NACo – NCCAE Knowledge Management Forum

Idaho Association of Counties – Kelli D Brassfield, Policy Analyst

County Challenges

- Funding
- Healthcare
- Public Defense
- Records Retention
- IT
- Continuity and Implementation
- Infrastructure
- Sales Tax Distribution
- Balance of Local Government Relationships
- Invasive Species

Public Defense –
- Standards are being placed by our Idaho Public Defense Commission (1 county seat)
- Funding/Grants
- Oversight

Standards being implemented are creating unfunded mandates and are missing limitations that could help mitigate excessive spending. Some counties are concerned that the standards don’t address how to decide when the expenditures need justifying. The standards also do not address poor performance.

The standards originally suggested workload/caseload number; however, they were removed because they did not reflect Idaho. The data was pulled from out of state. The Idaho Legislature funded a work-study on workload/caseloads in Idaho.

The Idaho Legislature funded $4.2M to the Idaho Public Defense Commission. The Idaho Public Defense Commission has a grant process for counties to use these funds to stay compliant or improve the indigent defense system.

Current oversight of Public Defense is a county responsibility. Counties are required to provide the personnel, facilities and all other related services needed. All cost is the burden of the counties. Many counties are up against their levy rates for their justice funds. The grant helps but is still not sufficient to cover all public defense costs. Many believe the state should take over the public defense system since they mandate what public defense must be and how it should be provided.
There is a resolution in our association this year to have public defense oversight and personnel be transferred to the state. This resolution states counties would still provide facilities and help with other costs.

Infrastructure –
- Transportation
- Support Rural Schools (SRS)
- Broadband

Especially after the winter Idaho endured, the transportation system is hurting. Idaho experienced extremely heaving snow and flooding to follow. Counties were struggling to maintain their already breaking road systems prior to this winter. Counties have been trying to get the state to provide a permanent funding source. This last session, the Idaho Legislature did provide a little support in the direction of hopefully finding a permanent source.

Idaho has the Strategic Initiative Program, which in the past only funded state projects through the Idaho Transportation Department. The Strategic Initiatives Program is comprised of excess funds, otherwise known as “surplus” dubbing the program “The Surplus Eliminator.” This program was changed with SB1206 to allow a 40%/60% split between the state and the local governments.

This program hinges on a surplus being present. If the state does not have a surplus at the end of the year, no funds are dispersed for transportation. Although this program now includes the local governments, it does not provide for that permanent funding the counties were looking for. The Idaho Legislature has not been willing to entertain any ideas of raising levy limits.

SRS have been an issue for counties across the country. It has provided needed funding for Idaho schools, transportation, and law enforcement.

Broadband is still lacking in Idaho’s rural counties. The Idaho Legislature passed SB1333 in 2016, which does help cover the cost of broadband infrastructure in school districts. Idaho has not yet addressed getting broadband infrastructure to rural counties for business and public use. Many companies are not willing to put in the infrastructure in rural counties due to the lack of revenue earning potential.

Sales Tax Distribution –

Idaho legislators have looked at changing the method to how our sales tax is distributed. In the last legislative session HB 67a was intended to repeal the grocery tax. This bill moved all the way to the Governor, who then vetoed the bill. HB 67a increased the county distribution percentage to hold the locals harmless.

Other legislators want to redistribute funds to more populated areas. There was a proposal to phase out the current distribution formula.