



County Government **PRIORITIES**

Collaborating to redefine, reinvigorate and better communicate the state-county partnership for the crucial services counties deliver to Pennsylvania's communities and constituents.



THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

Human Services Funding and System Reform

The commonwealth and its county partners must work together to provide services and supports that recognize that any family can be impacted by drug abuse, mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and child abuse and neglect.

Pennsylvania counties deliver crucial human services that protect the most vulnerable – among them children suffering from abuse, those fighting substance abuse addictions, individuals with mental illness and intellectual disabilities, and seniors in need of long-term care.

However, county capacity to meet service needs has been compromised by a steady decrease in state funding over more than a decade. At the same time, mandates and service needs continue to increase. The worst impact was a drastic ten percent aggregate cut in FY 2012-2013 to seven line items that impact core services in all 67 counties, a cut that has yet to be restored.

There are numerous examples of caseload pressures. Nearly 30 new child welfare laws enacted in 2015 caused significant increases in referrals and workloads to county child welfare agencies, but without comparable increases in state funding, left the system badly strained. Statutory impacts are compounded by the real-world toll the opioid epidemic is having on families and their children throughout the state.

The commonwealth must recognize the critical need for additional funding for human services, at a level that reflects the state's

commitment to serve our citizens, starting with restoration of the FY 2012-2013 ten percent cut.

But it is not just funding. Counties also seek a partnership with the General Assembly and administration on program reform, including efforts for better planning and integration of services. Although counties have achieved important steps toward improved coordination and streamlined administration to flexibly use funding across human services lines, experience tells us there are many more statutory and regulatory opportunities to improve the efficient delivery of services.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Commitment of full state and federal funding for additional mandates and new program requirements imposed on counties, as well as funding that responds to societal and economy-driven increases in caseloads.
- ▶ Restoring the 10 percent cut to key human services line items.
- ▶ Recognizing the state-county partnership to protect children by increasing state funding for county children and youth agencies.
- ▶ Collaborative review of the scope, objectives and administration of human services programs to better reflect the state-county partnership.

For more information on **human services funding and system reform**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or bpenyak@pacounties.org.

Preventing Substance Abuse and Drug Overdose

 **Strong state, county and local partnerships must be reinforced with appropriate resources to effectively address the opioid epidemic.**

Substance abuse and drug overdose has reached unprecedented levels in both the commonwealth and the nation. Alarming, an estimated 13 Pennsylvanians are dying each day from drug-related causes, and the presence of an opioid (illicit or prescribed by a doctor) was identified in 85 percent of drug-related overdose deaths in the state in 2016. This trend in substance abuse has become a major cost driver across state and county budgets. Impacts are felt in the courts, law enforcement, emergency rooms and publicly funded human services programs.

County drug and alcohol programs, run by Single County Authorities (SCAs), are responsible for developing and implementing prevention, intervention and treatment programs. The SCAs work with community leadership and stakeholders to assess local circumstances and develop an array of programs that meet the individual needs of each community.

In recent years, progress has been made – expanding access to the overdose-reversal drug naloxone, continued implementation of “warm handoff” protocols to help get overdose survivors directly into addiction treatment, and ongoing investigation into manufacturers and distributors of prescription opioids. However, more can and must be done.

Counties’ focus will be developing an integrated cross-systems work plan and examining the barriers to information sharing. Only through integrated planning at the local level with all stakeholders involved (law enforcement, emergency and medical personnel, first responders, treatment staff and community leaders), coupled with additional resources to expand local capacity, can Pennsylvania begin to reverse the epidemic.

Counties will continue to work in partnership with the commonwealth to ensure coordination of local and statewide strategies and comprehensive solutions to this public health crisis.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Additional state resources for increased local capacity for prevention, intervention and treatment.
- ▶ Implementation of best practices to reduce community impacts and the number of overdose deaths.
- ▶ Collaboration among state and local authorities to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to addressing the opioid and heroin epidemic.

For more information on **preventing substance abuse and drug overdose**, contact **Michele Denk** at (717) 736-4704 or mdenk@pacounties.org.

