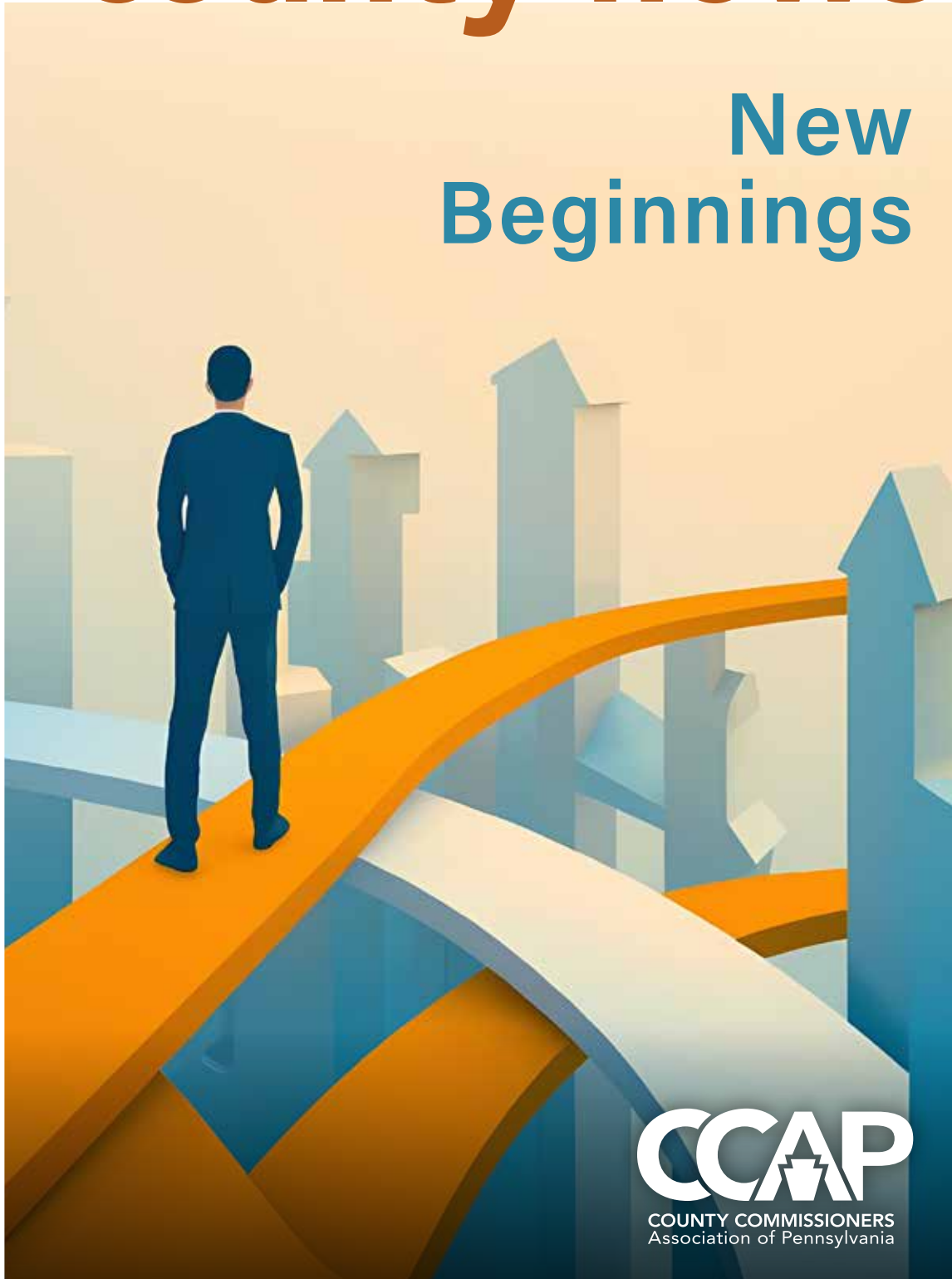


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Our Mission

CCAP advocates as the unifying voice of all Pennsylvania counties and provides leadership and support for excellence in county government.

Our Vision

CCAP is the recognized leader for Pennsylvania county government.

Founded in 1886, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties (NACo).

To acquire an article idea submittal form for CCAP's *Pennsylvania County News* please email John Buffone at jbuffone@pacounties.org.

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PENNSYLVANIA county news

VOLUME 3 2025



An ever-changing world can be scary sometimes. But with change comes fresh opportunities and innovative approaches that can shape the future. In this edition of County News, we will emphasize how counties are adapting to those changes—whether through new leadership, modernized services or community-driven initiatives—all while staying rooted in their mission of public service.

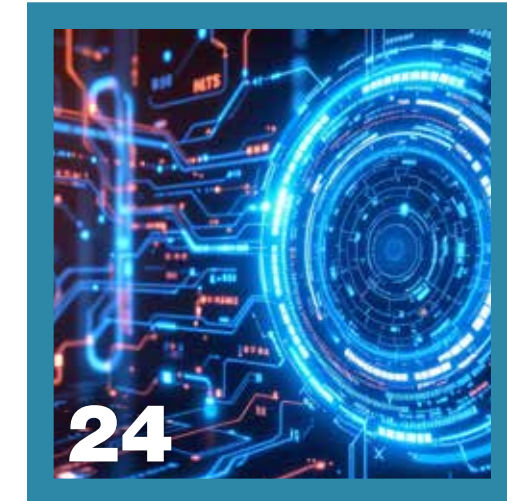
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KYLE C. KOPKO
PH.D., J.D.

**Executive Director
County Commissioners
Association of
Pennsylvania**

Dear Friends,

It was so good to meet many of you at the CCAP 139th Annual Conference in Seven Springs! For those whom I have not yet had the pleasure of meeting, my name is Kyle Kopko, and it is my great honor to serve as the new executive director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. The warm welcome that my family and I have received in the last few weeks has been truly humbling. It is clear to me that CCAP is more than an association; it's a family of dedicated people who share a common purpose: empowering county officials to govern effectively and improve the well-being of all the Commonwealth's residents.

That sense of family was something I felt even before my first day on the job. Throughout July and early August, I received scores of phone calls, text messages, and emails

from county commissioners (both current and former), policymakers, and CCAP staff. These were not just congratulatory messages; they were heartfelt testaments regarding how much CCAP means to them. The Association's reputation is built upon the collaborative culture its members have fostered for generations. Very few organizations can bring people together across political and geographic lines in support of Pennsylvania's communities. Our members recognize that when our counties are strong, the Commonwealth is strong.

As I complete my first month at CCAP, I am excited to build upon the Association's important legacy and identify ways of better serving all our members. To that end, one of my early priorities will be traveling across Pennsylvania to meet with county stakeholders. I want to hear your goals and

"Our members recognize that when our counties are strong, the Commonwealth is strong."

concerns firsthand so that I, and the entire CCAP staff, can be responsive to member needs.

Also, I look forward to working with the CCAP staff and Board of Directors to develop new strategic initiatives to provide the highest quality services to our members. In my first year, I plan to focus on several key areas of CCAP's operations and services. First, we will ensure that our training and professional development programs provide members the resources they need to navigate the modern complexities of county governance. Second, we will strengthen our

government relations efforts in Harrisburg to ensure that counties have a seat at the table in the policymaking process. Third, we will expand our online presence and digital communication capabilities, making it easier for our members to access the information they need. Although we will introduce some new approaches to CCAP operations, our ultimate goal will, and must, remain the same: CCAP supports county officials to effectively serve the 13 million residents who call the Commonwealth their home.

