

## 2024 COUNTY GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

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

#### 2024 PRIORITIES

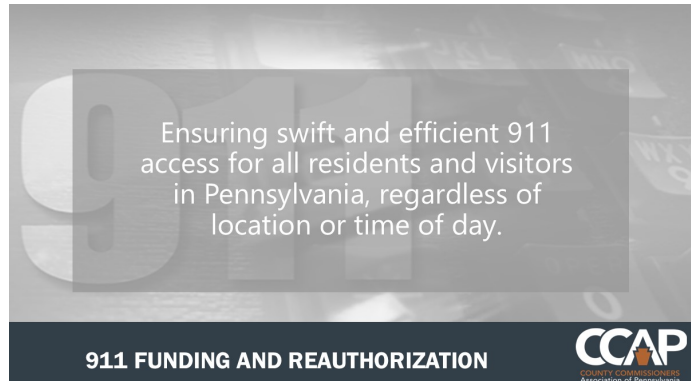
- 911 Funding and Reauthorization
- County Mental Health Base Funding Increase
- Addressing Inmates with Mental Health Issues
- Increasing the Prevailing Wage Threshold
- Right-to-Know Law Reforms
- Vote-by-Mail Reforms
- Broadband Access and Development
- Juvenile Detention Capacity Crisis

County leaders from throughout Pennsylvania have selected their key county government priorities for 2024, which showcase the breadth of services that counties provide on behalf of the Commonwealth. These priorities emphasize the critical need to reinvigorate and better communicate the state-county partnership in service delivery.

This special edition newsletter provides information on the 2024 county priorities. View the [2024 County Government Priorities](#) brochure for detailed information on each priority.

#### 911 FUNDING AND REAUTHORIZATION

Counties are continuously working with PEMA, legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry, and other interests on improvements to the 911 system. Center to this effort is forward movement and investment in Next Generation 911 (NG911) to take into account both current and future ways that people can communicate in an emergency. This includes improvements in system efficiency through shared infrastructure and network connection for 911 public safety answering points statewide, accurate GIS information and data, and better regional systems to assure availability and reliability. A strong, connected 911 system is critical to ensuring services will still be provided efficiently in situations of mass emergency and will keep pace with the ever-changing technological advances to maximize emergency services delivery.



Counties are continuously working with PEMA, legislative committees, emergency management professionals, the communications industry, and other interests on improvements to the 911 system. Center to this effort is forward movement and investment in Next Generation 911 (NG911) to take into account both current and future ways that people can communicate in an emergency. This includes improvements in system efficiency through shared infrastructure and network connection for 911 public safety answering points statewide, accurate GIS information and data, and better regional systems to assure availability and reliability. A strong, connected 911 system is critical to ensuring services will still be provided efficiently in situations of mass emergency and will keep pace with the ever-changing technological advances to maximize emergency services delivery.



#### COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH BASE FUNDING INCREASE

Counties currently administer direct services to support their community's mental health system. Thanks to flexible state-allocated county mental health funding, counties are serving residents but are stretching

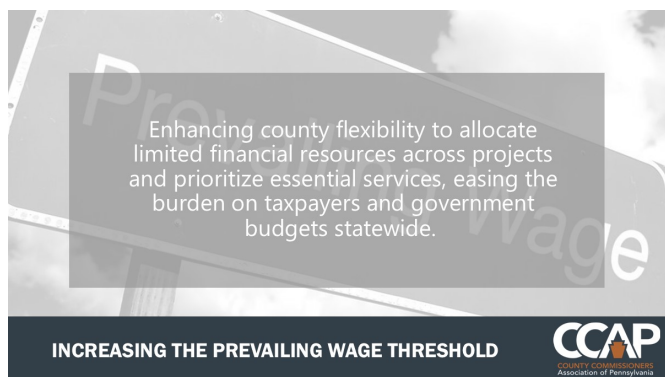
limited funds to the breaking point. With additional state funding for the county mental health base, counties could better address specific needs in areas such as children's mental health and older adult mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer support, and other diversion services. Without a commitment to sustainable funding, the commonwealth's residents will endure prolonged struggles to access mental health support. Underfunding will also affect more costly systems like hospitals, law enforcement, and corrections.

## ADDRESSING INMATES WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

County jails report a rising number of inmates with mental health issues, especially severe illnesses. Addressing their needs in jail is challenging, with a more frequent need for competency restoration, leading to extended wait times for state hospital beds. Lack of community-based resources and funding may cause individuals to cycle through the corrections system instead of receiving suitable and cost-effective behavioral health support.

Providing individuals facing mental health issues with access to services and diversion programs, to prevent incarceration. For those already in the correctional system, provide rehabilitation services to reduce costly interactions with the criminal justice system.

ADDRESSING INMATES WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES



Enhancing county flexibility to allocate limited financial resources across projects and prioritize essential services, easing the burden on taxpayers and government budgets statewide.

INCREASING THE PREVAILING WAGE THRESHOLD



## INCREASING THE PREVAILING WAGE THRESHOLD

Publicly funded construction projects in Pennsylvania costing more than \$25,000 are subject to prevailing wage requirements. The threshold, not adjusted for inflation or industry changes in more than 60 years, would amount to more than \$250,000 in 2023. Without an increase to the threshold, counties are spending significantly more money on projects that could otherwise be utilized in other areas of their overall budgets. Prevailing wage requirements can increase the cost of many projects, generally by 10 to 15% depending on the region in which the project is being done. Projects hitting the threshold include lawn maintenance contracts, broadband projects, and the construction of prisons, juvenile detention facilities, and local courthouses, among many others.

