

NACO BOARD ACTION:

NACo 2020 NATIONAL POLICY PRIORITIES FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS' CONSIDERATION

Counties play an instrumental role in the overall public administration and governance of federal, state and local policies, programs and services.

America's 3,069 county governments provide essential building blocks for healthy, safe and vibrant communities. Counties invest nearly \$600 billion each year in taxpayer resources, through the leadership of nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Counties support and maintain key public and community infrastructure, help nurture and sustain a skilled workforce to support dynamic local economies, and promote public health and safety to protect our citizens.

NACo supports federal policies and programs that equip county governments with the resources and flexibility needed to effectively serve our residents. NACo works to preserve local decision making and protect counties from unfunded mandates and preemption of local authority. Since counties implement many federal programs at the local level and must enforce many federal regulations, NACo encourages meaningful intergovernmental consultation with counties throughout all federal policy, program and regulatory development processes.

RESTORE THE BALANCE OF FEDERALISM AND OPTIMIZE INTERGOVERNMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

NACo supports efforts that recognize and respect the unique roles and responsibilities of counties as essential partners—*not just stakeholders*—in our nation's intergovernmental system of federal, state, local and tribal government officials. Consistent and meaningful engagement and consultation between intergovernmental partners is vital in the development and implementation of effective policies, programs and regulations. County governments are tasked with both implementing state and federal policies and regulations at the local level and should be included at all stages of the governing process. NACo urges Congress to pass the Restore the Partnership Act (H.R. 3883) and the Unfunded Mandates Information and Transparency Act (H.R. 300) to increase transparency to reduce regulatory burden, foster intergovernmental dialogue and unite all levels of government in supporting our unparalleled system of federalism.

PROMOTE COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITIES

NACo supports efforts by the Administration and Congress to increase our nation's infrastructure investments to help promote economic development, public safety and overall mobility through a comprehensive infrastructure package, surface transportation reauthorization and water resources bill.

Any federal infrastructure package should reflect county priorities, such as: allocating more federal seed capital and matching funds for locally owned infrastructure, increasing local decision-making authority and flexibility, protecting and restoring tax-exempt municipal financing tools, and streamlining and shortening the federal permitting process while still requiring robust public participation and world-class environmental stewardship.

NACo supports a two-year authorization of the Water Resources and Development Act (WRDA) that will address county interests related to ports, inland waterways, levees, dams, wetlands, watersheds and coastal restoration. As owners, users and regulators of water resources and infrastructure, counties are directly impacted by the policies and funding authorized through WRDA authorizations. Any water infrastructure legislation should address the needs of counties, including: allocating federal matching funds for local governments to plan for and implement projects that reduce flood damage risks and address habitat restoration, connectivity and resiliency, ensuring counties are consulted prior to the federal government undertaking water resource projects within county boundaries, and strengthening the federal-state-local partnership in the decision-making process for water projects.

Quick facts:

- Counties own and operate 45 percent of all public roads and almost 40 percent of the National Bridge Inventory and are directly involved in 78 percent of all public transportation systems and 34 percent of public airports
- Counties also invest \$122 billion annually in maintaining and operating public works, including transportation and water systems

PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT AND ADDRESS ESSENTIAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS

NACo supports sensible measures that promote and advance the overall safety of the public, and enhances federal, state, and local partnerships to provide evidence-based treatment services to justice involved individuals suffering with mental illness and substance use disorders. NACo urges Congress and the Administration to advance legislation and regulations that would amend the federal Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP) and allow non-convicted individuals to have continued access to necessary treatment through federal health benefits such as Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP and VA health benefits. Furthermore, NACo supports policies and programs that divert non-violent individuals struggling with mental illness and/or substance use disorders from local jails into more appropriate treatment services.

Quick facts:

- Approximately 8.5 million adults have both a mental health and substance use disorder
- 10.6 million individuals cycle in and out of more than 3,000 local jails each year
- 20 percent of jail inmates have a serious mental illness
- Counties own and support 903 hospitals and operate 1,943 local health departments

BOOST ADVANCED BROADBAND DEPLOYMENT AND ACCESSIBILITY WHILE PRESERVING LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

NACo supports the deployment and availability of emerging technologies, such as small cell 5G, to all areas of the nation to ensure equitable economic and educational opportunities for all. County officials must also fulfill our responsibilities as trustees of public property and as protectors of public safety and health during this deployment process. By preserving local authority, county governments can ensure that the public interest is being served by communications providers regardless of the delivery platform.

Additionally, complete and accurate connectivity data is necessary to effectively bridge the growing digital divide as the federal government relies on this information to determine the true need for critical broadband resources.

NACo urges Congress and federal agencies to recognize counties as partners in extending the benefits of advanced telecommunications and broadband technology — including improvements to county emergency preparedness and public safety systems — to all Americans. Federal policymakers should support local decision-making and accountability and oppose any actions that would preempt or limit the zoning and siting authority of local governments.

Quick facts:

- In rural areas, just 68.6 percent of residents have high-speed internet access via both fixed wireless services and mobile LTE broadband
- Approximately 14 million rural Americans and 1.2 million Americans living on tribal lands still lack access to broadband that meets the federal definition for minimum standards

SUPPORT FULL FUNDING FOR PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES (PILT) AND THE SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS (SRS) PROGRAM

NACo supports restoring full mandatory funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which compensates public lands counties for untaxable federal land. NACo also supports extending the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program as a transitional funding mechanism until the federal government fully

implements a sustainable, long-term forest management program with adequate revenue sharing for forest counties and schools.