Thank you again for your incredible support and welcome. I'll share more about myself in a Q&A article in this issue of Pennsylvania County News. I hope you enjoy that, and all the other great articles featured in this issue. Finally, I wish you and your loved ones the very best for a rewarding autumn season, I look forward to seeing you soon.

With warmest regards, ▀

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kyle C. Kopko". The signature is fluid and cursive.



SHERENE HESS
President
County Commissioners
Association of
Pennsylvania

OUR SHARED JOURNEY: THE COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT

"The older I get, the greater power I seem to have to help the world; I am like a snowball — the further I am rolled the more I gain."

~Susan B. Anthony
American social reformer and
women's rights activist

Dear friends, it is my honor to bring you this President's Message.

Readers may wonder what relevance the quote from Ms. Anthony, who played a pivotal role in the women's suffrage movement, has to do with CCAP's mission to be the unifying voice of all Pennsylvania counties, as the organization works to support all CCAP members, in their goal to respond effectively and quickly to the needs and circumstances of the Pennsylvanians that we serve.

There are two reasons, especially in regard to this particular quote.

Ms. Anthony worked decades and well into her senior years to advance women's suffrage. She died in 1906, and like many others, she did not live to see the actual ratification on August 18, 1920 and adoption on Aug. 26, 1920 of the

19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the Women's Right to Vote. Still, she persevered and committed to striving for future freedoms, likely knowing that she would not live to legally cast a vote.

Like the women and men who worked for suffrage with no immediate results, county government exists and works without end to ensure that programs, services and projects are created, designed, and delivered with continuity and reliability. Often we do so knowing that we may not see results of our work until years later, and possibly not in our lifetimes. Despite that, we press on and remain committed to creating and maintaining crucial services for residents and projects in our counties that will improve lives and health, grow local economies, provide for public safety, and ensure civil rights for current and future generations.

Ms. Anthony's regard for the wisdom and venerability gained as we become more experienced in our work, the "further we are rolled" as we dig in to address the needs in

our communities, speaks to me as well. We all know how effective it is to use our lived experience to find the pathways and partnerships that bring answers to challenges. Over the many years of its operations, CCAP has been by your side in this journey to invest in the citizens and communities you serve with information and guidance related to legislation, education, media, insurance, technology and more.

ACHIEVING AN IMPORTANT MILESTONE

As we have "rolled" through 2025, we have certainly gained momentum, much like the snowball referred to in Ms. Anthony's quote.

Confronted at the beginning of the year with the challenge of hiring an Executive Director, CCAP's board of directors and dedicated senior staff placed a laser focus on finding an individual who would not only understand the needs of county government leaders but be able to communicate those needs – and ideas for reforms – to a variety of target audiences, all while maintaining a non-profit organization with integrity and fiscal mindfulness. This skillset is rare, as is the leadership to execute it.

After months of planning, evaluating, and thoughtful, analytical and frank discussions, I was delighted to be able to share with CCAP members that the CCAP Board of Directors, with consensus, hired Dr. Kyle Kopko as CCAP's executive director, effective August 1. It was beautiful timing, as Kyle was able to join the Pennsylvania contingency at the National Association of Counties (NACo) annual convention in Philadelphia. The Convention was an incredible showing of county government strength, a premier gathering of elected and appointed officials from the nation's 3,069 counties, parishes and boroughs. We discussed federal policies' effect on counties, participated in workshops lifting up county best practices, went on mobile tours across our host county, participated in the Annual Business Meeting on the final day of the conference, and much more. Philadelphia showed our colleagues from across the nation how to hold a convention! We were so proud to be the host state.

The colossal task of hiring a new executive director could not have been accomplished without the synchronization of the Search

Committee, the Personnel Committee and full CCAP Board of Directors to identify and select the best individual to lead CCAP. The years ahead will be ones of strength and growth.

PRIORITIZING NEXT STEPS

Hiring an executive director achieved a significant milestone. Important goals remain for CCAP in 2025. Achieving everything likely is not possible; simply put: there are not enough hours and uncontrollable factors pose obstacles.

Despite impediments, CCAP remains committed to strengthening Pennsylvania counties' ability to effectively and economically provide critical services and programs to citizens in their communities, through advocacy for the 2025 Legislative Priorities:

- 911 Surcharge Reauthorization and Statute Updates
- Adequate County Mental Health Funding
- Vote-By-Mail Reforms

These legislative priorities were selected by CCAP's membership

"I encourage you to continue to prioritize clear communication, foster engagement, model resilience, reflect on and celebrate achievements, and strengthen relationships."

through a process that culminated at the CCAP Fall Conference last November where participants deliberated on the hottest topics shaping our counties' futures. I invite all CCAP members and partners to attend the upcoming CCAP Fall Conference on November 23-25, 2025 to be part of the Legislative Priority selection that will identify current and ever changing issues and concerns and inform our advocacy efforts in 2026.

Legislative advocacy will continue, as will CCAP's insurance programs (all of our programs are owned and governed by the members they insure), technology services and solutions, and four major conferences each year, along with over 40 educational workshops available to members throughout the year. The County News magazine, Legislative Bulletin, CCAP Update, Insurance Matters, Annual Report and many more publications provide timely, accurate information to make counties' jobs a little easier. Another membership benefit: CCAP has eight Affiliate Associations that provide services that cover assessment, planning, mental health, drug and alcohol, health care, children and youth, and human resources.

FINISHING STRONG, MAKING SPACE FOR CELEBRATION

While the Association is membership driven in all of its many facets (education, technology, insurance programs, and much more), I must acknowledge the individuals who work every day to develop and seamlessly deliver all of the Member Services that make CCAP a trusted and respected entity. I am genuinely thankful and grateful to the CCAP leadership and supporting staff for their enthusiasm and professional dedication to the organization. They continue to grow in commitment, constancy and incredible mastery of their subject areas. With its dedicated leadership team, CCAP is maximizing opportunities for its members to strengthen local, state, and federal partnerships, understand emerging trends and opportunities, and exchange success stories and approaches to solving problems.

I am also thankful for you, CCAP members. We all share a passion to make a difference and truly improve the quality of life for our residents and the prosperity of our communities. The trials and

uncertainty emerging throughout 2025 and the years leading up to it have been relentless; it takes special human beings to stay in the game amidst the emergence of AI, growing infrastructure, public safety, and mental health and social support needs, civil discord, financial instability, and the many other challenges of being a county government leader. I encourage you to continue to prioritize clear communication, foster engagement, model resilience, reflect on and celebrate achievements, and strengthen relationships.

I encourage you to explore all the ways you can become involved with CCAP. Participate in our calls for legislative advocacy, join a policy committee, attend the CCAP conferences, and take advantage of all the services CCAP offers.

I hope you enjoy this issue of County News. I look forward to seeing you all soon as we continue rolling forward, gaining momentum and staying the course in our shared Commitment to Excellence in County Government.

Sincerely, 🐾



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CULTIVATING HOPE

WAYNE COUNTY'S NEW CRISIS STABILIZATION CENTER TAKES ROOT



When it comes to new beginnings, Wayne County understands the dedication, hard work, and care that it takes to turn the seed of an idea into a reality. This tradition of growth extends far beyond just the impactful agricultural industry here. Wayne County's Office of Behavioral Health is committed to ensuring that all residents, no matter their needs, are put in a position to thrive.

