



**2021 SPRING
ADVOCACY GUIDE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	Page 1
Budget.....	Page 2
Election Reforms.....	Page 3
Broadband Expansion.....	Page 4
Solutions to the EMS Crisis.....	Page 5
Protect Funding for County Human Services.....	Page 6
Increased Funding for Community-Based Mental Health Services.....	Page 7
Other Resources.....	Page 8

CCAP 2021 SPRING ADVOCACY GUIDE

With 2020 in our rearview mirrors, 2021 has come with many surprises as we shift into a new normal. Uncertain state budget revenues paired with federal stimulus dollars have created an unusual budget scenario. Counties will need to be careful stewards of the federal funding they receive from the American Rescue Plan (often referred to as ARP or ARPA) while continuing to make the case for future funding commitments from the state. While this budget year may be better than originally anticipated, counties need to be thinking about long-term, sustainable funding.

In addition to the budget, counties must advocate for the 2021 County Legislative Priorities, especially elections reforms. In order to have enough time to deploy any legislative changes before the November General Election, any changes to the Election Code must be made before a summer recess.

Your input and voice as a locally elected official is critical to inform budget negotiations and important, timely election reforms. Share your powerful stories, bring your undeniable data showing the good work your county has achieved and also the vital need for increased resources. Using the virtual skills you've honed over the last year, ensure your legislators hear your perspective clearly and often. All are in a time of economic stress and uncertainty, but it is the state's responsibility to be a good partner in providing the necessary resources for local governments to carry out many of their necessary, or in some cases mandated, functions. We must remind leaders at every level that investment and cooperation are in the best interest of all of our constituents throughout the commonwealth.

The 2021 Spring Advocacy Guide includes information and talking points on the FY 2021-2022 budget, as well as updated information and talking points on the 2021 County Legislative Priorities. The toolkit also includes a one-stop guide for additional advocacy materials and information to help connect you to your legislators.

BUDGET

THE ISSUE

On Feb. 3, Gov. Wolf delivered his seventh budget address, announcing his \$37.8 billion fiscal proposal for FY 2021-2022. The proposal represents an increase of about of \$3 billion, or 8.2%, over FY 2020-2021. Overall for counties, the Governor's proposal represents generally level funding across line items, particularly in human services. One notable increase would be for county health departments as the Governor proposed an additional \$8.2 million for a total of \$33.7 million.

It will be vital to monitor the state's commitment to providing sustainable local government funding into the future, in addition to the commonwealth's emergency response efforts over the last year. Emergency funding has been necessary to ensure county operations could continue in light of a challenging financial situation. And now, we must ensure that one-time funds provided by the federal government are recognized as such, rather than supplanting the state's investment over the longer term. Counties must continue to be good stewards of state and federal funding to serve their communities and aid in economic recovery efforts in a post-COVID world, while considering long-term budget impacts. Additionally, the state needs to be aware and cautious of the impacts of special fund diversions on county budgets, understanding that those funds are earmarked and dedicated for specific uses, including recycling grants to local governments and funding of the Judicial Computer System.

The FY 2021-2022 state budget is expected to be completed before the June 30 statutory deadline and funded at full 12 month levels.

TALKING POINTS

First and foremost, tell your county story! Every county has had a unique experience responding to COVID-19, how they've utilized their CARES Act/ARP funds and the need that still exists despite additional federal and state aid.

- Counties have continued to be good stewards of state and federal dollars, continuing to serve our communities amidst a pandemic and through reopening and recovery.
- One-time federal money cannot be used for lost revenue and should not be thought of as a sustainable long-term funding option.
- Even with another federal aid package for local governments, counties still need a way to ensure the social services safety net and those it serves are protected and adequately maintained.
- County voices need to be included in budget discussions in order to ensure we continue to serve and protect the most vulnerable and that pandemic recovery planning occurs.
- Special funds, including the Recycling Fund and Judicial Computer System, have dedicated expenditures earmarked and any fund diversions may have significant operational and funding impacts on counties.

ELECTIONS REFORMS: PRE-CANVASSING AND MAIL-IN BALLOT APPLICATION DEADLINES

THE ISSUE

Counties' top priority is election reforms, and based on their experiences in 2020, focus on a renewed call to allow pre-canvassing of mail-in and absentee ballots to begin prior to Election Day, and a call to move the deadline for mail-in ballot applications from seven days prior to an election to 15 days. However, there are many other areas of the Election Code that also need to be clarified that were identified by the CCAP's Elections Reform Committee in their January report.

The General Assembly has expressed interest in making changes to the Election Code in order to respond to concerns raised by counties and others during the November 2020 Presidential Election. In order to implement any changes to election administration before the 2021 November General Election, Election Code changes must be signed into law before the General Assembly's anticipated summer recess. Additionally, counties must be brought to the table for discussions to ensure any Election Code changes are realistic given current administrative practices and capacity.

