



*Black Hawk, Dubuque, Johnson, Linn and Scott*

## **Urban County Coalition 2015 Legislative Issues and Priorities**

**Infrastructure Funding** -- Counties are spending an increasing amount of local tax dollars to fund a greater share of the rising costs of maintaining our state's aging transportation infrastructure. The current revenues that come from the Road Use Tax Fund have not kept pace with the increasing cost of construction and maintenance. While we believe it is critical that the legislature act to increase the motor fuel tax, we would oppose any efforts to restrict counties' ability to fund these projects out of currently available resources. **We ask that the State significantly increase the motor fuel tax to address the needs of Iowa's transportation infrastructure.**

**Mental Health Funding** -- Following the major re-design of the Mental Health and Developmental Disability Services delivery system in Iowa in 2012 (SF 2315), it is essential that adequate funding be provided to allow counties to transition to the new funding system to avoid waiting lists for services. There is a belief that regions have unreasonable fund balances but this does not account for the new requirements for core services and gaps in the current system that regions are expected to fill. While we recognize that increasing budget pressures and increasing Medicaid costs challenge state lawmakers, it would be counter-productive to shift costs with such strategies as freezing waiver programs that force the consumers to seek assistance at the regional level instead of the State. In particular, we request:

- **Ensure that Developmental Disability services are included in core services**
- **Provide sufficient funds for FY 16 to ensure that counties and MH/DS regions have the resources necessary to provide and manage services**
- **Amend the Iowa Code to vest all employment responsibilities, including payment for the judicial mental health advocates with the counties**
- **Eliminate the requirement that the DHS director approve the region's budget and any subsequent budget amendments**

**Unfunded and Underfunded Mandates** -- We appreciate the legislature's willingness to review these issues by holding an interim committee. We encourage the legislature to act to reduce the instances of cost shifting identified and eliminate the burdens these place on property tax payers. The two areas that have the largest impact on local property taxes are colocation of state offices (DHS) and courthouse maintenance and security, but there are many others.

- **Housing State Offices at Local Taxpayer Expense** – Currently some counties are forced to house a variety of state agencies (DHS and the Courts, for example) and receive little or no reimbursement from the State. In addition, counties are forced to pay for expenses such as postage and office supplies at local taxpayer's expense. We request that the State no longer require that counties subsidize the local office expenses of state agencies.
- **Emergency Management Agency Funding** – The current funding formula does not adequately address the needs of the urban counties in Iowa. Eliminate the funding cap on urban counties. We also encourage the State to pass through more of the federal funding it receives to counties. In addition, the State should send a greater portion (50%) of the wireless surcharge funding to the local Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP)

- **Paper Document Storage** – We appreciate the legislature’s attention to this issue and encourage legislators to provide assistance in converting to paperless filing systems, and review requirements for document storage and retention. We would encourage the legislature to pay particular attention to the document storage requirements of the Department of Human Services.
- **Publishing Costs** – Reduce publishing costs to local governments to publish meeting, and legal notices on-line and require only a summary to be published in local print outlets. Additionally, allow counties to publish in only one newspaper.

#### **Additional Issues**

**REAP Funding** --We would like to encourage the legislature and the Governor to fully fund the program at the 20 million dollar level.

**Trail Funding** -- We understand that there are a variety of demands on the State budget but we encourage the Governor and the legislature to continue to invest in Iowa’s quality of life infrastructure by increasing the funding for trails. We would also like to see a funding formula that distributes this money to areas of the state that have growing populations.

**County Bonding** -- We believe that in matters of public finance, counties should be treated in the same manner as cities. We support the provisions of SF 416, which allows counties flexibility in bonding for certain projects that the cities currently enjoy. We also ask that the limit be raised to a consistent level with cities, currently five million dollars.

**County Zoning Equity** -- We would request that the legislature grant counties the same authority to enforce zoning regulations that cities currently have. Currently counties have no mechanism to force compliance or collect the cost of cleaning up violations and these costs are born by all county taxpayers.

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