Maintaining the Shale Gas Impact Fee

 **The 13 broad categories of uses under Act 13 allow counties great flexibility to prioritize funds in a way that brings value to their communities in the short term, and to be responsible to county property taxpayers by thoughtfully and deliberately planning for the future.**

Since 2012, the impact fees generated by Act 13 of 2012 have allowed Pennsylvania counties with shale gas wells to address economic, infrastructure and social costs associated with drilling. Act 13 provides significant flexibility so that counties can determine how best to invest these revenues to mitigate their individual community impacts, assuring that county property taxpayers do not have to shoulder those costs.

Counties are thoughtfully responding to short-term needs, investing in rail projects and improvements at airports, emergency services and scholarships for training related to the industry, among many other projects. At the same time, counties also recognize the need to plan for the future, saving funds for larger projects or with an eye toward economic diversity that mitigates the boom and bust cycle of natural resource industries.

The impact fees also provide a benefit to all 67 counties, in the form of funding for at-risk bridges and open space and environ-

mental purposes through the Marcellus Legacy Fund. Act 13 also provides direct distributions to all county conservation districts.

As the natural gas industry continues to evolve in Pennsylvania, local governments will remain a key player in natural resource management, public safety and community and economic development. In the specific context of any discussions to place a severance tax on natural gas for commonwealth purposes, counties support the preservation of the current impact fee rate and distribution structure so that all local governments may continue to responsibly address critical needs.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Maintaining the shale gas impact fee regardless of any potential discussion to place a severance tax on the natural gas industry for other purposes.
- ▶ Assuring that all impact fee distributions remain as currently structured to benefit impacted local governments as well as counties throughout the commonwealth.

For more information on **maintaining the shale gas impact fee**, contact **Lisa Schaefer** at (717) 736-4748 or lschaefer@pacounties.org.

Increasing Forensic Bed Access for County Inmates with Mental Illness

 **Prisons are not the place for many individuals with mental illness or developmental disabilities. Society must provide care and treatment to improve lives, use resources more effectively and build safer communities.**

The shortage of psychiatric, or forensic, beds in state hospitals for county inmates who have mental illness and developmental disabilities has become a crisis that fails to effectively or compassionately address human need.

A recent analysis of forensic availability commissioned by the state demonstrated that need far exceeds capacity. The state and counties are already taking important steps to address this issue, including significant policy changes at Norristown State Hospital as well as other bed space and procedural efforts that are beginning to balance capacity with need. But more support and assistance must be provided, with a collaborative initiative between the state and counties needed to effectively address the shortage of forensic beds, including assistance and involvement from the governor, legislators and policy makers.

While procedures will ultimately be initiated statewide, community based services that will allow counties to divert those with mental illness to a setting other than jail must be

developed and maintained. Greater focus must be placed on treatment and restoration services within the prison system, including expanded options to allow mentally ill and developmentally disabled individuals to obtain care and treatment in the community rather than prison. Effective best practices and joint training for prison administrators, county mental health staff, the judiciary, law enforcement, the medical community and others, in close partnership with the commonwealth, should be immediately implemented.

Ultimately, the care of the individual must remain the principal basis for all county efforts.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Increasing access to forensic beds in state hospitals for county inmates with mental illness and developmental disabilities.
- ▶ Expanding resources that will allow more options for care and treatment of individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities outside of the prison system.

For more information on **increasing forensic bed access for county inmates with mental illness**, contact **Brinda Penyak** at (717) 736-4737 or bpenyak@pacounties.org.

Supporting Veterans Services

 **In return for their service to our country, Pennsylvania's veterans deserve the honor and respect of being fully supported when they return home to their families and communities.**

Counties recognize and honor the services provided by all members of the military, who made a promise to defend this country's freedoms. But we can do better to keep our promise to support our veterans and their families after the trauma of active service.

Pennsylvania is home to the fourth largest veteran population in the nation, with more than 800,000 veterans – about nine percent of the state's adult population. A little more than half of the state's veterans are age 65 or older.

Counties provide important support services to these individuals to assist them in their return to civilian life, including application for federal veterans' benefits and programs. Veterans also may receive real estate tax exemptions, emergency assistance, disability compensation, VA health care benefits education and employment services, and access to veterans' homes and other programs.

