



CCAP 2020 Priorities Status Report August 2020

CCAP members identified a total of five priority issues for 2020. Grassroots activity on the priorities began following their adoption at the 2019 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.

August 2020 Update

While the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and statewide emergency response continue to impact Pennsylvania counties, CCAP has maintained focus on our legislative priorities as well as policy issues related to COVID-19. While legislative session for the summer has technically ended, the House and Senate may be back in Harrisburg for rare summer session days to continue their COVID-19 response efforts and to address critical legislative items for the fall.

Although elections were not a 2020 legislative priority chosen by the CCAP membership last fall, it has again risen to the top as the June 2 primary and first go-around with mail-in ballots occurring during a global pandemic resulted in the need to clarify existing law before the general election. CCAP has participated in several roundtable discussions and hearings, and conducted conference calls with both the House and Senate, to discuss counties' goals.

CCAP continues to seek our place at the various decision-making tables and to insert the voice of counties at every opportunity. Already, CCAP is trying to assert county needs regarding the second round of budget negotiations this fall. Although we have received five months of funding, mostly at 2019-20 levels, an uphill battle remains with projections indicating a large state revenue shortfall and CARES Act funding restricted from being used to fill such shortfalls at the state or local levels.

Although CCAP has needed to shift legislative focus to developing the necessary response policies and legislation to assist counties during this uncertain time, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the very real need for action on each of our 2020 legislative priorities. We continue to seek opportunities to reinforce these critical needs appropriately within the current landscape. There are no guarantees and fighting for increased in mental health funding, adult probation funding, county property tax reform, rural broadband and EMS solutions will continue to be critical.

A more detailed report of the current status is presented below in priority order, as established by CCAP members.

Increased Funding for Mental Health Services

Counties seek a minimum increase of \$42 million in FY 2020-2021 to strengthen the existing safety net of county-provided mental health services, with a commitment to an additional 3% increase in the following budget years for these important community supports.

CCAP pursued multiple strategies for highlighting funding needs for mental health during the remote legislative session over the past several months, including a letter to Gov. Wolf, House and Senate leaders and committee chairs. York County commissioner Julie Wheeler also coordinated a conference call with CCAP staff and House Appropriations Committee chair Rep. Stan Saylor (York) in April to advocate for increased funding for this line item. Furthermore, CCAP President Jeff Snyder distributed a news release in late May and commissioners statewide submitted editorials on the increased mental health needs stemming from the pandemic crisis and resultant economic stress in PA communities. This led to an opportunity for President Snyder to join a SmartTalk episode in early June to discuss the priority in more detail.

CCAP was invited to join a hearing by the House Democratic Policy Committee on Monday, July 27, where county MH/ID administrators shared their experiences with addressing the needs of county residents amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Still, the five-month temporary budget reflects only FY 2019-2020 levels for the partial year and ongoing advocacy and outreach seeking an increase for this line will be critical in the second part of the FY 2020-2021 budget to be considered later this year. While COVID response includes a focus on mental health through the county relief block grant program and several other grants, none of these address the issue of the insufficient base dollars, and so state budget support remains critical. Congressional debates also continue as this status report is being written on additional federal relief aid and potential flexibility to use federal aid for revenue replacement. Those provisions may be key in securing full-year funding, and any increases, for mental health services.

Solutions to the Emergency Medical Services Crisis

Following the release of the CCAP EMS Task Force recommendations in November 2019, the Task Force has turned its focus to developing and implementing elements of the report, in particularly the development of a toolbox that can assist each county in creating local solutions and legislation to authorize an EMS authority.

The Task Force met in late May to review and discuss several concepts for legislation to that would authorize the creation of a countywide or multi-municipal EMS authority. Co-chairs Kevin Boozel and Mark Hamilton have also participated in several roundtable discussions on this legislation, hosted by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee and including other stakeholders from the EMS community. As a result of these discussions, the draft legislation continues to be updated; although there is limited time remaining in the 2019-2020 legislative session, legislative staff have indicated their intention to introduce a bill by the end of August.

