



Top Issues for Counties in Pennsylvania

CCAP Priorities

Funding for Voting Systems

With most of the voting equipment currently in use in Pennsylvania's counties approaching the end of its useful life, CCAP members had already selected funding for voting systems as a priority for 2018. However, on April 12 the Acting Secretary of the Commonwealth announced Pennsylvania is setting a deadline of Dec. 31, 2019, for counties to make commitments for purchase of new paper-trail election equipment, with the expectation of having that equipment in place by the April 2020 primary election.

CCAP has been discussing these concerns with members of the General Assembly, and is advocating that a contingency plan be put in place in case the deadlines established by the state cannot be met due to funding or logistical matters. Specifically, counties are concerned that funding will be insufficient or unavailable, that there will not be a sufficient marketplace of equipment for selection (whether by lack of certification or availability under production schedules), that there may not be adequate time for deployment in advance of an election as crucial as the Presidential primary, and that there may not be adequate time to train election staff, poll workers, and voters on the new equipment.

Also

- Human Services Funding and System Reform – CCAP has developed a historical budget analysis showing the trends in state funding for human services programs over the past decade.
- Preventing Substance Abuse and Drug Overdose
- Maintaining the Shale Gas Impact Fee
- Increasing Forensic Bed Access for County Inmates with Mental Illness – Our Behavioral Health Task Force is now the stakeholder group to advise the state Department of Human Services on increasing community capacity to achieve the settlement expected from the ACLU litigation regarding forensic services access. CCAP is also providing technical support to counties who are developing local responses that DHS is now funding.
- Supporting Veterans Services
- Mandate Reform

Legislative Landscape

Pennsylvania is at the end of a two-year legislative session, which, while it officially ends Nov. 30, will for all intents and purposes be finished by mid-October, ahead of the November election where all 203 members of the House and 25 of the 50 members of the Senate are up for re-election. When the General Assembly reconvenes for the 2019-2020 session in January, there will be at least 33 new members of the House and at least five new members of the Senate. The House majority leader is also retiring, and a number of key committee chairs in both chambers will also not be returning. In addition, this is a gubernatorial election year, with incumbent Gov. Tom Wolf seeking a second term.

In anticipation of the new session, where we meet with all new legislators and all committee chairs with jurisdiction over county issues, we are refreshing our PA Counties Are and PA County Human Services Are educational pieces.

CCAP Priorities Announcement

Historically, CCAP members have decided their priorities for the coming year at their Fall Conference in November, which were then embargoed (even to members) until an official press event by the Board at the Capitol in January or February. Last year, though, to more directly and actively engage counties in announcing and sharing the priorities, we chose to reveal the priorities at the Fall Conference closing session. In advance, we put together a planning guide for counties to drum up excitement and to encourage them to plan activities in advance for December and January (news releases, resolutions, legislative meetings, etc.). That guide included suggestions for different audiences, and within a week of the Fall Conference CCAP provided members with fact sheets and sample materials such as talking points, a resolution and a customizable news release, all available on the CCAP website.

Miscellaneous

Grand Jury Report

Following the release of the grand jury report on sexual abuse in the state's Catholic churches, the House announced that it would be working to schedule legislation for a vote this fall that would extend the statute of limitations on child sexual abuse indefinitely; a House committee had previously amended the bill to get rid of the tort cap limits for local governments as well. Originally, that bill included a provision that would have made it retroactive, although that was dropped due to concerns that it would be unconstitutional. Several legislators have also begun circulating cosponsorship memos for proposed legislation to require reporting of an individual who exhibits a pattern of abuse or is likely to commit additional acts of child abuse, in addition to reporting suspected child abuse that is actively occurring. This follows a significant overhaul of the state's child abuse laws in the last five years after the Jerry Sandusky scandal at Penn State University.

New Assessment Tools

An Assessment Reform Task Force, led by the legislative Local Government Commission, recently approved several resources and projects meant to improve Pennsylvania's assessment system. Completed resources include data collection standards to promote complete and accurate collection of property characteristics, a model RFP and contracting guidelines for counties undertaking a reassessment, and a self-evaluation tool to assist counties in identifying key trends that may affect the fairness, equity and accuracy of property values. Even though Pennsylvania has some unique aspects to its property assessment system under our laws and constitution, other states may find this information useful. The tools are posted on www.pacounties.org by searching Assessment Reform.

Medical Marijuana report

CCAP's Medical Marijuana Task Force completed its report in March, available on www.pacounties.org by searching Medical Marijuana. It serves as a conversation tool for counties to engage their staff to see where the impacts may be and what policies may need to be updated as they relate to the state's new medical marijuana law, from operational aspects such as employment policies and insurance programs to programmatic considerations for human services, courts and corrections and many others. We appreciate the assistance of several other county associations who offered input on their experiences.