

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
THE **VOICE** OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

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COUNTIES PREPARE FOR MAY 20 PRIMARY ELECTION

The May 20 Primary Election is less than a month away. Counties are currently preparing absentee and mail-in ballots, mailing and receiving military and overseas ballots, educating voters on timelines and rules, and recruiting and training poll workers. The deadline for voter registration for the Primary is May 5, 2025. The last day to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot is May 13, 2025.

As a part of educational efforts, counties are reminding voters to:

- Place their completed ballots into the privacy envelope;
- Then place that envelope into the second outer envelope; and
- Sign the declaration

Furthermore, counties are reminding voters that mail-in ballots should be mailed back promptly or dropped off at the county election office or at an official drop box as applicable before the deadline. Voters may continue to choose to vote at their polling place but should verify their polling location. Accurate information can be found at county election offices and their websites. Or, to register or check a voter registration status, find

a county election office, verify a polling location or review other election information, visit the **Pennsylvania Department of State's website**.

Counties chose **Vote-By-Mail Reforms** as one of their 2025 priorities, focusing specifically on giving counties needed tools to run fair, secure, and accurate elections, restoring public trust in the election system. To learn more about elections in the commonwealth and some of the challenges counties are facing, check out **County Connections** on YouTube or visit **CCAP's one-pager on vote-by mail reforms**.

NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY TELECOMMUNICATORS WEEK

This week counties across Pennsylvania are celebrating **National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week**, observed from April 13 to 19, 2025. This week is dedicated to recognizing the unsung heroes behind the scenes—911 telecommunicators—the “first first responders” whose voices are often the first link in the chain of emergency response.

Counties across the Commonwealth take pride in providing 911 services, operating Pennsylvania's 61 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), which handle more than 14 million service calls each year. At the heart of these operations are the 911 telecommunicators—dedicated professionals who answer every call, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They are highly trained professionals who manage high-stress calls, provide life-saving instructions, and coordinate responses with police, fire, and emergency medical services. Whether it's guiding a caller through CPR, dispatching help during a fire, or supporting officers during dangerous situations, these communicators remain calm and focused under pressure. Their responsibilities demand not only technical expertise and fast decision-making but also compassion, patience, and resilience. Often working long hours, weekends, and holidays, they ensure that communities have 24/7 access to emergency help—no matter the situation.

It is striking to think how little the average citizen thinks about 911 on a daily basis. Yet in the worst moments of our lives, we know that it will always be there, that highly trained professionals will be on the other end to navigate what might feel like in the moment an impossible situation, and that help will be on the way when minutes matter most. When we find ourselves in a situation where we need help, these professionals are just three digits away.

As residents across the Commonwealth recognize the importance of this work, it is a reminder that the voice on the other end of the line is a lifeline in moments of crisis. This week—and every week—Pennsylvania counties say thank you to their 911 telecommunicators for their service to their communities and to our counties.

More information regarding counties' top priority this year- 911 Surcharge Reauthorization and Statue Updates- can be found in the **Advocacy** section of CCAP's website.

COUNTY LEADERS RECOGNIZED FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE

This week, the Shapiro administration announced the recipients of the 2025 Governor's Awards for Local Government Excellence. These awards recognize local government leaders across the commonwealth for their dedication to strengthening and improving their communities. The following county leaders received awards:

- Northampton County Commissioner Lori Vargo Heffner earned a Career Recognition Award for her service as President of Northampton County Council, active participation in CCAP, and work as a psychotherapist, which has guided her advocacy for human services and mental health funding.
- The Tioga County Board of Commissioners were recognized with the Responding to Adversity Award for their disaster response efforts when Hurricane Debby hit the

county in 2024, causing devastating flash floods, property damage, and loss of life. Their commitment to working with Emergency Services and local first responders illustrated their commitment to their communities to respond and recover from this hardship.

Congratulations to our county leaders on earning these awards! For more information on the 2025 award recipients, visit **DCED's website**.