Since June of 2021, The Wayne County Office of Behavioral and Developmental Programs and Early Intervention (BDPEI) and Center for Community Resources (CCR) have worked together to provide mental health resources and crisis intervention to anyone who may need it. With 24/7 telephone and mobile services and walk-in support available during scheduled hours, Wayne County Crisis provides a safe space for individuals experiencing mental health emergencies.

As the partnership has grown over the years, so has the idea for expansion. Creating a crisis stabilization center felt like a natural next step towards evolving and extending the community reach of Wayne County Crisis. Wayne County BDPEI, in conjunction with Carbon-Monroe-Pike MH/DS, and Lackawanna-Susquehanna BHIDEI, applied for and were awarded a \$5.9M crisis grant to establish the new center for walk-in crisis services and a crisis residential program. Additional federal, state, and philanthropic funding was also secured to purchase and renovate a former physicians' office in downtown Honesdale to house these programs. As a result of the continued dedication of Wayne County BDPEI, and its valued collaboration with CCR, a new stabilization center will serve as the home of mental health crisis intervention in Wayne County beginning in Fall 2025.

Aligned with the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) crisis stan-

dards, the stabilization center will provide immediate help to those experiencing an active mental health crisis. There will be skilled behavioral health staff available 24/7, who aim to de-escalate crises, assess individuals' needs, and provide them with additional referrals. The walk-in center offers a comfortable space for those in crisis to recenter, along with respite areas for those who require further observation for up to 24 hours. An around-the-clock call center is also located in the building to ensure that area residents can access these services at any time.

The crisis residential program will allow individuals to avoid the emergency room and utilize a more streamlined process to access care. The 8-bed, 24/7 crisis residential program is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of professionals comprised of therapists, nurses, and peer specialists. Strength-based care plans incorporate individual and group therapy, medication management, and peer support to ensure that individuals receive the treatment they need.

Wayne County Crisis understands that recovery extends beyond the walls of the facility as well. Wayne County and CCR are dedicated to creating connections between individuals and the resources that will aid in their transition back into the community. Whether an individual is utilizing the walk-in center or the crisis residential program, the dedicated care team makes it a priority to follow-up with everyone who calls or visits. Wayne County Crisis aims to assist those in crisis and raise awareness about how these resources can help them or their loved ones. The goal of this initiative is to cultivate an environment where recovery, stabilization, and self-growth thrive. Wayne County and CCR are thrilled to bring these services to a community that's been proven to support new beginnings and opportunities for its residents. 🌱

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Pennsylvania's Local Technical Assistance Program is for Counties, too!

Although Pennsylvania counties generally own no or very limited roadway mileage, they may still play a critical role in managing and coordinating other transportation assets, including bridges or trail systems. Counties are also key partners in collaborating with and supporting municipalities that directly own and maintain approximately two-thirds of Pennsylvania's roadway network.

To help support locally-owned infrastructure, the Pennsylvania Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP), administered by PennDOT, offers free training and technical assistance to county and municipal employees across the commonwealth. A quarterly newsletter, recorded "drop-in" virtual training sessions and technical information (tech) sheets provide additional information on virtually any roadway, bridge or other transportation topic.

Some classes and topics that may be of relevance to counties may include:

- Bridge and Culvert Inspection for Municipalities
- Asset Management
- Crosswalks at Intersections
- Pedestrians and Crosswalks
- Active Transportation
- Drones: Municipal Transportation Uses
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
- Public Works Safety
- Safe Driver

The LTAP website offers self-service options through the "Register for Training" and "Request Technical Assistance" tiles and a wealth of knowledge on all road, bridge and transportation topics via the "Resources and Technical Information" tile.

If you have any questions or need further assistance, please call 1-800-FOR-LTAP or email LTAP@pa.gov.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT LTAP, PLEASE BE SURE TO VISIT THE WEBSITE AND CHECK OUT OUR THREE, BRAND NEW LTAP VIDEOS!

Overview of Pennsylvania's LTAP:
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LTAP Classes:
<https://youtu.be/FcTOKzppDgw?si=ETpf244-cKREoPWL>

LTAP Technical Assistance:
<https://youtu.be/2S4eqccf50s?si=5g3B0i-ZzApDZGHT>



NACO LAUNCHES MIDSIZE COUNTY CAUCUS, GIVING NEW VOICE TO KEY COMMUNITIES

By Brett Mattson, Legislative Director – Justice & Public Safety, NACo

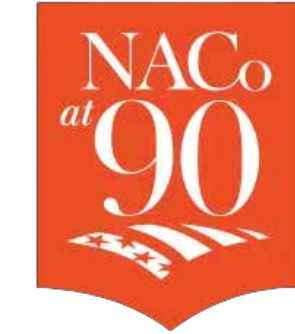
The National Association of Counties (NACo) has launched a new Midsize County Caucus to provide a stronger voice for counties that play a central role in delivering critical services and driving regional progress, but whose needs are often overlooked in national policy discussions. The caucus is designed to unite counties that are neither small rural jurisdictions nor large metropolitan areas but instead serve as essential connectors between the two – blending urban and rural characteristics while managing complex responsibilities.

Berks County Commissioner Christian Leinbach has been named the inaugural chair of the caucus. A long-serving leader within NACo, Leinbach has extensive experience advocating for policies that improve service delivery, foster intergovernmental collaboration and ensure counties have a seat at the table when decisions are made in Washington, D.C. His leadership will help guide the caucus as it works to define its priorities and build momentum among county leaders nationwide.

Midsize counties often serve as regional anchors for commerce, healthcare, higher education and transpor-

tation. They are hubs for jobs and economic opportunity, yet they also provide critical public safety, emergency management and human services to smaller surrounding communities. This dual role requires a balancing act – planning for growth and economic development while ensuring that public services remain strong, accessible and coordinated across jurisdictions.

One of the caucus' core objectives will be to strengthen partnerships between counties and nearby cities. Many midsize counties share transportation corridors, public safety resources and economic development zones with municipalities. Successful coordination between these jurisdictions can mean faster emergency response times, more efficient use of resources and joint investments that have a broader impact on residents. However, differences in funding streams, governance structures and state or federal program rules can make these partnerships challenging. The caucus will work to identify best practices, advocate for flexible funding and remove policy barriers that prevent effective city-county collaboration.



Public safety and emergency services will be another key area of focus. Midsize counties are often responsible for operating 911 dispatch centers, law enforcement, fire and rescue coordination, and emergency management agencies. These services must be ready to respond not only to incidents within the county itself, but also to emergencies in neighboring towns or rural areas that may

lack their own capacity. Ensuring sustainable funding, access to modern equipment and coordinated training opportunities will be central to the caucus' advocacy.

Economic development remains a high priority as well. Midsize counties frequently act as engines of regional growth, attracting new employers, supporting small businesses and maintaining the infrastructure that connects industries to markets. But they also face unique challenges – competing with larger metropolitan areas for investment while working to ensure that growth is inclusive and sustainable. The caucus will help counties share strategies for business recruitment, workforce development and leveraging partnerships with local institutions such as universities and community colleges.

Equally important is the delivery of public goods that enrich communities and improve quality of life. Parks and recreation systems, cultural facilities and community centers are often maintained by county governments, providing spaces for residents to gather, stay active and connect. These amenities not only support public health and well-being, they also play an important role in attracting residents and businesses. By advocating for greater recognition and funding for these community assets, the caucus will help ensure they remain vibrant and accessible.

The Midsize County Caucus is intended to be more than just a networking forum. It will serve as a vehicle for collective action, ensuring that midsize counties speak with one voice when engaging with Congress, the Administration and federal agencies. NACo plans to use the caucus to develop targeted policy recommendations, host strategy sessions and build a strong network of county leaders committed to advancing shared priorities.

