

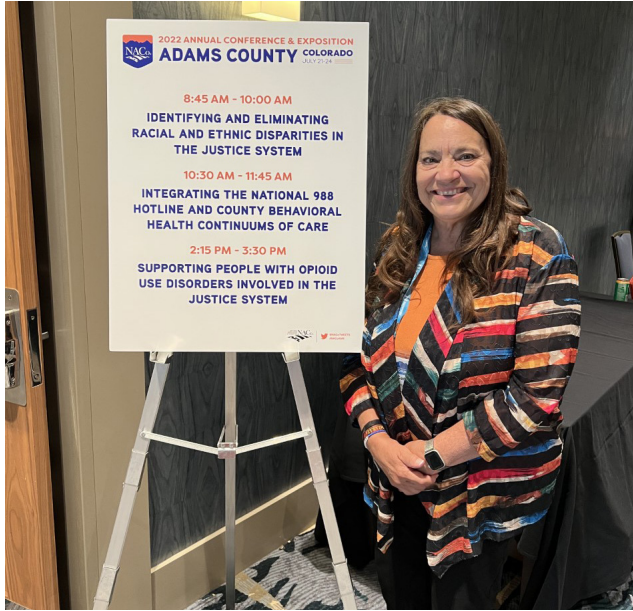
HUMAN SERVICES

Chair: Kathryn Whittington, Ashtabula County Commissioner

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Montgomery County Commissioner Carolyn Rice presented on the implementation of the 988 hotline and integration with county continuums of care at the NACo Annual Conference in 2022.

State and local governments work together to provide programs that help citizens achieve and maintain employment, protect children and older adults and, when necessary, connect families to food, transportation, child care, clothing and shelter.

While most of these programs are designed to provide services to those in crisis, counties focus on a work-first approach that addresses the root cause of the crisis and prevents the need for services in the future. To this end, county departments of job and family services, public children services agencies and child support agencies have begun to redesign service delivery and collaborate and share services in unique and innovative ways in order to meet the complex needs of clients.

Ohio's 88 counties exhibit vast differences in their economies, demographics and populations. Because of this diversity, CCAO urges the Governor and General Assembly to maintain county funding levels and flexibility between funding streams to the extent possible under federal law, so that each county

can prioritize services based on the local need and demand for services.

CCAO supports the following initiatives:

- Increasing state investments in child protection, adult protective services and family and children first councils.
- Increasing state investment and building capacity for mental health continuum of care.
- Expanding eligibility and building capacity for publicly funded child care.
- Sustaining state support for Ohio Benefits, Ohio's integrated benefit eligibility system, and enterprise document management.
- Allowing commissioners to appoint members of the Veteran Service Commissions (VSC) along with the ability to review and revise VSC budgets.
- Retaining commissioners as the authority for property tax levies that fund health districts and granting them discretion on the type, millage and duration of the levy.

COMMITTEE PRIORITIES

GROWING CONCERNS FOR CHILD PROTECTION

One of the most difficult tasks facing counties is the administration of programs and services for abused and neglected children. The child protection system faces many challenges: the placement crisis, the need for a strengthened continuum of care, and workforce shortages. The system has grown to serve more children in the last decade as a result of the opiate epidemic and more children entering care primarily due to behavioral health needs, developmental disability needs, and as a diversion from juvenile corrections rather than abuse or neglect.

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The children in care today remain in the system longer and have more complicated needs. The cost of care remains high across all placement settings, especially for children with high-acuity needs. Even counties who have successfully passed levies to cover these important services are struggling to provide the resources required. When reunification is possible, many of these children need additional services to deal with the residual effects to their mental health, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and behavioral and learning difficulties.

With respect to children entering the child protection system due to behavioral health needs, significant developmental/intellectual disabilities, and from juvenile corrections, securing timely, appropriate, available placements often prove challenging for public children services agencies (PCSAs). Ohio has a lack of community alternatives, viable treatment homes, and other placement options due to staff shortages, particularly at residential facilities. CCAO supports cross agency collaboration in identifying solutions to this crisis, including the creation of short-term children's crisis stabilization options.