HOUSE CONSIDERS EXPANDING COUNTY JAIL MAT PROGRAM

On April 8, **House Bill 561**, sponsored by Representative Maureen Madden (D-Monroe), was reported out of the House Human Services Committee and now awaits consideration on the House floor. This bill proposes important amendments to Chapter 46 of 2015, that would enhance county efforts to support individuals impacted by the opioid crisis.

The current program only funds long-acting, non-narcotic medications paired with counseling- specifically Naltrexone. While effective, this restriction has created significant costs for counties. Many spend hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to continue medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for individuals already receiving treatment at the time of incarceration, relying on a combination of grants, opioid settlement funds, and general funds.

HB 561 would expand eligibility to include all FDA-approved MAT medications, allowing counties to better tailor treatment and more efficiently use available funding. County MAT

programs have reduced recidivism, improved treatment continuity through hand-offs, and led to lower costs for other medication. Facilitates have also reported fewer behavioral incidents, creating safer environments.

Counties support HB 561's removal of the "pilot" designation and its renaming of the program to the Medication-Assisted Substance Use Treatment Grant. The bill also updates language to reflect current legal terminology, replacing "county intermediate punishment" with "probation with restrictive conditions". The bill now awaits further consideration on the House floor.

PUBLIC SECTOR OSHA BILL PASSES OUT OF HOUSE

On April 9, **House Bill 308**, introduced by Representative Patrick Harkins (D-Erie), passed out of the House chamber and is now under consideration in the Senate. This legislation seeks to establish the Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), extending OSHA protections to public employees.

Counties continue to underscore that worker safety remains a top priority for counties, noting the extensive measures already in place to ensure safe workplaces. Counties actively implement risk management strategies, including employee training, workplace inspections, and other safety protocols designed to reduce hazards, minimize liability, and control workers' compensation costs. Moreover, local governments in Pennsylvania are already subject to a comprehensive set of workplace safety laws and regulations, making HB 308 redundant and potentially conflicting with existing requirements.

While well-intended, counties caution that the bill would impose substantial costs on counties without delivering significant benefits, particularly since many OSHA standards are not applicable to the roles and environments within local government.

CCAP will continue to monitor this legislation as it receives further consideration in the Senate this session.

CENTER FOR RURAL PA HEARING ON MENTAL HEALTH

On April 8, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania convened a **public hearing** to discuss advancing rural mental health awareness and support. The hearing brought together a variety of mental health professionals and county representatives who shared insights into the current landscape of behavioral health services across rural Pennsylvania, highlighting both persistent challenges and emerging solutions.

Throughout the hearing, stakeholders emphasized that rural areas continue to face significant barriers to accessing timely and appropriate mental health care. These include delays in outpatient treatment, a shortage of qualified providers – particularly psychiatrists – and a lack of suitable housing for individuals with mental health needs. Many rural counties have lost their local behavioral health units over the years, with care now often delivered through telehealth.

Tiffany Cummings, a Magisterial District Judge from Tioga County, highlighted the difficulties individuals in rural Pennsylvania encounter in accessing outpatient treatment following discharge from jail or treatment facilities. She emphasized that while mental health services may be available during incarceration, the greatest challenge lies in ensuring continuity of care and securing suitable housing once individuals return to the community. Her testimony underscored the systematic gaps that exist for individuals with mental health needs transitioning out of the justice system.

Annie Strite, Cumberland-Perry County Administrator and Mental Health Director, and Andrea Kepler, Dauphin County Mental Health Administrator, shared updates on the opening of the Tri-County Mental Health Walk-In Crisis Center in Dauphin, Perry, and Cumberland counties. This new facility offers walk-in services, mobile crisis response units,

and works closely with 911 dispatchers to divert individuals in crisis away from emergency rooms and law enforcement encounters. This center highlights the value of regionalization – demonstrating how pooling resources across counties can enhance service delivery and reach more residents. The partnerships formed through the crisis center have not only enabled individuals to access care within their own communities but also alleviated pressure on law enforcement and EMS personnel, who are too often the first responders to behavioral health emergencies.