For counties across the nation, the launch of this caucus represents an opportunity to address long-standing challenges in a coordinated way. By focusing on city partnerships, public safety, economic development and

the provision of public goods, the caucus will help midsize counties maximize their impact and strengthen the communities they serve. With a dedicated platform for collaboration and advocacy, these counties are poised to increase their influence, secure more equitable treatment in policy and funding decisions and deliver even greater value to their residents. ▀





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Transforming Crisis Response

CONNECTIONS HEALTH SOLUTIONS MARKS MILESTONE IN CRISIS CARE ACCESS

Since opening its doors in December 2024, Connections Health Solutions' Emergency Behavioral Health Crisis Walk-In Center has become a vital safety net for individuals experiencing mental health or substance use crises. The center, designed as an alternative to emergency rooms and law enforcement custody, has already demonstrated a significant impact on the regional behavioral health system.

The walk-in center provides 24/7 access to psychiatric care, crisis stabilization, and support services for both youth ages 14–17 and adults 18 and older. Since December 2024 through July 2025, the center has served over 3000 individuals, helping many navigate a behavioral health emergency and access care in a safe, therapeutic environment. Notably, over 60% of individuals treated at the center have been safely stabilized and discharged to the community, avoiding unnecessary hospitalization or incarceration. This speaks to the effectiveness of the center's multidisciplinary team and trauma-informed approach, as well as strong partnerships with community-based providers.

A key component of the center's operations has been its coordination with local law enforcement. From December 2024 to July 2025, the facility has received over 330 law enforcement referrals, including a significant number of direct drop-offs through the designated back-door entrance—designed to provide a swift, dignified, and clinically appropriate alternative to jail or emergency departments for individuals in crisis. This collaboration helps officers return to patrol more quickly while ensuring individuals receive the care they need in a therapeutic setting.

Connections Health Solutions also operates a regional mobile crisis response team that serves all of Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry counties. The mobile team has reached over 750 individuals in community settings—including homes, schools, businesses, and public spaces—providing on-the-spot crisis intervention and follow-up support. This proactive model helps prevent crises from escalating and increases access for individuals who may not be able or willing to seek help on their own.



The success of the program is made possible through a strong, collaborative partnership with Cumberland, Dauphin, and Perry Counties, with guidance and leadership from Annie Strite and Andrea Kepler, the region's Mental Health Administrators. Their commitment to creating a unified, responsive behavioral health crisis system has been instrumental in bringing this model to life and ensuring it meets the needs of local residents.

Together with its county partners and community stakeholders, Connections Health Solutions is transforming the way behavioral health crises are addressed in central Pennsylvania—prioritizing access, compassion, and long-term recovery over emergency room stays or criminal justice involvement. As the program evolves, its focus remains clear: meet people where they are, stabilize with care, and connect every individual to the path forward. ▀



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State Introduces Redesigned, User-Friendly Provisional Ballot Envelopes

Secretary of the Commonwealth Al Schmidt announced this summer that the Department of State has redesigned the provisional ballot envelopes that counties use in an effort to improve legibility and make the envelope more user friendly.

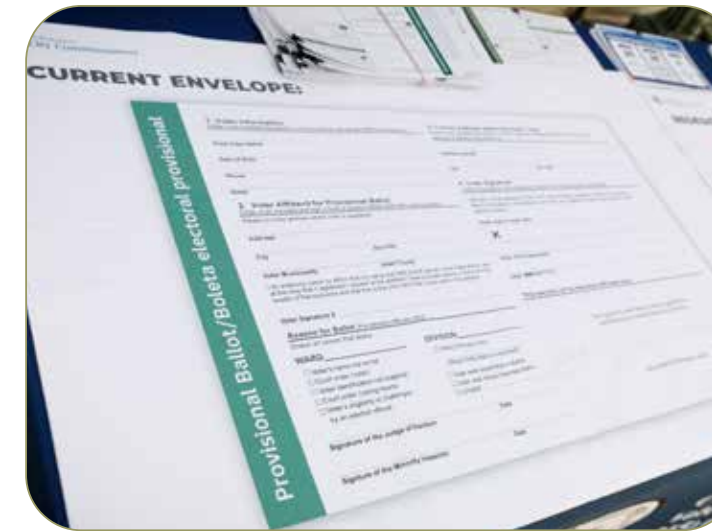
“Every registered voter in our Commonwealth should have the opportunity to cast their vote and make their voice heard in each election,” Schmidt said during a press conference in Philadelphia. “We believe these changes to the provisional ballot envelopes will have a positive impact, just as the changes we made to mail ballot materials two years ago did.”

This envelope update follows the Shapiro Administration’s redesign of mail ballot envelopes and materials in 2023.

Those redesigned materials resulted in the November 2024 general election seeing a 57% decrease in mail ballot rejections.

In that same election, 29.12% of the provisional ballots cast in Pennsylvania were rejected. The most common reason for a rejected provisional ballot was that the voter was not registered; the second-most-common reason was an incomplete provisional ballot envelope.

The redesigned envelopes feature a layout that clearly instructs voters which fields they must fill out, including highlighting the two places where the envelope must be signed. The envelopes also streamline the process for election workers, identifying which fields they need to complete before and after the voter completes their provisional ballot.



The Department received design feedback from county elections officials in Philadelphia, Berks, Butler, Mercer, and Greene counties, who specifically mentioned the need for enhanced usability for voters and poll workers alike.

“During this redesign process, we listened to our county election officials who told us the design of the provisional ballot envelopes led to missing signatures and incomplete envelopes, which ultimately led to the ballots being rejected,” Schmidt said. “I want to thank the county election officials who worked with us in this redesign process, which is another step toward ensuring that Pennsylvania elections remain free, fair, safe, and secure.”

“The redesign of the ballot envelope simplifies the process of voting provisionally, and that means fewer errors and fewer rejected ballots,” said Omar Sabir, Chairman of the Philadelphia City Commissioners. “It’s an important part of ensuring that every eligible vote gets counted, and we’re proud to lead this multi-county effort alongside our partners at the Department of State.”

“I’m extremely proud of the work that went into redesigning the provisional ballot envelope,” Philadelphia City Commissioner Seth Bluestein said. “Improvements to envelope design such as these may appear small, but they can make a big difference in reducing errors that might prevent Pennsylvanians from exercising their right to vote.”

Schmidt said he expects counties to use the new voter- and poll-worker-friendly materials in the 2025 general election. To help counties with the cost of replacing their

current provisional ballot envelopes, the Department is offering grant money to counties who opt to use the new envelopes.

County elections officials may ask a voter to vote by provisional ballot under certain conditions. A provisional ballot voter is asked to follow these instructions:

- Complete in front of election officials the sections on the provisional ballot envelope labeled Voter Affidavit, Voter Signature #1, and Voter’s Current Address.
- Mark the provisional ballot in an accessible and private area of the polling place.
- Seal the provisional ballot in the secrecy envelope.
- Seal the secrecy envelope in the provisional ballot affidavit envelope.
- Fill out in front of polling place election officials the Voter Signature #2 section on the provisional ballot envelope.
- Return the sealed provisional ballot affidavit envelope to a polling place election official.
- Receive a provisional ballot identification receipt.

Within seven days after the election, county boards of elections decide whether each provisional ballot vote should be counted.