In the meantime, however, the General Assembly has considered several other bills intended to help support EMS this session. One of those bills, HB 1459, was signed into law on July 23 as [Act 69 of 2020](#), to create statewide mental health resources for emergency responders, including county 911 dispatchers. Specifically, Act 69 will establish a statewide mental wellness and stress management protocol, peer-to-peer support and a toll-free helpline for emergency responders, consistent with the recommendations in the SR 6 report. This approach invests in a comprehensive approach to address the mental health needs of our emergency responders, including prevention and intervention services that can assist individuals in dealing with the pressures of working in the emergency response field before they become overwhelming. CCAP supported this legislation consistent with the recommendations of the EMS Task Force.

County Property Tax Reform

For many years, counties have sought a menu of local taxing options like local earned income taxes, personal income taxes or sales taxes to offset their reliance on the property tax and diversify their tax base. As has been the case for many years, the bulk of property tax reform conversations in Harrisburg remain primarily focused on school property tax reform.

At the same time, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have brought counties to the table as part of property tax discussions in a very different way. CCAP worked with the General Assembly on emergency legislation that confirmed local government ability to extend the discount and face periods for property tax collection, and that language was signed into law as [Act 15 of 2020](#). Furthermore, a school property tax deadline extension bill was signed into law as Act 75. While counties have little direct impact from this legislation, CCAP has been involved with tax claim bureaus and school stakeholders to discuss coordination on the tax collection side.

Revenue pictures at the state and local level remain uncertain as the impacts of the pandemic continue to evolve. CCAP worked with the other statewide local government associations to ask that the four legislative Local Government Committee chairs request the state's Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) do a study on local government revenue impacts and projections, similar to one that was done for state revenues in the spring. The IFO completed the request and published its [report](#), estimating that property tax revenues for counties would decline about 1.3%, and that revenue collections may be impacted in the second and third quarters of 2020 in those counties that chose to extend their discount and face periods.

Although diversifying revenue options would be helpful to counties' budgets in the long term, the difficult financial challenges created by the pandemic create an environment that make changes to the tax base – which would include increases in other tax sources – unlikely at this time.

Rural Broadband Expansion

Rural broadband 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 develop

reopening and distance learning plans for the fall. 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.

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 local solutions continue to drive the conversation on solutions to the statewide broadband crisis, there have been several legislative initiatives and funds devoted to broadband expansion, including [HB 2348](#) to establish the Unserved High-Speed Broadband Funding Program Account to aid in the expansion of broadband services across the commonwealth and [HB 2438](#), which would allow an electric co-op to provide broadband services or construct, operate and maintain broadband facilities through an existing easement owned, held or used by the electric cooperative corporation.

Additionally, many counties have plans to utilize some of the County Relief Block Grant dollars from the federal CARES Act to develop, deploy and expand broadband. As society transitions into a more digital, physically distanced world, broadband will continue to remain a key focus of budget and legislative conversations at the state and federal levels.

Adult Probation Funding

A major component of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative Part 2 (JRI2) has been adopted into law and is now being implemented, with a shift from the Parole Board serving as oversight to having the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) stand in as advocate, implementing a variety of changes but serving to assure best practices. Further, JRI2 will result in savings in state inmate costs redirected to the front end, specifically adult probation, allowing for financial support for a budget that has been unchanged for many years. And now, in a world attempting to reopen from COVID-19 closures and uncertain budget conditions, funding for adult probation services continues at FY 2019-2020 levels, at least during the five-month temporary budget.

The newly formed Adult Probation Advisory Committee established by Act 114 of 2019 has also been initiated, and CCAP president Jeff Snyder has been named to represent the Association. This committee will provide a solid policy basis for implementation of Act 114 probation reforms and justice reinvestment initiatives and impact funding as savings result from the shift from state corrections to community supervision.

Additional amendments to probation services are still needed. Legislation to address the length of probation sentences, as well as technical violations, has been considered but not reported from committee. [Senate Bill 14](#) has been approved by the Senate and awaits consideration in the House. Further, through a grant from PCCD, CCAP is working with the PA Chief Adult Probation Officers Association to facilitate best practices and evidence-based trainings across the state.