

LEGISLATIVE BULLETIN

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA THE VOICE OF PENNSYLVANIA COUNTIES

IN THIS EDITION:

- **County Priorities Spotlight: NACo Commission on Mental Health Releases Findings**
- **House Vacancies Change Chamber Dynamics**
- **FCC Votes to Lower Call Rates for Incarcerated People**
- **Legislative Hearing Held on Assessment**
- **Cybersecurity Educational Opportunities**
- **Committee Hears Comments on Urban Agriculture Proposal**
- **Report Released on Natural Gas Tax Structures**
- **CCAP Members: Help Shape CCAP's Policy Positions**

COUNTY PRIORITIES SPOTLIGHT: NACo COMMISSION ON MENTAL HEALTH RELEASES FINDINGS

Seventy-five percent of Americans rely on county-based behavioral health services, and counties are facing the rising challenges of increasing caseloads, declining outcomes, staffing difficulties, and rising costs. The mental health crisis is exacerbated by the fact that one-third of the population lives in counties with a mental health professional shortage. In response, NACo's Commission on Mental Health and Wellbeing has released **From Crisis to Solutions: Policy Catalysts for Improved Outcomes**.

Formed in 2023 in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Commission identified bipartisan priorities to alleviate the causes of America's mental health crisis: fortifying local crisis response systems, rectifying exclusionary Medicaid policies, bolstering the mental health workforce, and ensuring mental health parity enforcement.

These priorities lead to four recommendations for federal action and reform:

1. Amending exclusionary policies under Medicaid by expanding benefits and eligibility while removing restrictions on care,
2. Enhancing local crisis response systems by funding and coordinating resources at the county level,
3. Strengthening the mental health workforce by creating pathways for professionals and increasing funding for work corps in underserved areas, and
4. Enforcing mental health parity by uniformly implementing national laws across public and private insurers and providers.

The Commission's report goes into detail on each of these four pillars for reform, documenting the unmet needs of vulnerable populations while showcasing county-level case studies that illustrate how these policy changes can improve outcomes locally through collaborations between counties and community organizations. The **report** also includes a section on recommendations for county policy makers interested in building on the Commission's efforts and successes.

HOUSE VACANCIES CHANGE CHAMBER DYNAMICS

On July 17, two House Democrats resigned from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Rep. Donna Bullock (D-Philadelphia) and Rep. Stephen Kinsey (D-Philadelphia). This leaves the House divided at 101 Republicans and 100 Democrats, though with Rep. Joseph Kerwin (R-Dauphin) on National Guard Deployment leave, if the

chamber were to convene it would be 100-100 in available votes until a special election can be held to fill the vacancies.

Following the recent resignations, House Speaker Joanna McClinton (D-Philadelphia) immediately scheduled a special election for the 195th and 201st districts for September 17, a week before the House is expected to return to session. For the 2023-2024 session, Democrats took majority control the House at the start of the of the session with a 102-101 margin they have since maintained through several special elections.

FCC VOTES TO LOWER CALL RATES FOR INCARCERATED PEOPLE

On July 18, 2024, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted to adopt new rules consistent with the [Martha Wright-Reed Just and Reasonable Communications Act](#). The new rules will have significant impacts on the contracts county jails have with their Incarcerated People’s Communications Services (IPCS) providers.

Included in the new rulemaking:

- Lower per-minute rate caps for voice services and interim per-minute rate caps for video communications services, such as video visits (shown in the table below)
- Simplified pricing structure by incorporating all consumer costs into the rate caps
- Limiting the costs associated with safety and security measures that can be recovered in the per-minute rates
- Allowing IPCS providers to offer alternate pricing plans
- Prohibiting IPCS providers from making site commission payments, subject to a transition period

Tier (ADP)	Audio Rate Caps (Permanent) (Per minute)		Video Rate Caps (Interim) (Per minute)	
	Current Caps	New Caps	Current Caps	New Caps
Prisons (any ADP)	\$0.14*	\$0.06	N/A	\$0.16
Large Jails (1,000+)	\$0.16*	\$0.06	N/A	\$0.11
Med. Jails (350-999)	\$0.21	\$0.07	N/A	\$0.12
Small Jails (100-349)	\$0.21	\$0.09	N/A	\$0.14
Very Small Jails (0-99)	\$0.21	\$0.12	N/A	\$0.25

** Current cap figures that include a \$0.02 additive for facility costs, which equates to the allowance made for facility-incurred IPCS costs reflected in contractually-prescribed site commissions, the closest available comparison. ADP means average daily population.*

The FCC additionally created a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that would review permanent rate caps for video services and explore quality of service issues such as dropped calls or frozen video screens.