For more information on voting in Pennsylvania, including mail and provisional ballots, call the Department of State’s year-round voter hotline at 1-877-VOTESPA, visit vote.pa.gov, or follow #ReadytoVotePA on social media. 🗳️



Continued on page 22

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High Noon for High-Tech

ASSESSING THE IMPACT AND POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

By Jason Thon and Graham Harkins

Benjamin Graham, often called the father of value investing, once noted that “The essence of investment management is the management of risks, not the management of returns.” It’s a reminder that resonates in today’s market, where a handful of companies, dubbed the Magnificent Seven by Bank of America analyst Michael Hartnett, have been responsible for an outsized share of equity gains.

The Magnificent Seven: Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Tesla, and Nvidia, are viewed by many as the epicenter of technology, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence. Their market value and performance have not only defined the narrative of the 2020s but also shaped the composition and behavior of key benchmarks.

HOW MUCH DID THE MAGNIFICENT 7 MATTER?

Reviewing returns from January 1, 2020 through June 30, 2025, their influence was clear:

- The Russell 1000 returned 106.8% over the period, but only 74.2% without the Magnificent Seven.
- The Russell 1000 Growth returned 152.8%, falling to 95.1% without them.
- The Russell 1000 Value barely shifts, returning 60.8% with the group and 58.7% without.

Source: FactSet & CS McKee

This divergence underscores two points: the Magnificent Seven are firmly growth-oriented, and the media’s headline index performance often fails to reflect the health of the broader market.

OUTSIZED GAINS, OUTSIZED WEIGHT

At times, the group represented an average weight larger than 50% of the Russell 1000 Growth, with some months exceeding 55%. This is an extraordinary concentration for just seven companies within a multi-sector index, at times resembling a “Tech Index.” Their cumulative return within the Russell 1000 Growth was

nearly 273%, compared with 95.1% for the index without them.

This concentration has cut both ways. In 2022, the group fell nearly 40%, exacerbating losses in the Growth index. In 2023, they rebounded with returns more than 70%, driving much of the recovery. A portfolio’s exposure to them often determined whether the year was strong or disappointing.

The effect isn’t confined to Growth. At times, the Magnificent Seven have approached 30% of the Russell 1000. In one striking example, a single constituent (Nvidia) exceeded 125% of the entire small-cap Russell 2000, a feat never seen before.

ECHOES OF THE PAST

Periods of narrow leadership are not new. The “Nifty Fifty” of the 1960s and 1970s and the technology leaders of the dot-com era both carried indexes higher before experiencing sharp reversals. While today’s Magnificent Seven are more profitable and established than those earlier leaders; history suggests that concentrated

leadership, regardless of company quality, typically has its limits.

THE KEY TAKEAWAY: BREADTH MATTERS

A lesson to be learned is that market performance and market breadth are not the same thing. On the surface, 2023 looked like a banner year, with the Russell 1000 up 26.5%; strip out the Magnificent Seven, and the return falls to 15.6% (a 41% difference in actual returns). Both are positive, but they paint very different pictures of underlying market strength. Growth returned 42.7% while Value lagged at 14.4%.

This dynamic matters because the Magnificent Seven constituents appear across the investment landscape. They are prevalent in benchmark indexes, many actively managed portfolios, passive products, and sector/thematic strategies. Their dominance means exposure often runs deeper than investors realize.

For pension investors, this creates subtle but important risks.

Concentration can amplify both on the upside and downside, blurring the line between “diversified exposure” and “reliance on a handful of companies.”

LOOKING AHEAD

The crucial question is whether market leadership will broaden. If gains extend across sectors and styles, the market’s foundation becomes stronger and more sustainable. If leadership remains concentrated, returns will continue to hinge disproportionately on the fortunes of a few companies.

Public fiduciaries — including county commissioners, treasurers, and pension board members — are tasked with managing assets that support retirees over decades. Recognizing how concentrated leadership has shaped recent performance is an important step in assessing both opportunities and risks.

Benjamin Graham’s words may just offer a useful guide: “The essence of investment management is the management of risks, not

the management of returns.” In a market environment where seven companies can so heavily influence outcomes, it is a perspective worth keeping in mind. ▾

For information on CS McKee and their capabilities contact Shane Nickolich at snickolich@csmckee.com or 724-972-2223, or visit www.csmckee.com.

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Child Welfare Offers Youth and Families a Chance for a Better Tomorrow

By Brian Bornman, Esq., PA Children and Youth Administrators Association Executive Director

The child welfare system in Pennsylvania is a complicated mix of groups including the state Department of Human Services (DHS), county child welfare agencies, the providers that counties contract with to ensure placements and services are available, as well as numerous other entities who provide other services. The Statewide Adoption Network consists of a prime contractor, who holds a contract with DHS to coordinate and subcontract for adoption and permanency services, the Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC) is a program through the University of Pittsburgh who holds a contract with the state to provide caseworker certification training to those hired to be caseworkers in the state. CWRC provides other services such as facilitating a Youth Advisory Board.

While county child welfare as solely responsible for investigations and the provision of child welfare services, without all the entities involved in the field, this would be impossible. This article is a chance to look at some of the good work that is taking place in field. There is never a shortage of people willing to point out when the system doesn't work. However, the nature of the work is such that you don't know what terrible outcomes were prevented through child welfare involvement.

There is no way to identify the youth who never ran away because the agency connected the family with a therapist, or the children who didn't go hungry because a caseworker dropped off a food box, or the parent who was able to keep their children because a worker assisted them with getting treatment for substance use disorder. Yet, just because something can't be quantified, doesn't mean that it is not so. Below are three examples of times where the system worked as intended and there was a positive outcome.



Child welfare in Pennsylvania has been under increasing pressure in recent years, with arrests, licensing actions, and countless disparaging media stories. The field has been plagued by staff vacancies that have been difficult to fill despite great effort to do so. This was a serious issue prior to COVID and the problem only increased afterwards. The stress of the work, low pay, long hours, and a new work generation which tends to switch jobs much more frequently than prior generations have made maintaining stability within an agency more challenging than ever.

Despite these challenges, the dedicated professionals in the field continue to do their best to ensure the safety of children in state, make sure families receive the services they need, and help youth transition to adulthood.

Hopefully, these stories will serve as a small example of the great work that is done in Pennsylvania every day. The professionals in child welfare are incredibly committed and, more often than not, sacrifice so much of themselves to ensure the children in their county are protected. Hopefully, our society will come to place where, rather than casting about for someone to blame for every ill that befalls children, we can have a discussion on how all the systems in a child's life could have worked together better to bring about a better outcome. Rather than assigning nefarious intent, we can have honest discussions. No one system can single handedly ensure the safety of children and provide resilience and stability to families. Until we can break down silos, stop the blame game, and have honest discussions, the ones to suffer will be the very families we are trying to help.

As always, I want to say a heartfelt "Thank You!" to all the child welfare professionals working so hard for the Commonwealth's children. This includes county agencies, providers, the courts, DHS, CWRC, SWAN, and all the others who are critical to making the system function. 🍷



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Finding Forever

The Karenbauer Family

By Hannah Carroll, SWAN Communications Specialist



At the 33rd Annual Pennsylvania Permanency Conference this past June, attendees were invited to hear from Darien Karenbauer and his adoptive mom, Maranda Karenbauer. They are a SWAN family with roots in both western and central Pennsylvania. Their story, which was featured in the film *Take a Chance on Me* by the Archibald Project, is one of love, challenges, and transformation.

