

RESTORING THE PARTNERSHIP



The 2005-2006 Legislative Priorities
of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio

County government and state government

are partners in the delivery of vital services to the citizens of Ohio.

Counties are essentially an arm of state government in delivering health & human services programs; administering justice & prosecuting criminals; improving infrastructure; managing the complex property tax system; and fostering needed economic & community development. In some of these areas, the state/county partnership has been challenged.



In recent years, the state has been shifting more costs to counties in the areas of human services, indigent defense as well as court and jail operations. In addition, there have been freezes and a reduction to the Local Government Funds, which help pay for many state-mandated responsibilities performed by counties. At the same time, counties have been asking the General Assembly for tools to improve efficiency and to modernize county operations. Working with lawmakers, counties have made some progress, yet there is more work to be done. Counties are creatures of state statute and only can act when specifically authorized by state law, unlike home rule municipalities.

To restore and strengthen the state/county partnership, County Commissioners are asking the General Assembly and the Administration for assistance. We believe that this partnership must be anchored by a firm commitment to provide counties with adequate funding, must provide broad flexibility for the efficient delivery of services and must prevent unfunded mandates. We look forward to working with lawmakers and the Administration toward these objectives.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUND

The General Assembly has frozen or cut the local government funds during each of the last four fiscal years. According to the Ohio Department of Taxation, this has resulted in a loss of revenue equal to \$340 million. **CCAO urges the General Assembly to restore the permanent law statutory "revenue sharing" formulas for all three local government funds.**

RENEW STATE CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (STATE ISSUE II)

HUMAN SERVICES

Welfare Reform – Counties have delivered success for Ohio by dramatically reducing the state's cash assistance case load and developing more flexible, effective and efficient methods for supporting families. **CCAO urges the General Assembly to fully fund key support programs, such as Medicaid and food stamps, and remain committed to local coordination of services by not earmarking funds for specific programs at the state level.**

Children Services – The state contributes only about 6% of the funding to sustain children services, placing Ohio 49th out of the 50 states in the percentage of funding spent for child welfare. **If counties are to meet the growing needs of families in crisis, the commitment to funding these programs must be strengthened.**

Child Support - Ohio's child support system impacts 40% of children in the state. Counties have successfully increased overall collections and paternity establishments, resulting in a higher standard of living for many children. However, Ohio has significantly reduced the state allocation for child support in the past two budgets. Consequently, many counties have had to use local dollars to fill the gap. Most counties simply will not have the resources to fill the gap in the next biennium. **CCAO strongly recommends restoring the state's maintenance of effort contribution for child support funding.**

MANAGING THE COUNTY WORKFORCE

Counties are seeking to reform Ohio's civil service laws to better enable appointing authorities to manage their workforce in challenging times with limited taxpayer resources. Counties need the authority to reduce work week hours and to temporarily furlough employees due to lack of funds. These options can address short-term funding and work place demands, while layoffs can address long-term challenges. **Counties urge the General Assembly to enact the recommendations of the Civil Service Review Commission to update Ohio's civil service laws.**

Ohio voters approved the State Capital Improvement Program in 1987 and the legislature adopted enabling legislation the following year. It authorized the issuance of \$120 million in bonds per year for 10 years to finance water supply, waste water, storm water, road, bridge and solid waste facilities. The state reauthorized the State Capital Improvement Program for an additional 10 years in 1995. **CCAO supports renewing the State Capital Improvement Program for another 10 years.**

TAX REFORM

CCAO urges the General Assembly to undertake fair and comprehensive tax reform that will convert Ohio's outmoded tax system to one that will make the state economically competitive, will attract high paying jobs, and will provide adequate revenue to fund important state and local programs at appropriate levels. The revised tax system should also provide better balance between taxes paid by individuals and by businesses. CCAO, in particular, supports broadening the sales and use tax base to include more services. Finally, **if tax reform results in the repeal or modification of major local taxes, the General Assembly should provide for full replacement of lost revenue to local governments.**

PUBLIC DEFENDER FUNDING

The state continues to breach its commitment to reimburse counties for 50% of the costs of providing assigned counsel and running public defender offices. **The General Assembly should repeal the "proportional reduction" language in the Revised Code and should appropriate adequate dollars to reimburse counties fully for 50% of the cost of Constitutionally mandated legal representation.**



From left, Executive Director Larry Long; Senior Policy Analysts Suzanne Alexander, Brad Cole, John Leutz, Cheryl Subler, and Research and Information Manager Doug Putnam.

Executive Director Larry Long is your primary contact for issues involving the *Local Government Fund and general administration of county government.*

Senior Policy Analyst Suzanne Alexander is your contact for *human services.*

Senior Policy Analyst Brad Cole is your primary contact on the issues of *infrastructure, environment, and economic development.*

Senior Policy Analyst John Leutz is your contact in the areas of *administration of justice and public safety.*

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