Publicly funded construction projects in Pennsylvania costing more than \$25,000 are subject to prevailing wage requirements. The threshold, not adjusted for inflation or industry changes in more than

## RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW REFORMS

The unrelenting number of Right-to-Know (RTK) requests continues to increase workloads for county governments, who must deal with both repeat requesters and requests for voluminous amounts of information. In recent years, this has also started to include increased requests for election-related information, often impacting county election offices amid their other duties administering elections. While counties are fully supportive of the need to be transparent, the law needs to be updated to help alleviate the burdens of vexatious and commercial requesters and ensure the law provides transparency while still meeting the initial intent of the law.

Enabling counties to dedicate time and resources to key services for residents while maintaining integrity and transparency in government.

RIGHT-TO-KNOW LAW REFORMS



Giving counties needed tools to run fair, secure, and accurate elections, restoring public trust in the election system.

VOTE-BY-MAIL REFORMS



## VOTE-BY-MAIL REFORMS

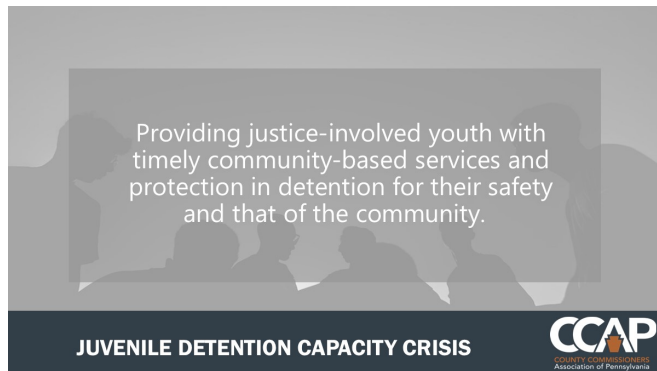
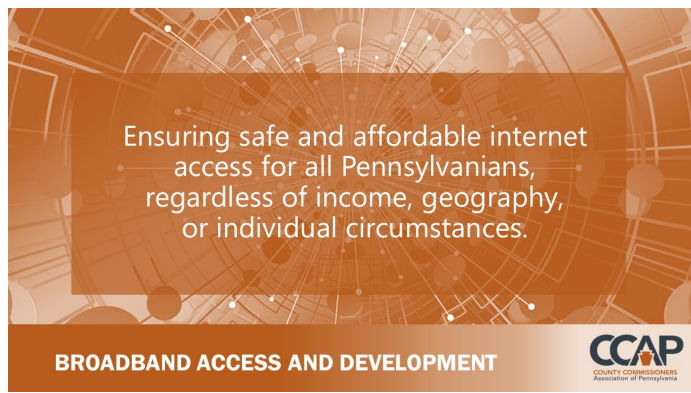
Since the enactment of Act 77 of 2019, counties have identified areas of the Election Code that need to be addressed and clarified in the wake of multiple court decisions and appeals to help counties meet their responsibilities for election administration and to provide efficient and accurate results. Pre-canvassing and adjusting unrealistic mail-in ballot application deadlines remain two of the most important changes that would significantly improve the election experience for both counties and voters, without sacrificing ballot security or access to voting. But counties also need the support of the legislature and administration to update other parts of the Election Code so that counties have clear rules to help restore the public's confidence in the integrity of our elections.

Since the enactment of Act 77 of 2019, counties have identified areas of the Election Code that need to be addressed and clarified in the wake of multiple court decisions and appeals to help counties meet their responsibilities for election administration and to provide

## BROADBAND ACCESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Many counties have taken a leadership role in working with local partners to identify gaps in broadband service and have developed best practices and innovative ideas, such as regional cooperative models, to address them. While progress has been

made in bridging the digital divide, funding remains a crucial need to expand broadband access, not only with physical infrastructure but ensuring people have a safe and secure connection. With the promise of billions of dollars in federal investment, a state broadband plan, and publicly available maps to better plot and measure connection, Pennsylvania is on the right path. Yet, strategic, and thoughtful approaches are essential to ensure universal broadband access for all Pennsylvanians.



## JUVENILE DETENTION CAPACITY CRISIS

Pennsylvania has a strong commitment to using secure detention for juveniles only when less restrictive alternatives have been considered and rejected. While the juvenile justice system and its partners have been able to reduce admissions to secure detention by

70% over recent years, prompting the closure of many facilities, multiple factors are now creating a need for secure detention that is double the availability. This results in youth charged with violent crimes being placed in inappropriate settings, including nonsecure shelters.

Pennsylvania lacks secure treatment beds for youth with complex behavioral needs that would be better served in a treatment setting. This leaves only secure detention as the way to ensure community safety while addressing the individual's needs. New federal laws affecting youth whose crime is charged as an adult have increased the number of individuals and length of stay in detention. Additionally, the pandemic-era staffing shortages have affected juvenile detention like many fields. Lack of staffing has been the main cause for some facilities to cease operating, while others have had to reduce their operational capacity until that can be resolved. Counties have resorted to extraordinary measures such as contracting secure detention beds and sending youth out of state.

[Read More on the County Priorities Webpage](#)

[Contact the CCAP Government Relations Team](#)



The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is the voice of county government, a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan Association representing Pennsylvania's 67 counties. CCAP membership includes the county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators, chief clerks and solicitors. CCAP advocates as the unifying voice of all Pennsylvania counties and provides leadership and support for excellence in county government.