



May 13, 2015

SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT SUBCOMMITTEE TESTIMONY

Chairman Jordan, Vice Chair Gentile, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Suzanne Dulaney, CCAO Executive Director. On behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you items of importance to counties in the state biennial budget, HB 64.

INDIGENT DEFENSE

While I know indigent defense is also being discussed in the Corrections subcommittee, I want to bring it to your attention given its importance to our association. As you know, every state has a constitutional mandate to provide legal representation to indigent persons. Ohio has chosen to transfer this responsibility to its counties, initially reimbursing them for 50 percent of the costs incurred for providing indigent counsel. Today, state reimbursement stands at 40 percent. \$12 million in additional GRF funding would provide 50 percent reimbursement. The total GRF contribution including this additional \$12 million CCAO is seeking is still more than \$5 million below the GRF appropriation in 2009. Please note that this request is being done in conjunction with our ongoing support for broader reforms to the public defender system to ensure every dollar is spent wisely and meets the state's obligation to provide effective counsel.

UNFUNDED MANDATES

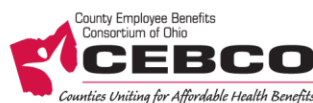
Adult Protective Services – Current law states counties are to investigate reports, evaluate the need for and to the extent of available funds, provide or arrange for protective services. As introduced, HB 64, eliminated “to the extent of available funds” as well as the county obligation to “provide” protective services. We are unclear what would be meant by an unconditioned duty to “arrange for” services. The House returned the language to current law. Given that this is another top priority for CCAO, we are asking for the support of this committee and will also work with the Workforce subcommittee on this item.

Mandate to Compensate Livestock Owners for Dog Kills – Please support language included in the budget bill to remove the mandate on counties to reimburse livestock owners for animal kills caused by dogs and also removes the requirement that animal control officers investigate animal kills caused by coyotes and black vultures since the State of Ohio stopped reimbursing for animal kills caused by such creatures years ago.



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Repeal Mandate to Partially Reimburse Vendors for Adjusting Cash Registers – Please support language in the bill to remove a mandate on counties to reimburse vendors, upon request, \$50 per cash register for making adjustments when the local sales and use tax is increased. The state does not have a similar requirement.

NEW TOOLS IN THE TOOLBOX

Remove the Population Threshold for Counties to Establish Land Banks – Please support language to remove the current population threshold of 60,000 or more so that any county may use this economic development tool.

Sale and Lease Back Authority – Please support language that would enable political subdivisions to enter into an agreement to sell property and lease it back. Agreements then typically include provisions addressing improvements to the property, which can be a big challenge for counties in the absence of this tool. We will also soon share some additional language on this topic that we are working on with the Associated General Contractors for your consideration.

Electronic Poll Books – CCAO is joining with election officials to support \$15 million to counties to purchase, or reimburse for obtaining, electronic poll books. We also support an amendment from Senator Uecker that would permissively authorize the Board of Elections to reduce the number of poll workers from 4 to 2 when using them.

Local Government Safety Capital Grant Program – The bill currently establishes this program under the Local Government Innovation Council to award grants to political subdivisions for purchasing vehicles, equipment, facilities, or systems needed to enhance public safety, with maximum grant awards set at \$100,000.

County Courthouse Needs Assessment – The bill currently provides \$150,000 each fiscal year for Ohio History Connection to conduct a statewide assessment of needed repairs to county courthouses listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Airports – Counties own the vast majority of general aviation airports, which often serve as an important component to local economic development. The bill currently provides \$5.25 million per year for loans and grants to airports and requires ODOT to work on legislation that moves aviation fuel from sales tax to the gas tax by June 30, 2017. We encourage your support.

Medicaid for Jail Inmates Pilot Program – Currently included in HB 64 is language that would require the Ohio Department of Medicaid to operate a time limited (2 year) pilot program for two counties (Montgomery and Jackson) under which Medicaid eligibility is re-established only for 30 days prior to release, with the goal of reducing recidivism. We know this item will be reviewed by the Medicaid Standing Committee.

AGRICULTURE, DEVELOPMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

Soil and Water Conservation District Match Funding – The bill presently increases soil and water districts funding by \$2 million per year to bring the state/local match program up to 50/50 funding, which we support. We will be working with the Corrections subcommittee and encourage your support.

OSU Extension - CCAO supports increasing the level of state support for OSU Extension provided that an appropriate share of new funds will be used to relieve county general fund contributions. As introduced, the funding level was flat at \$23 million per year. The House added a 5% increase to the line item.

Agriculture and Water Quality Programming – CCAO has noted that several proven agricultural and water quality programs such as Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center and research facilities studying water quality were flat funded in the as introduced version. In the wake of what happened in Toledo just six months ago and other serious water quality issues arising around the state, it seems clear that status quo poses a significant risk to Ohio's economic climate. Please consider strategic investments in agriculture and water quality to complement other legislative actions taken to date to address algae blooms. The House added 5% to OARDC and the Sea Grant program.

Fair Boards – Please support the grant program for capital improvements for county and independent fairgrounds with a 2:1 state match currently in the budget bill.

STABLE FUNDING FOR SERVICES & MANDATED FUNCTIONS

As part of our Ways & Means Testimony, we shared our views today on various tax provisions being discussed as part of the budget process. I have attached the testimony in case it proves helpful to you to understand how decisions you will be making in those areas impact county government.

Thank you for your patience as we hit the highlights of the various ways this state biennial budget impacts county government. Given that counties operate as local branches of state government, with most state programs and services being delegated to county government, our success for the citizens of Ohio relies upon a strong state and county partnership. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have