

# LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

## COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

### COUNTY PRIORITIES SPOTLIGHT: MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

As the nation recognizes May as Mental Health Awareness Month, counties are once again sounding the alarm about this priority issue. There is a crucial need for urgent action beyond mere awareness. It's time to rebuild and adequately fund Pennsylvania's community-based mental health system. Counties are calling for the legislature to increase funding for county mental health services by \$250 million above current funding levels to begin the process of rebuilding Pennsylvania's community-based mental health system.

Pennsylvania residents have waited long enough, and 16 years of not keeping pace with inflation and increases in demand have unraveled the mental health system. It is a constant struggle to maintain community-based services such as outpatient treatment for adults and children, crisis intervention, school assistance programs, support for individuals leaving state facilities, treatment, community consultation and education, day services and prevention.

It is time to call for a Mental Health Action Month, urging a significant investment in the county mental health system to begin rebuilding. Counties across the commonwealth support a broad-spectrum approach to addressing this crisis as they coordinate care to meet the diverse needs of all of the residents of their communities. Increasing funding of county mental health services will improve outcomes and maximize the opportunities for long-term success of our community-based behavioral health system. Without a strong partnership from the state to provide the funding to meet the ever-increasing need for these services, additional costs will ultimately be incurred by taxpayers long-term.

More information on this top county priority can be found on the Priorities [webpage](#) of the CCAP website.

---

### HOUSE ADVANCES PRECANVASSING BILL FOR COUNTIES

On May 1, the House of Representatives **advanced** HB **847**, sponsored by Representative Scott Conklin (D-Centre), which expands the ability of counties to prec canvass all mail-in and absentee ballots up to seven days prior to election day. This change would enhance election administration without compromising security and is a top priority issue for counties this year.

There are many areas of Act 77 that need clarification by the General Assembly and administration to help counties fulfill their responsibilities in election administration. However, this simple, rational, commonsense change by itself would give counties more time to prepare mail-in and absentee ballots for counting and would help manage workloads and resources, ensuring timely availability of results. Counties hope the narrow focus of this bill will encourage the Senate to act quickly to move the bill as currently written to the Governor's desk so that it can be implemented for what promises to be a high turnout, high profile General Election in November.

---

### RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW BILL ADVANCES IN SENATE

On April 30, the Senate State Government Committee approved SB **525**, sponsored by committee chair Senator Cris Dush (R-Jefferson).

SB 525 would create a new process by which agencies may petition the Office of Open Records (OOR) for relief from a vexatious requestor. Once the review process is completed, if OOR determines that an agency's petition for relief should be granted, OOR must put out a final opinion with appropriate relief that includes, but is not limited to, an order that

the agency does not need to comply with future requests from the vexatious requestor for no more than one year. Vexatious requesters are defined as those who use the Right-to-Know Law (RTKL) with malicious intent to intimidate, harass, or punish an agency, which results in slowing the agency from completing other important work and wasting taxpayer resources. SB 525 now heads to the full Senate for consideration.

Reforming the RTKL is a top priority for counties in 2024. Counties believe that government has a responsibility for transparency and accountability to its residents and stakeholders. There is a balance that must be maintained among access, privacy and security concerns. Counties and other local governments have seen a steady increase in recent years in the number of individuals using the law in this manner, which was never contemplated by the General Assembly when the original statute was passed.

---

## LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS MOVING IN LEGISLATURE

House Bill [1463](#), introduced by Representatives Jessica Benham (D-Allegheny) and Dan Miller (D-Allegheny), passed the House on April 30 by a vote of [184-16](#).

This legislation aims to create a universal definition for dispatchers and codify 911 workers, or telecommunicators, as first responders. This classification allows these individuals to qualify for federal benefits and receive recognition for their role in providing lifesaving assistance. CCAP will continue to monitor this legislation to assess what broader implications this bill may have for counties. HB 1463 now goes to the Senate for consideration.

HB [1207](#), introduced by Representative Robert Freeman (D-Northampton), removes size stipulations associated with land bank jurisdiction, allowing all municipalities to establish land banks on a voluntary basis. Land banks give municipalities, including counties, a means to convert vacant, abandoned, and tax-delinquent properties into assets for productive purposes.

HB 1207 was approved by the House last June with bipartisan support [147-56](#) and was [reported](#) out as committed from the Senate Housing and Urban Development Committee on April 10. The bill is now awaiting action by the Senate Appropriations Committee before a final passage vote can be taken by the full Senate, which could occur as early as the week of May 6.

---

## COUNTIES TESTIFY ON LOCAL TAX OPTIONS DURING HOUSE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE HEARING

On April 29, Frank Mazza, CCAP Director of Government Relations, [testified](#) before the House Local Government Committee on [HB 678](#) and county tax options.

HB 678 represents a positive step toward advancing discussions on property tax reform that would include counties. The bill would authorize counties to levy a 1% sales and use tax, with the revenues allocated to counties and municipalities. Allocations to municipalities, including counties, would be based on the proportion of the assessed value of tax-exempt properties in each municipality within the county. Allocations would be used to fund core services or reduce local tax rates.

Pennsylvania's counties have long advocated for options, such as a sales, earned income or personal income tax, that would allow them to diversify their tax base. Providing counties additional taxing options would alleviate burdens on property taxpayers and provide flexibility to tailor their taxes to their local economic and demographic conditions. As with individuals managing investment portfolios, though, there is no one "best" mix of taxes for all of our 67 counties. Our counties are rural and urban, their residents have different demographics and incomes, and their communities are built around different economies and different balances between residential and commercial properties. Thus, having options will give each county the ability to decide what portfolio of local taxes works most equitably for their constituents.

This week's hearing was the first step in what counties hope will be a broader discussion about providing counties with new ways to address revenue challenges and fund services by adding more options to their tax base. HB 678 has not yet been scheduled for a committee vote.

---

## IFO ISSUES APRIL REVENUE UPDATE

The State's Independent Fiscal Office (IFO) released the monthly revenue [update](#) for April. General Fund collections for April exceeded expectations, totaling \$5.69 billion, marking a \$43 million (0.8%) surplus against the IFO's official estimate. The surplus was driven by collections from inheritance tax and escheats but offset by lower-than-expected personal tax incomes (PIT) collections.

April collections were \$30 million (+0.5%) higher than collections for April 2023. Year-to-date revenues for fiscal year 2023-2024 reached \$38.48 billion, which is \$326 million (or 0.9%) higher than predicted.

---

## CCAP RESOLUTIONS PROCESS REMINDER

During the end of May and beginning of June, CCAP policy committees will be holding their annual virtual meetings to consider resolutions amending the [Pennsylvania County Platform](#), CCAP's comprehensive policy document determined by counties.

All CCAP members are invited to review the Platform and to send any proposed resolutions for additions, changes or deletions to CCAP Government Relations staff at [PAcountiesGR@pacounties.org](mailto:PAcountiesGR@pacounties.org), or to discuss them with CCAP policy committee chairs.

A membership discussion and vote on the resolutions will be held in conjunction with the CCAP Annual Conference from August 4-7 in Gettysburg, Adams County. An overview of the process, timeline and related materials can be found on the CCAP Policy [webpage](#). Deadline to submit resolutions for consideration by policy committees is **May 28, 2024**.

---

[Other CCAP Publications](#)

CCAP | PO Box 60769, Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769

[Unsubscribe cloudsub@pacounties.org](mailto:cloudsub@pacounties.org)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent by [byccap@pacounties.org](mailto:byccap@pacounties.org) powered by



Try email marketing for free today!