Darien was born in Harrisburg and entered foster care at age ten, coming from a situation where his life was often unstable. He found himself having to care for his younger sisters even though he was a young child himself. While in care, he experienced multiple disrupted placements that left him guarded and disinterested in adoption.

Enter Maranda and Travis Karenbauer, a young couple from western Pennsylvania who had dreamed of fostering before they were even married. At 27, Maranda and Travis met 16-year-old Darien on a Zoom call she described as a job interview—with her nervously “cheesing” and Darien silently staring. But by the end of that call, Maranda and Travis knew they wanted Darien to be part of their family. Darien, for his part, wasn’t quite as sure, but something in him decided to give them a chance anyway.

Darien moved in shortly after. Travis drove from New Castle to Harrisburg to pick him up as soon as he was able because he and Maranda didn’t want him to have to spend another night at the residential facility where he was staying. He arrived to find a soft bed, warm blankets, and (most exciting of all) an Alexa speaker.

“I talked to Alexa all night long,” he laughed. It was the first time he felt like he actually might be able to unpack his things.

The Karenbauers knew that to love Darien was to love all of him. They understood the complexities of trauma, and they prioritized connection before correction when things got hard. Maranda said, “I always meet my kids ‘in their hard’ with connection. Part of overcoming burnout is feeling connected to your kids. The darkest moments

were where we connected the most.”

For Darien, the difference between the Karenbauers’ home and his past placements was a sense of belonging, “Other homes always had kids, other fosters, bios... but in their home, I felt like THEIR kid.”

When discussion about adoption came up, it wasn’t easy. After so many disruptions, permanence felt like a bit of a myth for Darien. Maranda cites the prep work that Darien’s SWAN worker, Lynn Hammer, did with him as crucial to their family’s success. Lynn worked with Darien for about five years, and supported him through multiple placements. Lynn helped facilitate a meeting with Darien’s biological father, whom he had never met, which gave him closure he needed to move forward. Darien described how important it was to him that Lynn always showed up consistently for him and showed he cared. Finally, Darien’s adoption was finalized on May 5, 2021.

“I really was owned by the state,” Darien said. “The government was my parents for a minute. Hearing that I was the son of Maranda and Travis—wow. That hit.”

But even after finalization, the trauma lingered. “We had to learn to hold the ‘both,’” Maranda explained. “The joy and the grief. The rewards and the pain.”

Now a father himself, Darien is determined to write a new story for his son Leo. “Now Leo gets to cry at night and have his dad go pick him up,” Darien said. “Leo has a different story than I did.”

Becoming a father pushed Darien to graduate from high school and complete EMT training. He credits his healing not just to his own strength, but to the people in his life who showed up for him consistently.

Today, the Karenbauers are parents to four boys—Darien, two teenagers, and a three-year-old—and are providing each of them with the stability and unconditional love of permanency. Their story is a testament to what can happen when a family prioritizes connection, “sits in the hard,” and refuses to give up. 🍷

Bridging Generations

Westmoreland Youth Advisory Board Begins to Build Lasting Connections Through Service

At the start of the year, the Westmoreland Youth Advisory Board (YAB) set an ambitious and heartfelt goal: to create meaningful partnerships with county Active Adult Centers. Their mission was simple yet powerful—bring generations together through community service projects, shared activities, and the building of supportive relationships.

So far this year, the group’s efforts are already making a visible impact across Westmoreland County. Youth Advisory Board members have rolled up their sleeves to join seniors in projects that go beyond service—they spark conversation, laughter, and friendship. From hands-on crafting and wreath making at the Mt. Pleasant and Hermine Centers, to calling numbers at bingo and playing pool with Center members at the West Newton Center, each event provides an opportunity for connection and joy.

The YAB has also taken their service outdoors, as YAB members weeded, mulched, and worked to beautify the

grounds of a local facility. One particularly meaningful project involved creating fidget blankets, designed to provide comfort and sensory stimulation for individuals living with Alzheimer’s and dementia. These blankets, made with care and creativity, will now bring peace to residents thanks to the collaboration with the West Newton Center.

The youth have enjoyed getting the chance to help others and interact with another generation. The Active Adults also seem to have enjoyed getting to know some of the youth and hearing their stories.

The initiative has already proven to be more than just community service. It’s a bridge between generations, fostering understanding, compassion, and shared purpose. With more projects on the horizon, the Westmoreland Youth Advisory Board is continuing to shine as a model for how youth leadership and community collaboration can bring lasting change. 🍷



2025 CCAP Annual Conference and Trade Show

The 139th CCAP Annual Conference and Trade Show took place at the Seven Springs Mountain Resort in beautiful and scenic Somerset County. The Annual Conference and Trade Show is the Association's premiere education event welcoming more than 500 county members, vendors, exhibitors, guests and speakers over the four-day conference.

This year's theme was Camp CCAP, which was fitting since the resort is nestled in the forests of the Laurel Highlands.

CCAP welcomed nearly 500 attendees, representing 57 Counties, to the 139th Annual Conference in Somerset County, August 17–20 at the Seven Springs Mountain Resort.

Over the course of four days, members and partners gathered to exchange ideas, shape policy, and celebrate the collective work that continues to strengthen counties across the state.

Kicking off the conference, Dr. Kyle Kopko, CCAP's new Executive Director, opened with inspiring remarks on the

association's path forward and his vision for the future. Followed by Keynote, Justin Patton, an executive coach, international speaker, and award-winning author who challenged attendees to use their presence to communicate with stronger trust.

Members also experienced CCAP's exhibit hall featuring a record breaking 92 exhibitors, all who were eager to meet with members to discuss their counties' needs. Embracing this year's conference theme – CAMP CCAP - awards were given during Sunday's Welcome Reception



The Trade Show Hall at Seven Springs Mountain Resort



CCAP President and Indiana County Commissioner
Sherene Hess



Wayne County Commissioner
Brian Smith



Brinda Penyak, Special Advisor to the Secretary
of the Department of Human Services



CCAP Chief Engagement Officer
Todd Snovel and CCAP Chief
Financial Officer Pamela Szajnuik.



Pennsylvania Lieutenant
Governor Austin Davis



Former Franklin County Commissioner
Sam Worley (left) and Columbia County
Commissioner Dave Kovach (right).



Bradford County Commissioner Daryl Miller (left)
and PSAT Executive Director Dave Sanko (right).



Berks County Commissioner
Christian Leinbach



Northampton County Commissioner
Lori Vargo Heffner



Snyder County Commissioner Joe Kantz (left) and Snyder
County Commissioner Robert Cravitz (right).



to the 'Best Dressed Camper' with Bradford County Commissioner, Zachary Gates taking home the top prize.

At the Annual Business Meeting held in conjunction with the conference, members approved 14 resolutions, amending the County Platform and comprehensive policy statement. This action marked the final step in the annual policy-setting process, the result of the work of 10 policy committees and more than 130 members who examined platform positions and advanced resolutions throughout the year. Members also elected CCAP's 2026 officers selecting the following leaders:

- Joe Kantz, Snyder County Commissioner, President
- Dave Glass, Clearfield County Commissioner, First Vice President
- Ann Coleman, Mercer County Commissioner, Second Vice President
- Julie Wheeler, York County Commissioner, Treasurer
- Sherene Hess, Indiana County Commissioner, Board Chair

Conference programming featured discussions on some of the most pressing challenges facing counties today, including healthcare access, rural revitalization, artificial intelligence, and the opioid crisis. CCAP was honored to have Lieutenant Governor Austin Davis and State Treasurer Stacy Garrity as speakers at the general sessions.