The stressful ordeal of service in active theaters demonstrably results in long-term residual effects, and even the comparatively simple disruption of career and family life can result in personal distress when returning to civilian life. Veterans differ in their ability to cope with these stresses, sometimes with unfortunate results that draw them into the human services and criminal justice systems. Too frequently, services are simply not able to keep up with demand.

To truly show our gratitude to veterans for their service, federal and state resources must be supplemented to help improve the lives of veterans and their families.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Additional resources, at both the federal and state levels, to assure programs and services are adequate and appropriate for veterans.

For more information on **supporting veterans services**, contact **Doug Hill** at (717) 736-4715 or dhill@pacounties.org.

Funding for Voting Systems

 **A free and fair election system is the hallmark of American democracy, and counties take seriously their responsibility to assure the integrity of every step in the process, from voter registration until the last vote is counted.**

Counties take pride in securing the most fundamental democratic right of Americans – the ability to vote, and the assurance of free and fair elections.

The federal Help America Vote Act of 2002 provided funding to states to update their voting technology, and most Pennsylvania counties replaced their equipment in 2006. But with the life span of voting machines in the 10 to 15 year range, most of the voting equipment currently in use in Pennsylvania's counties is approaching the end of useful life and will need to be replaced in the next few years. And just as important, in the intervening years new voting systems technologies have emerged that will improve our ability to assure that every vote counts.

In Pennsylvania, responsibility for selection and purchase of voting equipment falls exclusively to counties. The choice is made from a short list of equipment certified by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, following a detailed physical and technical examination. Replacement costs can quickly add up, with nearly

24,000 voting machines operated by the state's 67 counties, and the latest computerized machines typically costing between \$2,500 and \$3,000 each, plus central counting systems, supplies, programming and maintenance agreements.

A recent report by the Joint State Government Commission, pursuant to Senate Resolution 394 of 2016, included findings and recommendations on current and future technologies and needed improvements, based on surveys of counties and the experiences in other states. The cost to upgrade, modernize and replace election system technology was highlighted. County officials and election directors were included on the advisory committee for the study, and its findings will help to provide the basis for discussions in 2018.

Assistance from the federal and state government will be necessary for counties to continue to uphold their responsibility to maintain a fair and accessible voting system for all.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ State and federal resources to address ongoing voting system replacement needs across Pennsylvania counties.

For more information on **funding for voting systems**, contact **Doug Hill** at (717) 736-4715 or dhill@pacounties.org.

Mandate Reform

 **The state-county partnership is critical to counties' mission to effectively maintain healthy, safe and resilient communities.**

The word mandate, particularly when paired with the term "unfunded," often carries a negative connotation, especially in the context of laws and regulations. But mandates are inherent in the relationship between two levels of government, and a mutual understanding of that partnership can yield a promise of effective and responsible delivery of constituent services.

For counties, a priority for 2018 is re-engaging the administration and General Assembly in understanding and respecting the state-county partnership in service delivery. While mandates can also be structural (e.g. row offices) or procedural (bidding, advertising, prevailing wage), the costliest and most complex mandates relate to service delivery. Counties provide human services programs on the state's behalf, operate the county prisons and the local court system, run the 911 systems, and are responsible for elections, solid waste planning, records management and the assessment system, among many others. But while all of these are mandated functions of county government, they are better thought of as a partnership between county and state government.

Counties do not reflexively oppose mandates. But for mandates currently in place, the state-county financial and regulatory

relationship must be examined and, where necessary, reconfigured. And for any proposed new or expanded mandate, it must reflect state financial commitment and mutual determination of its scope, objectives and administration.

County government and the commonwealth must develop and maintain the close working relationship necessary to cooperatively meet these challenges. Pennsylvania's service recipients and taxpayers alike require county government and the commonwealth to collaborate to implement solutions that better reflect the needs of Pennsylvanians, improve stewardship of taxpayer dollars, reduce cost, increase local flexibility and assure the quality of services counties provide.

COUNTIES SUPPORT:

- ▶ Re-engaging the General Assembly on the state-county partnership in service delivery.
- ▶ Re-examining county mandates currently in place.
- ▶ A commitment by the state to work together with counties to assure any new or expanded programs are properly structured and properly and durably funded.

For more information on **mandate reform**, contact **Doug Hill** at (717) 736-4715 or dhill@pacounties.org.