TALKING POINTS

Pre-canvassing

- **Allow counties time to pre-canvass ballots in advance of an election**, which would offer a more meaningful option to complete these procedures, such as verifying the barcode number and voter's information on the outer envelope match the information in the SURE system, opening envelopes and removing and flattening the tri-fold ballot and scanning ballots – all following appropriate security and chain of command protocols for all individuals involved in the process.
- Without an extended pre-canvass period, counties will continue to face very real challenges in providing timely results following an election, even those with significantly less voter turnout than we saw in November.

Mail-in Ballot Application Deadlines

- **Adjust the deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot back to 15 days before an election** to allow enough time for the county to process the application and for the ballot to be mailed from county to voter and back again, which can ease voter timing concerns.
- The current seven-day deadline to apply for a mail-in ballot created timing challenges with the postal service, which led to some ballots not being received before the deadline to submit those ballots, or too close to the deadline to return them to make it logistically possible for them to be returned via mail.
- The 15 day deadline coincides with the voter registration deadline, streamlining information and eliminating potential voter confusion.

Timing

- **Any changes to the Election Code must be enacted well in advance of November in order to allow for enough time to properly implement any changes**, particularly if they involve developing new protocols or procedures, retraining poll workers, etc.
- **Any changes to the Election Code must also be developed in partnership with counties.** Given the time-sensitive window before the General Election, counties can help to create language that is clear and easily understood, and identify challenges up front regarding how, or even if, certain changes can be practically and successfully implemented, and the resources needed to do so.

Additional considerations

- **Provide adequate resources for any changes to the elections process.** Although federal funds have been provided to assist in election implementation, those funds do not take into account the impact of any new protocols or requirements that may be enacted, such as additional postage needs.
- **Counties must be at the table** during policy discussions so that statutory changes can be implemented clearly and consistently, and to assure appropriate resources are available for counties to implement any policy changes.

BROADBAND EXPANSION

THE ISSUE

Access to reliable and affordable broadband service continues to be echoed at all levels of government as one of the biggest hurdles of the 21st century. COVID-19 has further exposed the lack of availability and the need of Pennsylvanians for high speed and reliable internet access for business, education, health care, emergency services and other key parts of our everyday lives, especially as schools and businesses must constantly adapt to changing pandemic conditions. Counties have been at the forefront of broadband expansion in the commonwealth and are continuing to develop partnerships and creative solutions that work to provide internet connectivity for their residents, especially in rural areas and better bandwidth capacity statewide at affordable rates.

CCAP has continued to engage members of the General Assembly and Administration in education and idea sharing of how counties can be partners and innovators in the field in addressing the roadblocks in broadband, and discussing potential next steps and solutions, particularly at the local level through public private partnerships. While there are not many legislative proposals that have been introduced yet this session, stakeholders have come together to discuss next steps, including potential legislative solutions and newly identified partnerships. As society remains a more digital, physically distanced world, we anticipate broadband access will continue to remain a key focus of budget and legislative conversations at the state and federal levels.

TALKING POINTS

- Counties have been investing in strategic, innovative broadband solutions utilizing federal, state, local and private funding to advance broadband expansion across the commonwealth.
- Many counties utilized some of the County Relief Block Grant dollars from the federal CARES Act to develop, deploy and expand broadband. Many of these programs are beginning to be implemented early in 2021 and counties are likely to make further investments with funding from the American Rescue Plan (ARP).
- Partnership is critical to expanding broadband – the commonwealth must develop partnerships among federal, state and local government, and the private sector to identify successful approaches and best practices that can remedy this problem.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES CRISIS SOLUTIONS

THE ISSUE

Emergency medical services (EMS) in Pennsylvania are in crisis, affirmed by findings of multiple studies and most prominently in the 2004 SR 60 report, and reaffirmed in the report of the legislature's SR 6 Commission, released in 2018. CCAP membership has been engaged in discussions on ways that counties can help address the issues raised in these reports, including the lack of emergency services in many Pennsylvania communities.

One of the primary CCAP EMS Task Force recommendations includes legislation to create the statutory authority for county or multi-municipal authorities for EMS delivery. A co-sponsorship memo for the reintroduction of SB 1274 of last session has been circulated jointly by Sen. Lisa Baker (R-Luzerne) and Sen. Tim Kearney (D-Delaware). Furthermore, the EMS Task Force is continuing to review the funding needs to support the variety of service models in operation in the commonwealth, and are working to develop a toolbox of resources that can assist counties in bringing stakeholders and resources together to address local issues.

TALKING POINTS

- EMS is in crisis as many communities, urban and rural, wrestle with a decline or outright lack of services.
- While counties are not directly responsible for EMS delivery, they can help develop and implement policy solutions and build capacity.
- Allowing for an EMS authority model that would be capable of county-wide or regional EMS service delivery could assist in optimizing service deployment and service areas and offer opportunities for dedicated funding sources.
- CCAP can also help, through our EMS Task Force, which is committed to providing tools and resources that will assist in addressing this crisis.