Tuesday afternoon, members and their guests had visited the Flight 93 Memorial sponsored by M&S EAP Services, Inc., Scott + Scott Attorneys at Law, LLP and CGL Companies. That evening the Annual Dinner and Awards Ceremony recognized members and partners

whose leadership, dedication, and collaboration have made a lasting impact on the Association and its mission.

This year's award recipients were -

- Outstanding County Commissioner: Brian Smith, Wayne County
- Outstanding County Chief Clerk: Roni Shilling, Mercer County
- Outstanding County Solicitor: Robert Cravitz, Snyder County
- Friend of County Government: Joseph Saeler, Butler County
- Affiliate of the Year Award: John DiMattio, Erie County

The success of this year's Conference reflects the commitment of county leaders, partners, and staff who continue to work together to strengthen local government and improve the lives of residents across the state.

Next year's Annual Conference and Trade Show will be held August 2-5, 2026, at the Kalahari Resort,



Blair County Commissioner Amy Webster



CCAP Director of Government Relations Frank Mazza



Sullivan County Commissioner Brian Hoffman



CCAP Executive Director Kyle Kopko



2025 Annual Conference Award winners

Monroe County.



2026 CCAP Officers



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Two Fresh Starts

FOR THE FAYETTE COUNTY JAIL

By Angela Kern



The former Fayette County Jail, a stone fortress-styled building in the foothills of the Greater Appalachia region of Southwestern Pennsylvania, was exhausted: its antiquated infrastructure; its staff that made it through another sweaty, non-air-conditioned summer; its residents crammed into smaller Victorian-era cells; an administration trying to make-do and improvise for decades. The old lockup, built 1892, was in continuous use for one hundred and thirty-one years when ground was broken for the new, state-of-the-art facility one mile away, in the county-seat city of Uniontown.

By the time Covid showed up, the administration had received a completely new realignment, with a new Warden, two new Deputy Wardens, other top-ranking positions created, and for the first time in its history, women filling nearly half of those positions. The jail seemed in line for a total rebirth.

With better conditions on the horizon and forward-thinking management at the helm, the jail was experiencing a necessary fresh start.

County statistics on generational poverty and related recidivism rates were not experiencing the same improvement; the current poverty rate is roughly 19% (which is higher than both the state and national averages), and the same familial names rotate through the jail from grandfather to mother to grandchild.

By 2022, Fayette County's Sheriff James Custer, in his second term, was familiar with these faces in constant commit-and-release rotation, and was unknowingly about to meet his jail's future fate at that summer's National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) conference in Kansas City, MO, when he sat in to listen to an enthusiastic and passionate I.G.N.I.T.E., Inmate Growth Naturally and Intentionally Through Education, presentation by Flint, Michigan's Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson. His initiative aims to:

“reverse the cycle of generational incarceration through education. Educating inmates has numerous benefits that help reduce recidivism and make the community safer. By providing inmates with valuable job training, they are

equipped with skills they can use upon release to gain meaningful employment and reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Educational programs have also been found to reduce generational incarceration by offering inmates a way to break out of the cycle perpetuated by previous generations.”

While the Covid-19 pandemic had illuminated a nationwide lack of meaningful and impactful jail programming and services, innovative leaders, such as Sheriff Swanson, were creating and rewriting the way county jails could deliver and track such services.

But don't call it a program, because it's really not; there's no prescribed curriculum, no real handbook or guidelines. It's education, reentry and rehabilitation, buoyed by meritocracy-based motivators that, in less than five years since the NSA adopted it as a national initiative, has seen 'launches' in 28 counties in over 14 states, as of June 2025.



Continued on page 38



I.G.N.I.T.E. is a modern about-face in Corrections, a culture change, which has numbers and data to back up its success claims. Harvard and Brown Universities had collaborated to research the efficiency of I.G.N.I.T.E. in reducing recidivism, and in April of 2024, they released a 92-page study on the Genesee County Jail's IGNITE program that they had tracked for two years.

The findings were affirming: One month of the IGNITE program reduces weekly jail misconduct by 49 percent; acts of violence between the incarcerated and staff were drastically reduced; One month of IGNITE reduces recidivism by 19 percent, and one year of the program reduces recidivism by 23 percent; On average, IGNITE increases a full grade level in reading and math.

Sheriff Custer was inspired and determined, "After learning about IGNITE, the goals and objectives, and a new jail on the way, I knew then that this is the program that we needed in Fayette County! With more than 30 years of law enforcement in the county, I've witnessed recidivism and generational incarceration. I.G.N.I.T.E. is the program that is going to change this trend. I can't think of a better way to address recidivism than to provide an educational platform that will give our incarcerated individuals a greater opportunity to succeed upon release."

He went home from the conference with a vision of bringing I.G.N.I.T.E. to Fayette County, and charged the jail's administrative team, Warden John Lenkey, myself (Deputy Warden of Treatment, and Captain Heather Eicher with implementing it as shortly after

the new facility doors were opened for business, with the support and guidance of the National Sheriffs Association.

I.G.N.I.T.E. launched one month after the old jail's doors closed, in March 2024. It was an entire-staff collective, while simultaneously learning the ropes and glitches of new policies and procedures in an unfamiliar building.

What does I.G.N.I.T.E. look like in Fayette County Jail? Everyone is eligible, regardless of charges, bond, length of stay, etc., and there are only two prerequisites to fulfill before making a request to join: no misconducts in the prior sixty days and have at least sixteen solo hours of course content completed on the tablet. All residents are issued a tablet upon commitment and contain thousands of hours of educational content, classes, videos, and courses between two platforms, Edovo and CypherWorx. Once accepted into I.G.N.I.T.E., all Ignitees receive a two-piece bright blue uniform with I.G.N.I.T.E. emblazoned on back, and they all wear the uniform proudly. Ignitees receive more recreation time than the general population, may request special family visits, have a better library, have access to the administration for discussions, their housing units have couches, ping pong tables, houseplants and weight equipment, to list just a few of the perks. I.G.N.I.T.E. costs nothing for the residents, and nearly nothing for the facility.

But the real perk is the I.G.N.I.T.E. 'program' itself. The year is divided into mini semesters, or "sessions", as

the jail calls them, where the Ignitees leave their housing units or cells to attend in-person courses, groups, classes for six to eight weeks.

The classes are offered and organized through "community partners", which can be anyone willing to volunteer to outreach, and have so far included Penn State University (Home Gardening class), two local banks (United Back and Somerset Trust) for financial literacy, the county's Human Resources Team (Welcome to the Workforce) and the jail's vendors Summit Food Services (ServSafe certification) and Steratore Sanitary Supply (a nationally recognized Cleaning Certification).

Ignitees may practice yoga in Mindfulness Matters class, or sit in on Warden Lenkey's own empowering group, INcourage. Private Industry Council (PIC) placed a Career Pathways Instructor in the jail three days a week, and Ignitees create profiles on their Career Search site. The facility is always looking for local second chance employers, small businesses, educational institutions and even interested individuals to become community partners. Anything along the lines of personal empowerment, education and improvement can be adapted into an I.G.N.I.T.E. offering. Ignitees must remain misconduct-free and spend a minimum of sixteen hours of trackable course engagement, whether it's in-person or on the tablets.

A session culminates with a graduation, which is the high point of the I.G.N.I.T.E. experience. Ignitees are honored for their accomplishments, get to speak to the assembled and the media, the community rallies for them, officers show up to acknowledge their efforts and shake their hands. The scene is touching, but it's more than just pageantry. "Many of our Ignitees have never been told "I'm proud of you", or ever received a certificate or a encouragement for anything in their life, and it gives these men and women something additional their lives are lacking: hope," explains Warden Lenkey.