The compliance date affecting a county’s existing contract will vary based on the jail’s size and contract provisions. Compliance will begin in a range from January 1, 2025, to April 1, 2026.

Additional information from the FCC can be found in the [July 18, 2024 News Release](#) and [July 22, 2024 Report and Order](#).

LEGISLATIVE HEARING HELD ON ASSESSMENT

The Senate Democratic Policy Committee held a public hearing on July 15, discussing the current system of property reassessments in Pennsylvania. Chair Senator Katie Muth (D-Montgomery) opened the hearing with remarks on the issues associated with the commonwealth’s property reassessment system, noting that Pennsylvania is the only state without regularly mandated property reassessments.

Various public officials and citizens from across the commonwealth emphasized the urgent need for scheduled statewide reassessments to address outdated property value data. Dr. Melissa Friez, Superintendent of the Mount Lebanon School District, highlighted the financial challenges her district faces due to the lack of property reassessments, particularly the financial strain caused by tax refunds. The testifiers strongly advocated for mandatory reassessments, stressing the importance of keeping property assessments current to ensure equitable taxation for everyone.

Counties play a crucial role in administering and maintaining the real property assessment system for all local governments, to assure fairness and equity in assessment administration for all property owners. In addition, counties fully bear the financial burden of performing these assessments on behalf of all local governments.

CYBERSECURITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

CISA Last Mile Election Security Webinar – July 31 at 12 p.m.

CCAP has partnered with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), the federal agency responsible for protecting critical U.S. infrastructure, to share information on the [Last Mile Election Security Toolkit](#) ahead of this November's general election.

CCAP and CISA will be holding a webinar on Wednesday, July 31, at noon, where Election Security Advisor (ESA) Dave Tackett, will discuss the products and services available from CISA to help election officials and election infrastructure stakeholders protect against the cyber, physical, and operational security risks to election infrastructure during the 2024 election cycle. Information to access the webinar can be found on the [CCAP Calendar](#).

Annual Cybersecurity Summit – October 2-3, 2024

CCAP, in partnership with Harrisburg University Professional Development, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit 16, will be hosting its annual Cybersecurity Summit October 2-3, 2024. With the theme of "Our Journey Together – Collaborating to Mitigate Cyber Risk," the Summit will focus on leveraging the collective expertise of the public and private sector at all levels to navigate the complex landscape of cybersecurity. The Summit will be held in a hybrid format, allowing attendees to either participate online or in-person at Harrisburg University. Interested individuals can register [online](#).

COMMITTEE HEARS COMMENTS ON URBAN AGRICULTURE PROPOSAL

On July 16, the House Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee convened a hearing to discuss [House Bill 920](#), which proposes the establishment of the Urban Agriculture Incentive Zones Act. This legislation seeks to incentivize agricultural production in urban areas by reassessing vacant, unimproved, or blighted lands for small-scale agricultural purposes, such as crop cultivation or livestock production.

The proposed legislation assigns counties the dual responsibilities of evaluating unused land to determine its suitability for agricultural use and ensuring compliance with related contractual obligations. Counties have long been responsible for conducting property assessments, including administering the Clean and Green Act which provides preferential assessment for eligible farm and forest land. House Bill 920 would further expand the scope of the Clean and Green Act by qualifying additional farmland for preferential assessments introducing a new set of requirements and complexities to their assessment responsibilities.

Counties have several logistical questions and concerns related to assessment of properties in these zones as they would play a critical role in implementing this act. CCAP provided [written testimony](#) to the committee, seeking clarification on logistical matters such as contracts, the applicability of this legislation in urban and non-urban areas, and other ambiguous provisions in the current draft.

Counties urge the General Assembly to actively involve them in the legislative process when developing assessment-related legislation. By including counties in the discussion, the General Assembly can ensure that local insights and expertise are considered, leading to policies that enhance the accuracy and fairness of property assessments

CCAP MEMBERS: HELP SHAPE CCAP'S POLICY POSITIONS

One of the best ways to make your voice heard as a CCAP member is to participate in the policy-shaping process [throughout the year](#). July and August are particularly important months to get involved, as there are several ways you can have a voice in policy decisions.

All CCAP members are invited to observe any of our ten policy committee meetings, held in-person on August 4, the Sunday prior to the [Annual Conference](#), in Gettysburg (Adams County). Voting on all policy resolutions to update the [CCAP Platform](#) will take place during the conference at the business meeting on Tuesday, August 6. For those not able to attend in person, CCAP members will have the ability to participate in the business meeting and voting process virtually. The full voting packet, which also includes 2025 CCAP officer selection, 2029 Annual Conference site selection and a proposed bylaws amendment, was sent to CCAP members on July 25.

Questions should be directed to PACountiesGR@pacounties.org.

Other CCAP Publications



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