The 2019 and 2021 state budgets added \$75 million per state fiscal year to the state child protection allocation that flows to counties, bringing the total investment to \$135 million per fiscal year. These investments must be sustained and increased in order for the system to meet expected challenges.

Furthermore, the overall system is experiencing a serious workforce shortage that places a crucial system in even greater peril. County caseworkers witness the destruction of families and traumatic situations for children, leading to a high level of trauma in their own work experience. Our child protection workforce must be reinforced by keeping caseloads down and making sure supervisors have the training and supports they need to retain qualified workers. Innovative programs such as tuition reimbursement or loan repayment could provide support and incentivize caseworkers to remain with a county agency. Additionally, mobile crisis units should be available across the state to assist counties with severe staffing shortages or critical situations. If a long-term solution is not found that can address the strains on this system, a generation of children will be living with the aftermath.

Multi-system youth account for a high percentage of placement costs across Ohio. Multi-system youth are those in need of services from two or more of the following systems: child protective services, mental health and addiction services, developmental disabilities services, and juvenile court. The 2021 state budget allocated \$25 million GRF per year to assist counties in providing services to multi-system youth. CCAO supports the continuation of these funds that aid counties with increasing placement costs.

CCAO STRONGLY ENCOURAGES AN INCREASED STATE INVESTMENT IN CHILD PROTECTION TO ENLIST AND RETAIN QUALITY CASE WORKERS AND RECRUIT FOSTER PARENTS FOR THE INCREASING NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO NEED PLACEMENTS, AS WELL AS SUPPORT BEST PRACTICES AND IN-HOME SERVICES.

In the 2019 state budget, the General Assembly also declared its intent to cease the practice of custody relinquishment for the sole purpose of gaining access to services for multi-system youth. The 2021 state budget appropriated \$16 million in each fiscal year the Department of Medicaid "Multi-System Youth Custody Relinquishment" fund for this purpose. CCAO supports the continuation of funds to prevent custody relinquishment.

PCSAs can safely reduce the number of children entering foster care by implementing alternative response. This allows agencies to partner with families to use wrap around services before a placement is needed, supporting relatives and other kin to prevent children from being placed with unrelated foster or congregate care and aggressively seeking permanent adoptive homes when children cannot be reunified with their birth family. Unfortunately, many counties have had to reduce or eliminate these best practices due to high placement costs – meaning higher expenditures and poorer

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outcomes in the long run.

CCAO strongly encourages an increased state investment in child protection to enlist and retain quality case workers and recruit foster parents for the increasing number of children who need placements, as well as support best practices and in-home services. The increased investment should include greater resources for the Kinship Permanency Incentive Program, which is currently funded at just \$1 million per year, in order to support relative caregivers who can provide an alternative to the formal childcare system.

In 2021, the Family First Prevention Services Act (Family First) was implemented nationwide. Through dramatic federal funding changes, Family First shifts the focus of the child welfare system to prevention – keeping children out of foster care and with their families – by encouraging states to support families through evidence-based programs in mental health services, substance abuse treatment and improved parenting skills. While the federal government will provide a 50% match for funding these programs, the other 50% of the cost will fall to the states. This is a transformational change that will also require a shift in practice and training at the county level. CCAO supports continued state funding for prevention services, as well as capacity building funds for such services and the expansion of mental health prevention services options as phased implementation continues.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Counties administer many public assistance programs, including food assistance, cash assistance, TANF and Medicaid. Some of these programs, like Ohio Works First cash assistance and SNAP, have work requirements. Counties strive to make these programs meaningful and effective. SNAP Employment and Training operations receive a small amount of operational support from ODJFS. CCAO encourages additional investments in this employment and training program so that it can be a true path toward self-sufficiency for individuals



receiving public assistance. County programming through the TANF-funded Prevention, Retention and Contingency program is critical in both supporting self-sufficiency and supporting work. CCAO supports maintaining funding for PRC programs, as well as the ability to determine the design of the programs locally.

