

# Mandate Relief

## Savings For Local Taxpayers In Tough Economic Times



**G**iven the current budget and resource problems facing both the state and local levels, counties are asking the General Assembly to review and re-visit mandates and statutory provisions that are outdated or unnecessary. Many of the largest mandates that counties are required to perform – human services, 911, solid waste planning, elections administration, record-keeping – are appropriate at the county level and should be the subject of regular structural and funding review in a larger context. Consequently, they are not the subject of these recommendations. Instead, the mandates identified here are ones that do not impact service delivery but are ones where changes to existing law can result in overall savings to local budgets and local taxpayers. Targets for reduction or elimination include:

**THE OFFICE OF JURY COMMISSIONER** - Counties ask the General Assembly to provide authority to eliminate the office of jury commissioner. The office would be abolished by a vote of the county commissioners, and effective at the end of the term of the jury commissioners currently in office. In the majority of counties, the functions of jury selection are now almost entirely computerized and handled by other staff in the court administrators' offices.

**BIDDING AND ADVERTISING** - The current thresholds for bid and telephonic quotes have not been updated since 1990. CCAP supports increasing the bidding threshold to \$25,000, and increasing the telephonic quote threshold to \$10,000. We also support an annual adjustment in these thresholds equivalent to the increase in the Consumer Price Index or the Construction Cost Index. These increases will result in reduced costs for advertising of projects to be put out for bid. Counties also support allowing electronic advertising as an alternative to newspaper advertising, consistent with what is already allowed under the state procurement code, as well as allowing counties the option to separate or combine bids for elements of construction projects as warranted.

**CONSTABLES** - There are several provisions of law related to constables that can be modified to result in savings to local taxpayers. A recently enacted change requires constables to be paid on a per-docket basis, which means that a constable is being paid multiple times for one service. Second, the requirement for a constable to be present at the polls on Election Day is no longer necessary since security is handled in other ways, and abolishing the requirement would save this hourly billing cost.

**PREVAILING WAGE** - Counties seek nominal relief from Prevailing Wage Act requirements, which can increase the cost of many middle-range public projects. We are open to discussion of a variety of options, including increasing the threshold for prevailing wage projects or allowing local opt out.

**ADVANCED QUARTERLY PAYMENTS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH** - CCAP supports a change to state law to require the Department of Public Welfare to provide advanced quarterly payments of children and youth funding, with reconciliation at the end of the year. Currently counties pay for these services up-front, and wait for the commonwealth to reimburse them. These reimbursements are routinely delayed, sometimes by up to 18 months, and counties frequently have to use tax anticipation notes, at an additional cost to the taxpayer, to bridge the gap.

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**EXPEDITED PERMIT PROCESS FOR BRIDGES** - The permit process for bridge repair or replacement in Pennsylvania can extend over a period of years and, given recent materials markets, that means that project costs increase considerably while waiting for the permit. Counties call on PennDOT to streamline the permitting process, which will also aid in usage of stimulus funds currently under consideration by the federal government.

**FUNCTION AND ROLE OF COUNTY AUDITORS** - Accounting and reporting standards under the County Code and Governmental Accounting Standards Board are more stringent, and frequently outside the capacity of our elected auditors. CCAP supports an amendment to the County Code to allow counties to use their Certified Public Accountant to perform the required audits and reports, limiting elected auditors' responsibilities to other existing statutory functions. Counties also support an amendment to the county salary law allowing the annual salary for elected auditors to be established in the same manner as other elected officials, removing per diems and mileage pay.

**COUNTY COLLECTION OF COUNTY PROPERTY TAXES** - CCAP supports legislation giving counties the option to collect their own real estate taxes. Tax collection through a county office, rather than through a local tax collector, would save even the smallest counties \$100,000 per year or more. The handful of counties currently permitted to collect their own taxes – home rule counties and a few counties authorized by special law – report cost-effective results while maintaining taxpayer satisfaction with collection administration.