufficient.
- **The current gap for services is over \$1.2 billion:** Counties estimate over \$1.2 billion is needed to restore and stabilize the community-based mental health system due to the lack of current investment in workforce, prevention, crisis, etc.
- **Immediate funding is critical to address services now:** Counties continue to press that \$250 million is still needed to address immediate concerns and ensure continuity of critical services in order to rebuild after years of chronic underfunding. Recognizing the difficult budget outlook this fiscal year, counties are seeking middle ground to address this significant funding need.
- **"The Ask" for FY2025-26:** Given current budget realities, counties are calling for a meaningful **increase of \$100 million** in FY 2025-2026 to begin addressing the needs of our communities
- **\$100 million increase has broad benefits:** This increase would provide substantial funding to support current and build new base-funded services in communities that continue to struggle with long wait times for services and lack of providers. Furthermore, increased funding will ensure equitable care access, ease pressure on schools, jails, law enforcement, and emergency rooms, and build healthier communities statewide.
- **Community-based is a Comprehensive Investment:** Mental health funding—particularly for children and families—must be a priority, not an "either-or" proposition that continues to silo systems and services.
- **Counties cannot do this alone:** Counties stand prepared to collaborate with state leaders and community stakeholders, including medical professionals, schools, and law enforcement to deliver meaningful change.

Tell Your County Story

- To the extent possible, include local stories that may resonate with your legislators. For example, was there a situation that occurred within your community that could have had a different outcome if there were more available funds? Or is there a success story your community has seen that comes from a program that base funds paid for?
- Talk about the numbers – what does your county's base funding currently go toward?

- If the county were to receive an increase in funding, what programs or services could you stand up or develop? What would the actualized impact of these services be? (i.e., number of residents that could be served, potential savings that could be seen from keeping programming at the community level, predicted decreased stress on another community system/partner)
- If your county continues to receive level funding, what impact does that have to the services you provide?
- There is a continued focus on investing in schools and youth mental health. How is your county working to collaborate with schools or other partners on programming for youth?
- Humanize the story – remember, you serve the same constituents. Providing examples or stories for how these programs are impacting the communities you jointly serve is critical. Without providing specific identifiable information, are there stories you can share of how this funding positively impacts the lives of those individuals and communities you serve?

VOTE-BY-MAIL REFORMS

Giving counties needed tools to run fair, secure, and accurate elections, restoring public trust in the election system.

- **Commitment to integrity:** Counties take the responsibility of administering fair, secure, and accurate elections with the utmost seriousness.
- **Unclear provisions in Act 77:** Since its passage in 2019, Act 77 has left counties navigating legal ambiguities around issues such as handling naked ballots, addressing ballot defects and curing processes and managing un/misdated ballots amid shifting legal interpretations.
- **Lack of clarity led to voter confusion:** While counties generally oversaw a smooth presidential election in 2024, the significant uptick in the use of on-demand, in-person mail-in voting, which was being labeled as “early voting” by many, added stress to county election offices during high-stakes elections like the 2024 Presidential Election.
- **Need for pre-canvassing remains:** While counties have made do without, allowing counties to pre-canvass ballots before Election Day will reduce administrative burdens, reduce opportunities for human error, and ensure timely election results in all future elections.
- **Adjust Mail-In Ballot deadlines to benefit all:** Current deadlines create logistical challenges for both the postal service and counties, jeopardizing the timely return of ballots. Moving the application deadline back to 15 days before an election achieves three critical goals: providing voters enough time to request a ballot, allowing counties enough time to get voters their ballot, and eliminating confusion on the various deadlines.
- **“The Ask”:** The General Assembly must act this year to clarify statutory language to address new and on-going ambiguities that have led to numerous legal challenges, provide counties the option to pre-canvass mail-in ballots, extend mail-in ballot deadline, and provide counties with the resources to ensure smooth, efficient elections that maintain public confidence in our election system.
- **Counties stand ready to discuss any proposals related to election administration.**

Tell Your County Story

- Stick with the facts – how many mail-in ballots (absentee and mail-in) did your county receive in the most recent election?
- Did your county see an uptick in use of over-the-counter, in-person mail-in voting?
 - How did your county address this?
 - Did your county track the number of citizens using this method of voting?
 - If so, what was the average wait time for voters?
- Consider using this as an opportunity to highlight different voter education outlets and where to find factual information about the voting process and deadlines, including your county website and any places/outlets you post updates about elections.
- Try to avoid the argument of whether mail-in ballots are good or bad. Rather, what logistics are needed for the county to carry out a secure, efficient and timely election with the voting methods and logistical obligations currently in place?