During the federal public health emergency, states were prohibited from disenrolling clients from Medicaid. Under Ohio law, when the federal government ends the public health emergency, county JFS agencies will be expected to complete eligibility redeterminations for all enrollees within 60 days with a potential 30-day extension. This redetermination process will be an increased workload for county agencies, on top of continuing the current administration of SNAP, Medicaid and other programs. Additionally, customer service demands will be very high when SNAP maximum allotments, as permitted by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service due to the public health emergency, are phased out.

CCAO supports additional flexible funding for county administrative work to complete these determinations and continue transformational casework for JFS clients. County agencies strive to connect Ohio's public assistance recipients with meaningful work and training programs. As we look toward connecting people to the workforce and jobs that enable them to be self-sufficient, additional strategies around mitigating the benefits cliff should be pursued. These strategies could include financial literacy programs, supportive services for individuals in training, incentives for retaining employment and offering counties the ability to implement other such programs. CCAO supports flexible funding to implement these strategies.

MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES

CCAO supports increased state investment in mental health and addiction services. It is crucial that Ohio expand the availability of services to support individuals and families in need, especially those in crisis situations. Investing in the full continuum of care, including prevention, treatment, and recovery services and supports, will strengthen our communities. Maximum flexibility in funding streams will allow local boards and communities to expand

CCAO SUPPORTS BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CHILD CARE, ESPECIALLY FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS AND MEETING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN THE FOSTER AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM.

capacity of services most needed in their local areas. Strengths and opportunities for growth vary from county to county, so flexibility is crucial as Ohio works to build out the continuum of care. CCAO supports investing in and expanding mental health services for Ohio's children and adults of all ages.

CHILD CARE

As counties continue to support families and workforce development in their communities, child care continues to emerge as a key piece of the puzzle. Counties administer the publicly funded child care system in Ohio and, through these services, understand that gaps in provider coverage exist across the state. Additionally, many individuals, particularly women, are unable to afford the cost of care for their children and thus leave or remain absent from the workforce. Child care is a vital workforce support for our communities, including county employees. CCAO supports increasing the eligibility threshold for publicly funded child care to 200% of the federal poverty level. CCAO supports building capacity for child care, especially for infants and toddlers and meeting the unique needs of children in the foster and child welfare system.

PRENATAL TO THREE SERVICES

Counties recognize that children who are born healthy and grow up in healthy, safe environments have better physical and mental health throughout their lives. Expanding services available to our youngest Ohioans strengthens our communities in the long term. CCAO supports increased access to home visiting programs, increased funding for early intervention services, and building the capacity of Ohio's workforce in these crucial programs. Further

consistent health coverage and care is foundational for every young child and as such families with young children need access to quality and timely pediatric and early childhood mental health services.

FAMILY & CHILDREN FIRST COUNCILS

Counties have worked diligently to piece together a seamless delivery system for families seeking assistance for their children out of a patchwork of state and federal programs that tend to leave gaps, create overlaps in services and often contain conflicting regulations. Local Family and Children First Councils work to reduce duplication of services and to help families navigate health, social and human services. In order to perform these coordinating functions, each county, regardless of size, was traditionally allocated \$20,000 to administer Family and Children First Councils. This amount was reduced in FY 2010 and is currently funded at \$15,750 per county in the FY 22-23 biennium. CCAO recommends appropriately funding the administration of local Family and Children First Councils by increasing the allocation to at least \$50,000 per county.

ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Counties are charged with providing a uniform adult protective services program for older adults who require protection from abuse, neglect or exploitation. Counties are the logical delivery agent for adult protective services due to the close proximity necessary to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect and the legal relationships with prosecutors, sheriffs and courts to enforce protective services. Elder abuse requiring adult protective services interventions can range from physical abuse, emotional or verbal abuse, self-neglect or financial exploitation.

The Adult Protective Services System (APS) has received increased policy attention in recent years, but funding has not always kept pace with expectations placed on counties or the aging of Ohio's population. Program reforms in the FY 18-19 budget expanded the scope of Ohio laws against the abuse and exploitation of elders and added many different types of professionals to the list of "mandatory reporters," including individuals working in the financial sector. Over time, these

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changes will greatly expand the number of reports of abuse, neglect, or exploitation that counties must investigate.

