2023 County Priorities
End of Year Status Update

CCAP members identified a total of six priority issues for 2023. Grassroots activity on the priorities began following their adoption at the 2022 Fall Conference. After a formal announcement in January, officers and staff launched efforts to work with the General Assembly and the administration to introduce and advance proposals throughout the year. This report provides an update on the status of each priority issue at the close of the first half of the 2023-2024 legislative session.

911 Funding and Reauthorization

The General Assembly and Governor reauthorized the 911 statute in December as part of Act 34 of 2023, avoiding the looming crisis if the statute had been allowed to sunset at the end of January 2024. However, while counties advocated for an increase in the 911 surcharge from $1.65 per month to $2.30 per month, those new law maintains the current $1.65 surcharge until February 29, 2024, and then increase the 911 surcharge to $1.95 through January 31, 2026. Further, the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, Local Government Commission and Joint State Government Commission are required to complete a study to assess system efficiencies, system costs, 988 interoperability and other provisions by the end of 2024.

Counties are highly disappointed with the surcharge increase and with just two years until the next reauthorization, Pennsylvania counties urge the General Assembly to begin having real conversations about proper 911 funding immediately, so this life-saving service does not become a perpetual backburner issue. While the statute will not lapse, counties are hitting the ground running for 2024 with strategies to ensure members are ready to engage their legislators in funding and reauthorization discussions well ahead of the next sunset. Counties also will continue to focus on the necessary statutory changes to keep the law in-line with Next Generation 911 needs.

County Inmates with Mental Health Issues

County jails have become de-facto state hospitals following years of deinstitutionalization of individuals with mental illness. When unmet behavioral health challenges lead to criminal charges, individuals are often committed to jails that are not equipped to address needs of people who need mental health treatment, resulting in poor outcomes for those individuals and for their communities. Counties have continued to move the ball on discussions with the Shapiro administration and legislature on alternatives to placing inmates who have mental illness in jails. The judiciary has also created a behavioral health initiative with goals including diversion from confinement and the competency evaluation and restoration process. This has come as a part of a broader discussion on the need for mental health funding and investment in our community-based system as well as the need for partnerships to maintain continuity of care for those

inmates returned to the county.

County Mental Health Base Funding Increase
After receiving no increase for nearly 15 years, the FY 2023-2024 budget provided for a slight $20 million increase in the mental health services line dedicated for county mental health base, which was affirmed in the state's Fiscal Code language. While this increase of roughly 3% is not nearly reflective of the impact of 15 years without any increases, much less the impact of inflation or increased need that our counties see each and every day, which counties estimate to be over $1.2 billion. Additionally, $100 million of one-time American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, originally slated to go to adult-behavioral health, was dedicated to school-based mental health funding.

Further, Governor Shapiro signed an [Executive Order](), creating a statewide Behavioral Health Council composed of state leaders, county governments and community providers, charged with developing specific recommendations to decrease wait times for services, as well as to streamline mental health treatments and addiction care. The order also creates an Advisory Committee to the Council that will be responsible for sharing industry knowledge, expertise, data and feedback, with representation from county government with broad human services knowledge, including behavioral health, child welfare services and drug and alcohol serviced as well as county commissioners. Counties support the initiative and hold positions on both the council and advisory committee, further informing and investing in the commonwealth's mental health plan, vision and system for years to come.

Address the Needs of Children and Youth Who Have Complex Behavioral Health Issues
Counties have been working with the Department of Human Services on ways to address the needs of children in need of mental or behavioral health services outside of the home whom no provider is willing or able to accept because they require more intensive treatment or create a safety threat to themselves and others. While the state has been working on a blueprint to identify long-term goals and solutions, counties have not sat idle. A CCAP work group was formed to develop a report and recommendations addressing the needs of children and youth who have complex behavioral health issues. The work group examined how this critical work is being approached locally, in Pennsylvania, and in other states and is expected to release a report in early 2024 on the topic along with proposed strategies for advocacy and implementation.

Broadband Access and Development
The collective future of Pennsylvanians hinges on addressing the challenges to broadband expansion that are preventing access to opportunities and information to many of our residents. The CCAP Board extended the Broadband Task Force to continue to help direct specific county asks as part of the statewide broadband planning process, as well as provide a timely and effective feedback loop to assure CCAP can fully represent Pennsylvania counties as critical stakeholders. The Task Force met several times during the year to discuss and provide feedback on the work of the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority (PBDA). CCAP executive director Lisa Schaefer continued to serve as chair of the PBDA Data and Mapping subcommittee, ensuring that county feedback and perspectives were included in state plans and mapping work.

CCAP, with the input and advice of the task force, provided comments on the state broadband plan, action steps and grant and funding application criteria. Counties also provided critical input on the local government feedback processes for grant applications, which allowed for counties and other local governments to offer insight into proposed infrastructure projects. Maintaining these touchpoints and feedback processes will be critical in determining how much of the more than $1.6 billion in federal funding from the BEAD program and other digital equity programs will actualize for Pennsylvania.

All three primary CCAP conferences featured programming on state broadband efforts and CCAP is continuing to explore opportunities for information sharing between counties and identifying an avenue for regular updates on broadband programs and funding as they become available.

Promote Election Integrity

CCAP continues to advocate for resolving administrative issues and gaps within the Election Code. While there was no substantial movement on legislation that would amend Act 77, CCAP has continued to monitor and offer comments on Election Code bills that could affect how counties conduct their election administration duties. Counties also weighed in on movement of the 2024 Presidential Primary election, noting counties' neutral attitude toward any specific date until determined to be too late to shift thousands of polling locations and poll workers, as a way to mitigate negative impacts to county election offices and confusion this could cause to candidates and voters in the process. Counties look forward to partnering with the administration as well as the General Assembly on election-related legislation, particularly as counties prepare for the administration of the 2024 Presidential Election.