PROTECT FUNDING FOR COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES

THE ISSUE

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

However, even though mandates and caseloads continue to increase, state funding support has been unable to keep up with demand. Counties continue to deal with the daily challenge of serving the ever-growing needs of their residents, such as the significant increases in workloads to county human service agencies, the toll of the opioid epidemic on families and their children and the lasting, unknown impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pennsylvania’s residents and communities. Yet, counties must also face the reality of ever-stagnant state funds to address those needs.

Ongoing state commitment is vital to supporting these critical programs, particularly as the financial and economic environment remain uncertain. While both the state and counties will benefit from one-time federal aid dollars in the coming months, it is not prudent to use these funds to supplant the state’s investment in human services programs over the longer term. The state-county partnership in service delivery must again be prioritized – including a commitment to additional and sustainable funding for all county human services programs and assurances of continued funding to essential services in the event of any future state budget delay – before the safety net becomes so frayed it can no longer support those who need it most.

TALKING POINTS

- Counties administer human services programs, often on behalf of the state and federal governments, to protect our most vulnerable citizens.
- However, mandates and caseloads continue to increase while state funding support has been stagnant, or in some cases, even cut.
- One-time federal money cannot be used for lost revenue and should not be thought of as a sustainable long-term funding option.
- Even with another federal aid package for local governments, counties still need a way to ensure the social services safety net and those it serves are protected and adequately maintained.

INCREASED FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

THE ISSUE

In his FY 2021-2022 budget address in February, Gov. Wolf proposed level funding for the mental health community base line, setting the stage from which counties will work for the next several months. As we move into a more "normal state," county mental health programs will be the supports our most vulnerable rely on for a long time to come, particularly as they recover from many pandemic-related hardships. Counties are grateful that the short-term budgets implemented during FY 2020-2021 continued to keep state funding flowing at baseline levels in a time of great need.

Now, as we strive to overcome the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to ensure these necessary community-based programs, services and supports that our most vulnerable rely on will continue to be funded and available to avert severe long term impacts statewide. The state must seriously invest in county mental health programs to shore up existing services and capacity needs. Counties also seek a long-term commitment to investing in the mental health base over the coming years to help counties ensure that the safety net of services already in place is strong and sustainable, prior to adding additional programs and services. With need already far exceeding resources, counties cannot sustain, let alone meet, growing needs without additional investment from the state.

TALKING POINTS

- Community-based mental health services meet people where they are in their communities, providing for upfront prevention and supplemental services that are critical to ensuring the health and wellbeing of those in our communities.
- During the pandemic, counties saw an increased need for services, but the overall environment did not allow for community programs.
- As we move into a more "normal state," counties will be addressing the pent-up need following the pandemic, serving individuals who are new to the county system.
- We must have the appropriate supports in place to address mental health concerns whenever individuals are ready to face the trauma they have experienced throughout the pandemic.
- Even with another federal aid package for local governments, counties still need a way to ensure the social services safety net and those it serves are protected and adequately maintained for years to come.

OTHER RESOURCES

[Legislative Action Center](#)

The CCAP Legislative Action Center, located at www.pacounties.org under the Government Relations tab, serves as a hub for different advocacy material links and resources including fact sheets, talking points, sample letters and background information. The Legislative Action Center serves as a reference page to link you out to the General Assembly website. You can find contact information for PA House and Senate members as well as other commonwealth employees.

[Grassroots Toolkit](#)

This toolkit holds a host of good tips and tricks, from strategies for effective communication to human services advocacy advice. It also features a crash course in the Pennsylvania legislative process.

[Legislative Bulletin](#)

The bi-weekly *Legislative Bulletin* keeps counties up-to-date on the latest news from the Capitol, including information on recent bill movements, hearings and events. While the *Bulletin* is good reading material to stay in the know, it also is a way to keep members informed of issues going on in Harrisburg. The topics in the bulletin can make for great conversational pivot points with legislators.

[Resources and Reports](#)

Ever wonder where you can find repository information on older or ongoing legislative issues? Perhaps you are looking for guidance on a new Act. This newer edition to the CCAP Government Relations website serves as a landing page for issues ranging from transportation and the hotel tax to election reforms, human services information and the EMS Task Force.

[Priorities](#)

Each year the CCAP membership selects several issues that rise to the top of the legislative agenda for that year. The Priorities webpage hosts resources including fact sheets, talking points, sample social media posts and even a specialized planning guide that can be used for grassroots activities with legislators.

[Budget](#)

The state budget process can be a lot to handle and understand. The CCAP Budget page is an excellent hub of information on the Pennsylvania State budget. You even can register for budget news updates, review spreadsheets or read an analysis of the items critical to counties.

[Twitter \(@PACountiesGR\)](#)

While social media certainly is not for everyone, it is a great way to find and share information quickly and broadly. Consider following CCAP on Twitter (@PACountiesGR) to stay in the know about different county and legislative happenings in real time.