In FY 22-23, the legislature appropriated \$5.72 million per year to fund APS, an increase of \$1.49 million per year, allotting \$65,000 to each county. In order to ensure victims of elder abuse receive core adult protective services, the state must financially support the administration and delivery of such services.

CHILD SUPPORT

As county child support agencies increase paternity establishments and overall collections, children attain a higher standard of living. The child support program has utilized current funding, technology and tools to a great extent over the past 15+ years and is now transitioning to incorporate newer models aimed at assisting lower income families. Several strategies are being piloted across the state. They include early intervention programs; collaboration with both workforce agencies and social service agencies to assist with barriers that obligor parents may have to obtaining and maintaining employment; parenting time engagement; strategies to improve parenting and co-parenting skills; and person-centered case management. In order to incorporate more of these strategies across the state for more families, the program needs additional support from the State and an upgrade in technology.

CCAO supports an increase in the state match allocation to county child support enforcement agencies. The 2021 state budget increased the state match by \$2.943 million per fiscal year. This allocation had previously been flat funded for ten years. CCAO also supports a statutory change to allow child support to follow a child who has been

CCAO SUPPORTS A STATUTORY CHANGE TO ALLOW CHILD SUPPORT TO FOLLOW A CHILD WHO HAS BEEN PLACED IN THE CUSTODY OF A THIRD-PARTY CARETAKER.

placed in the custody of a third-party caretaker.

HUMAN SERVICES TECHNOLOGY, MODERNIZATION AND EFFICIENCY INITIATIVES

CCAO appreciates the investments the state has made in modernizing technology, such as through Ohio Benefits which provides combined eligibility determination for Medicaid, TANF and SNAP and the development of enterprise document management that allows sharing of essential information across programs. CCAO has seen the impact these investments have on service delivery that is more efficient, can be nimble in a crisis and streamlines the process for clients.

It is critical that work continue to ensure these systems are efficient and user friendly to both county workers and the clients served. CCAO supports work to streamline the systems so county JFS agencies can focus on less transactional work and more on transformational work, as well as continued state investment to refine these technologies, including financial support for ongoing training, system maintenance and upgrades. County shared services is an important service delivery mechanism. CCAO supports an open dialogue between the state and counties in the governance and structure of shared services.

CHANGES TO THE COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE COMMISSION LAW

CCAO supports initiatives to review the law and operation of Veteran Service Commissions to be sure enhanced and coordinated services are available to our brave men and women of the armed services returning home. The language in ORC Section 5901.11 regarding funding the Veterans Service Commission with up to .5 mills on the assessed value of the property of the county should be studied by the Department of Veteran Services to identify alternative funding options to replace current county funding. CCAO supports the enhanced ability for the boards of county commissioners to review and revise the budget of the Veterans Service Commission, especially as it pertains to the administrative and operational expenses of the Commission.

As it relates to operational expenses, there is a special need to be sure that the Veterans Service

Commission does not have the authority to provide for staff compensation increases that exceed the average increase provided to other appointing authorities through the appropriation process. Additional checks and balances are needed to ensure that needy veterans are receiving essential financial assistance and other services in a cost efficient and responsible manner that fully utilizes other health, human service and employment programs. The Department of Veteran Services should provide funding for any mandated training. Finally, boards of county commissioners should become the appointing authority for members of Veteran Service Commissions. If this authority is not granted, commissioners should be given the ability to appoint two of the five members.

LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENTS

CCAO supports giving boards of county commissioners and county councils discretion regarding the submission, type (renewal, increase, reduction or replacement), millage and duration of property tax levies submitted to the voters for the purpose of funding a health district. If legislative action allows for a joint health district to be formed that covers multiple counties, commissioners should also have discretion over multi-county levies. Should this discretion not be granted to boards of county commissioners, it is important commissioners should retain the levy authority, in order to maintain some accountability and to facilitate a public forum in which health officials may discuss and justify the need for the levy.