NACo supports legislation to ensure mandatory, full-funding of PILT, including H.R. 3043, the Permanently Authorizing PILT Act sponsored by Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Ariz.), and S. 2480, the PILT Reauthorization Act sponsored by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), which would make PILT mandatory for ten years.

NACo endorses legislation to extend SRS for an additional two years: H.R. 3048, sponsored by Rep. Joe Neguse (D-Colo.), and S. 430, sponsored by Sen. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho). Additionally, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) sponsored S. 1643, the Forest Management for Rural Stability Act, which would create an endowment fund to make permanent SRS payments to national forest counties and schools while also granting more flexibility to counties in the use of SRS funds.

Quick facts:

- 61 percent of counties have federal land within their boundaries
- PILT and SRS support critical county services, including emergency services, search and rescue, fire protection, forest maintenance, education and transportation infrastructure

ESTABLISH A MORE EFFECTIVE DEFINITION OF “WATERS OF THE U.S.”

NACo believes that local streets, gutters and human-made ditches should be excluded from the definition of “Waters of the U.S.” (WOTUS) under the federal Clean Water Act. NACo calls on Congress and the Administration to develop and implement a new, more practical WOTUS definition in consultation and collaboration with state and local governments.

Quick facts:

- More than 70 percent of counties invest in storm sewer systems, sewage disposal, solid waste management and water utilities
- Counties invest \$23.9 billion in sanitation, storm and water supply systems

PROMOTE WORKFORCE OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES FOR COUNTY RESIDENTS IN CHANGING ECONOMIES

NACo supports federal investments and policies that help advance and leverage both regional and local strategies to engage children, youth, adults and older adults in the development of a competitive and quality workforce. While national economic indicators are strong, many counties face challenges in linking residents to sustainable employment opportunities that foster economic mobility.

For example, counties are confronting increased demand and caseloads for services that help residents overcome barriers to employment, such as skills training, mental health and substance abuse disorders, accessible childcare and housing affordability.

At the same time, county governments face reduced federal and state funding, along with growing federal and state mandates, limitations and oversight. To help counties meet these challenges and foster a high-quality workforce to compete in the global economy and meet the needs of employers including county governments here in the U.S., NACo encourages a strong federal partner committed to providing increased resources and maintaining local decision-making and flexibility to achieve better outcomes for county residents, especially those in transitioning local economies.

Quick facts:

- Despite low rates of unemployment, two-thirds of counties have poverty rates exceeding the national average
- Counties employ 3.6 million residents and provide services to 314 million county residents

STRENGTHEN ELECTION INTEGRITY AND SAFETY

NACo supports federal policies that provide flexibility for local decision making and increased federal investments in the nation's elections system. As administrators and financers of our elections, counties work to ensure our elections are both fair and secure. Therefore, NACo supports a consistent, predictable and dedicated federal funding stream to assist counties with meeting the significant federal requirements already imposed on local governments administering elections. We also support efforts by Congress and the Administration to combat cybersecurity threats in a way that is inclusive of county election and technology officials.

As Congress considers these changes, NACo urges federal lawmakers to protect local control over election administration and oppose mandates and specific requirements regarding equipment, procedures and personnel responsibilities.

Quick facts:

- Between the 2016 and 2018 general elections, county jurisdictions processed over 73 million registration forms
- More than 109 million voters, or almost 91 percent of voters nationwide, in the 2018 general elections cast their ballots within jurisdictions where counties play a major role in administering and coordinating elections
- In 2018, counties oversaw more than 151,000 polling places and organized over 593,000 poll workers during election periods

ENHANCE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH REGIONAL AND LOCAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

NACo urges Congress and the Administration to provide increased federal resources to counties for disaster planning, mitigation and recovery. Counties often serve as our nation's first line of defense before and after disasters strike. While state statutes and organizational structures vary, local emergency management responsibilities are most commonly vested in county governments. NACo supports increased federal investment in support of local emergency management capabilities that improve public safety and environmental stewardship, along with social and economic security.

Furthermore, NACo supports rapid federal reimbursement of local costs associated with major disasters and encourages the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to administer policies and regulations on a consistent manner during any presidentially declared disaster or emergency throughout the country. NACo also encourages DHS to apply any policy or regulation changes on a prospective basis, based on the declaration date of the emergency or disaster. NACo supports DHS and FEMA leadership as they work to reduce excessive paperwork as well as overly restrictive and bureaucratic regulations.

Quick facts:

- In 2018, local governments were impacted by 66 federally declared disasters funded by recovery grants
- In total, an estimated 570 counties (19%) received at least one federal Major Disaster Declaration, with 411 with at least one federal Emergency Declaration (13%) and another 788 counties (26%) with at least one federal Disaster Declaration
- During that same time period, local and state governments managed 23,331 emergency events without additional federal resources

FULLY REPEAL THE CADILLAC TAX

NACo urges Congress to pass the *Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act of 2019* (H.R. 748/S. 684), which would permanently and fully repeal the 40 percent excise tax, known as the Cadillac Tax, on employer-sponsored health insurance plans. This new policy was enacted under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010 and has been delayed for implementation until 2022. As one of the largest providers of employer-sponsored healthcare insurance in the nation, county leaders would either pay significant new "taxes" to the federal government or cut healthcare coverage for nearly 3.6 million county employees and their families and dependents. NACo supports a renewed bipartisan approach to improving our nation's healthcare delivery system that balances the roles and responsibilities of intergovernmental partners, employers and individuals.