The hearing also highlighted workforce shortages as a critical issue, particularly the lack of mental health professionals and nurses in rural areas. Beyond workforce and infrastructure challenges, economic barriers and inadequate broadband access remain significant obstacles to accessing care in rural communities. These systematic issues underscore the urgent need to strengthen the mental health system statewide.

As the primary providers of community based mental health services, counties are increasingly strained by rising demand and limited resources. The hearing reinforced the need for increased base funding to support existing services and expand access to care. Counties continue to advocate for a \$100 million increase in the state's 2025 budget for county mental health programs – funding that is essential to meet the growing needs of communities and ensure that all residents have access to timely, quality behavioral care.

HOUSE CHILDREN & YOUTH COMMITTEE HEARING ON LEGAL PARENTAGE BILL

The House Children and Youth Committee held an informational hearing on April 9 to discuss **House Bill 350**, introduced by Rep. Ben Sanchez (D-Montgomery). This legislation amends Titles 20 (Descendents, Estates and Fiduciaries), 23 (Domestic Relations), and 42 (Judiciary and Judicial Procedure) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to create the Uniform Parentage Act. If enacted, this bill would provide clear guidance for establishing legal parentage (i.e., parent-child relationships) within Pennsylvania's judicial system.

During the hearing, testifiers underscored the importance of ensuring there are clear guidelines for establishing parent-child relationships in a court of law to protect children and families in the commonwealth. Currently, the lack of statutory language to address this issue requires courts to apply common law practice, resulting in legal decisions being made on a case-by-case basis that often vary widely by county. The aim of the Uniform Parentage Act is to:

- Provide judicial consistency among all counties in the commonwealth
- Ensure there is a legal framework for establishing a parent-child relationship through multiple paths with clear guidance for establishing the relationship for each path
- Provide uniform definitions that all county judges can follow when making legal decisions and preparing written opinions in the case of appeals
- Ensure that all children have equal access to parent-child relationships, which can afford them more stability

House Bill 350 was referred to the House Children and Youth Committee on April 7 and awaits further action by the committee and General Assembly. CCAP will continue to monitor future developments on this legislation.

PRESERVING TAX-EXEMPT MUNICIPAL BONDS IN CONGRESS

As a part of federal advocacy efforts, the National Association of Counties (NACo) has been actively working to protect the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds with Reconciliation negotiations continuing in Congress. Tax-exempt municipal bonds are an important tool used by state and local governments to finance capital improvement projects. The tax-exempt status allows issuers, including counties, to keep borrowing costs down through lower interest rates that are competitive.

The elimination or limitation of tax-exempt municipal bonds by Congress would have detrimental fiscal impacts on Pennsylvania counties and taxpayers. Should this occur, borrowing costs will increase for counties through higher interest rates – some projections shared by NACo show that borrowing costs for counties would increase by more than two percent. Ultimately, this could result in counties having to raise taxes in order to pay back the higher debt service obligations. Additionally, eliminating tax-exempt municipal bonds will negatively impact the financial stability of many seniors and retirees that have investments in municipal bonds in their retirement portfolio, which is common due to the low-risk nature of these investments.

As an affiliate of NACo, CCAP supports preserving the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds and urges members to engage with their federal partners to ensure that Congress protects this important financing tool for counties. For more information, visit [NACo's policy brief](#) on this issue.

CCAP RESOLUTIONS PROCESS

Beginning in May, CCAP policy committees will be holding their annual virtual meetings to consider resolutions amending the **Pennsylvania County Platform**, CCAP's comprehensive policy document determined by counties. All CCAP members are invited to review the platform and to send any proposed resolutions for additions, changes or deletions to CCAP Government Relations staff at PACountiesGR@pacounties.org, or to discuss them with CCAP policy committee chairs. A membership discussion and vote on the resolutions will be held in conjunction with the **CCAP Annual Conference** in early August. An overview of the process, timeline and related materials can be found on the CCAP Policy [webpage](#).

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