Hope is something that is typically not considered as part of the jail-stay experience, but the administration, sheriff and staff at the Fayette County Jail are working on changing the status quo, to offer fresh begins and impart hope, and look forward to future data reflecting their evidence of recidivism rates decreasing and the sharp reduction of misconducts/violence with the jail population. Warden Lenkey, Captain Eicher and myself are always happy to "talk-I.G.N.I.T.E." and may be reached though the jail's tab on the county website.

Angela Kern, Deputy Warden of Treatment at the Fayette County Jail, is in her eighteenth year at the jail, where she enjoys coming to work, and is proud to be a part of the I.G.N.I.T.E. initiative.





CCAP's New Executive Director *Dr. Kyle Kopko*

Q What led you to this role?

A For the last five years, I served as the Executive Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, a legislative agency of the General Assembly, where I worked closely with legislators, executive branch officials, and county commissioners on a wide range of policy issues. I found the work rewarding, particularly the opportunity to collaborate with county leaders on important initiatives. The Executive Director position at CCAP was brought to my attention by a colleague; I honestly hadn't considered the role before that time. After learning more about the position, I realized it was a unique opportunity to build upon my past professional experience and lead an organization so directly focused on supporting Pennsylvania's counties and residents. I thought this was a terrific fit given my professional background, and I was excited by the prospect of taking on this new leadership role.

Q What is your top priority for your first year?

A My top priority is to listen and learn from CCAP members and staff about their goals and concerns. I believe a leader must hear directly from stakeholders before making any long-term plans for the future. Over the next year, I will be traveling across the Commonwealth to meet with county leaders and will also engage with CCAP staff to better understand how I can support them. This work will set the stage for a new multi-year strategic plan, ensuring CCAP continues to deliver high-quality member services and thrives as an association for years to come.

Q How would you describe your leadership style in three words?

A Collaborative, adaptable, transparent

Q How do you plan to connect with members?

A I believe connecting with people in person is very important for this role. To understand what is happening across our 67 counties, it is best to visit them, meet with stakeholders, and observe conditions firsthand. I adopted this same practice as Executive Director of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania and will continue it at CCAP. Over the next year, I expect to visit all corners of the Commonwealth to hear directly from our members.

Q What is something you value most in a team?

A I value many qualities in a team, but the most critical is a shared dedication to our mission. When team members understand they are working for the greater good of the organization, that mindset fosters open communication, breaks down institutional silos, and motivates us to focus on what's most important: helping county leaders better serve their communities. This is an incredibly important mission, and every CCAP employee, regardless of their title, has an essential part to play in serving our counties, and ultimately, our Commonwealth.

Q What do you think is CCAP's greatest strength as an association?

A CCAP does something particularly well that is increasingly rare in recent decades: We bring together public officials of all backgrounds to work for the greater good of their counties. Our members—no matter their home region, partisan affiliation, or whether their county is rural or urban—have a true sense of collaboration. That cooperative spirit is a tremendous asset and should be celebrated.

Q What is a surprising fact about you that most people don't know?

A Not many people realize this when they first meet me, but music is a big part of my life. I played the saxophone, guitar, and percussion growing up, and I even considered pursuing a degree in recording engineering. When I was in high school, I built a small home recording studio where I would learn some of my favorite songs by recording them, laying down one audio track at a time for each instrument. And some years later, I married a classically trained singer, and both of our daughters are heavily involved in musical performances. I'll occasionally run the sound board or assist with P.A. system for the annual school musical.

Q What do you like to do in your free time?

A My wife and I are amateur winemakers. We don't grow our own grapes, but we buy grape juice and handle everything else ourselves—from fermenting, to bottling, to label design. We've made thousands of bottles of different varieties over the years, including Chenin Blanc, Gewürztraminer, Pinot Grigio, Riesling, Cabernet Franc, Nebbiolo, Merlot, and Sangiovese (just to name a few). We love sharing the finished product as gifts for friends and family on holidays and birthdays.

Q What is your favorite movie and why?

A Ghostbusters (please don't judge!). That franchise was a big part of my childhood. I grew up watching the cartoon and I had most of the toys. I remember some years ago I had the chance to see Ecto 1 at the Pennsylvania Auto Show. I also met Dan Aykroyd when he visited central Pennsylvania. That was a thrill! Even today, my kids love the Ghostbusters movies as I do (I may have brainwashed them...). In fact, both of my daughters (as toddlers) dressed up for Halloween as the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. You can guess my costume choice...

Q Coffee, tea or something else entirely?

A I must admit that caffeine and I have been great friends since college! Yes to coffee, tea, and sodas. ☘





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Older Youth Spotlight

Robin Braum

From Child Welfare Resource Center Annual Report

M meet Robin, Youth Ambassador with the Child Welfare Resource Center and a sophomore at Gannon University. Robin was born in China, adopted into the United States at the age of three and entered the foster care system at age 16. At age 17, Robin was fortunate enough to meet his second adoptive family, providing him with the permanency we seek for all our older youth in Pennsylvania.

Robin's experience has been a journey of personal growth, focused on forming new friendships, nurturing connections with fellow students, and building meaningful relationships. As a foster care youth, transitioning to college can be tough. When he first stepped into the world of college, he was immediately confronted with the pressure to meet deadlines and the pressure he placed on himself to excel in coursework. Many of these deadlines revolved around critical financial aid requirements, such as the FAFSA and CHAFEE deadlines. Navigating these forms and knowing whom to contact for assistance could be bewildering. Robin found that "closely reviewing the financial aid forms and not hesitating to seek guidance from my Independent Living Program manager, the financial aid department at my college, or a trustworthy individual, like his caseworker, proved to be immensely helpful. My IL worker has been a guiding light when it comes to deciphering these complex forms and processes."

One of Robin's biggest challenges was finding the right balance between his work life, academics, social life, and various extracurricular activities he was passionate about. To prevent burnout and maintain his grades, he decided to consult with his IL case manager for support. "Together, we crafted a well-structured schedule that allowed me to allocate time for studying, working, and enjoying my social life." Prioritizing



what mattered most to Robin played a crucial role in this balancing act. "I realized that my family and social life were at the top of my priority list since they've been the foundation of my journey." Following that, school, work, and extracurricular activities fell in line.

"Understanding your priorities is, I believe, one of the most crucial aspects of being a successful college student."

Unlike many freshmen who reside on campus, Robin opted for a different living arrangement. This introduced its own set of challenges, particularly in finding an affordable apartment close to the university in a safe neighborhood. Yet again, he turned to his IL worker for guidance. Together, they navigated the process, ultimately securing a suitable apartment and utilizing programs like the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) initiative for assistance. "Through this experience, I learned the value of government assistance programs, particularly my participation in FYI, which offers rent support for up to three years. There's an array of options available to foster care youth, spanning from assistance with groceries, bills, transportation, and more. Accepting support is not a sign of weakness; rather, it's a demonstration of strength and practicality."

Robin finds the value in maintaining open lines of communication with his support network and utilizing resources to the fullest. "Whether it's your resource parents, case manager, teacher, coach, or a trusted friend, these individuals are there to help you succeed. As foster care youth, we've faced unique challenges, and these resources are provided not because we lack intelligence or capability, but because we've had a difficult hand dealt to us in life, and we are determined to improve our circumstances." 🍷

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For more information, contact
Desiree Nguyen at dnguyen@pacounties.org

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