Counties share concerns about sequester cuts and impact on public safety

WASHINGTON, D.C. – At a meeting today with senior White House and U.S. Department of Justice officials, the National Association of Counties (NACo) voiced concerns about the effects of further domestic sequestration cuts affecting local government and the critical role that counties play in protecting families, property and communities.

The nation’s 3,069 counties spend roughly 27 percent or $74 billion of their total government expenditures each year on public safety and court related activities. Each year, local juvenile courts handle an estimated 1.6 million delinquency cases and adjudicate youth delinquents in nearly seven of every 10 petitioned cases.

In addition 2,657 counties own and operate a jail. According to DOJ data, local jails admitted an estimated 11.8 million persons during the 12 months ending midyear 2011, down from 12.9 million during the same period in 2010 and down from 13.6 million in 2008. This decrease is due in large measure to a variety of federal funding assistance provided in DOJ’s State and Local Law Enforcement Account.

Many persons in local jails struggle with substance abuse, lack of adequate education and job skills, mental health issues; and a large number of these people return to prison or jail within three years of their release due to inadequate services and opportunities. That is why federal funding that helps support law enforcement, juvenile justice and public safety efforts are critical to counties.

“Most county government functions are mandated by state constitution or law or federal law or regulation,” said NACo Executive Director Matthew D. Chase. “Counties are the service delivery arm at the grassroots level for federal and state policies and programs. When it comes to law enforcement, juvenile justice and public safety, extreme caution must be exercised when seeking responsible cost savings. Automatic, across-the-board federal budget cuts are risky and place the public and the most vulnerable of our population at greater risk.”

NACo has long urged that Congress adopt a balanced approach to deficit reduction. As part of the Budget Control Act, federal non-defense discretionary spending has already been cut by nearly $1 trillion over 10 years. These and further cuts directly affect U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), state and local criminal and juvenile justice assistance grant programs – NACo priority programs.
These programs, such as the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) program, play a central role in preventing victimization and fighting crime in neighborhoods across the country. Byrne JAG also helps in leveraging other federal, state, local and private dollars to support the balanced functioning of the criminal justice system.

Byrne JAG is an enormously effective tool to fight crime. According to DOJ data, Byrne JAG grantees reported the following from October 2008 through September 2011: More than 5,000 drug trafficking organizations disrupted; 27,048 firearms seized; 7,739 gang members arrested for a felony; 2,909 gang members arrested for a misdemeanor; approximately 600 multi-jurisdictional task forces supported; 2.3 million pounds of drugs reported seized including heroin, cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and ecstasy.

Miami-Dade County, Fla., reported that since FY 2010, the Byrne JAG program has been cut nearly 50 percent. The cuts affected efforts addressing illegal drug use, gang activity, domestic violence, substance abuse treatment, juvenile assessment, and crime prevention awareness. Dauphin County, Pa. reported that even when funding is cut back, counties are still required, by law, to provide costly criminal justice services. Funding cuts can cause delays for cases to move through the system which adds costs along the way, i.e. longer jail time for offenders. (SOURCE: A National Survey of Criminal Justice Practitioners by the National Criminal Justice Association and the Vera Institute of Justice)

Juvenile justice programs enable counties to serve at risk children to help keep them in school and out of county jail. One anonymous county reported in the survey that 50 fewer children were served as a result of recent federal cuts. “This puts youth at higher risk of entering the juvenile justice system dropping out of school or abusing substances. The cost of treating youth is 10 times the cost of prevention services for these youth.”

Mentally ill treatment funds have been cuts as well. Sarasota County, Fla. has been forced to eliminate three positions at its juvenile justice assessment center providing mental health assessments and case management for youth.

The reduction in federal funding on justice programs since FY 2010 has had a negative impact on people, property and communities. Continued cuts will have further consequences for every American, threatening the health and safety of communities across the county.

For more information, visit the NACo website at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).

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*The National Association of Counties (NACo) is the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States. Founded in 1935, NACo provides essential services to the nation’s 3,069 counties. NACo advances issues with a unified voice before the federal government, improves the public’s understanding of county government, assists counties in finding and sharing innovative solutions through education and research, and provides value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money. For more information about NACo, visit [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).*