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Subject: CCAP

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To: doloomis@iup.edu <doloomis@iup.edu>

Hi Dave,

As I thought, **there definitely is no change in our stance. The only thing different is that we included it in our top list of priorities this year.**

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Pennsylvania counties unveil 2016 priorities

Legislative agenda highlights critical county role in providing essential services to communities

(Harrisburg, PA)--County leaders from throughout Pennsylvania today unveiled a list of five key county government legislative priorities for 2016, led by a call to state officials to enact comprehensive reforms to the commonwealth budget and human services funding.

Members of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) noted that the priorities reflect a consensus of Pennsylvania's county governments on issues of highest significance and greatest potential impact to counties and their taxpayers. In addition to the commonwealth budget and human services funding, other priorities cover a range of issues that acknowledge counties' commitment to improving county governance, including diversifying the county tax base and **reforming the assessment system**, addressing challenges facing the county child welfare system, comprehensive behavioral health services reform, and maintenance of the shale gas impact fee.

“Addressing these issues is essential in order for counties to continue to successfully provide critical services to Pennsylvania residents,” said Bob Thomas, Franklin County commissioner and 2016 CCAP president. “We seek to continue the partnership we are building with the Administration and with the General Assembly to advance these priorities and to move forward with meaningful reforms.

“Counties are at the forefront for delivery of crucial human services for our most vulnerable citizens, yet we face increasing challenges. Mandates continue to multiply while funding fails to keep pace, or is even cut,” Thomas continued. “In the past six months, counties also have weathered delays in state payments during the budget impasse, finding strategies to fill the gaps in their budgets – where state funds account for some 40 to 60 percent of their overall funding.”

George Hartwick III, Dauphin County commissioner and chair of CCAP’s Human Services Committee stated, “We cannot emphasize this enough: Counties must never again be forced to resort to mechanisms that burden residents and potentially affect essential services because of a state budget impasse.”

Aside from the impasse, many programs have suffered decreases in funding over the past decade. This includes a drastic 10 percent aggregate cut to the seven line items in the Human Services Block Grant in the FY 2012-2013 commonwealth budget. This cut has been maintained for four budget cycles. Other human services lines have been essentially flat funded during the same time period.

Hartwick continued, “Counties urge the Governor and the General Assembly to restore the 10 percent reductions to seven critical line items in the Human Services Block Grant. We also ask for expansion of the Human Services Block Grant to all counties who want the opportunity to take advantage of the flexibility and efficiencies it offers. Only 30 counties are now able to be a part of the Block Grant, all of whom have reported positive experiences.”

Making it even more difficult for counties are changes in how child welfare funding is appropriated in the enacted FY 2015-2016 budget, an initiative known as “rebalancing.” Hartwick stated, “Counties oppose ‘rebalancing,’ which is not a simple accounting change as some have argued. Instead,

rebalancing shifts a full quarter of child welfare funding to the following fiscal year – with no guarantee that those funds will ever be appropriated in the future. This comes at the same time when nearly 30 new child protective services laws have dramatically increased county children and youth caseloads – even doubling them in some counties.”

CCAP also noted that revenue opportunities and tax fairness remain an important part of the balance needed to ensure future services. According to Jim Hertzler, Cumberland County commissioner and chair of CCAP’s Assessment and Taxation Committee, “Counties provide important services that each and every one of us rely upon in our daily lives, but we do so with only one source of locally generated tax revenue – the property tax.”

County officials believe that local taxes should be equitable and that no one should have to pay more than their fair share. It is important for local governments to be able to use a balanced portfolio of local taxes, matching the relative strengths of different taxes to spread the tax burden fairly across taxpayers. Hertzler continued, “Property tax reform will never be truly complete unless counties are included in the discussions, and the comprehensive property tax system – from assessment to taxation – is considered.”

More information is available at www.pacounties.org by clicking on “2016 Legislative Priorities.”

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Please note: Additional comments by Kevin Barnhardt, Berks County, chair of the CCAP Courts and Corrections Committee, and Erick Coolidge, Tioga County, chair of the CCAP Agriculture Committee and the CCAP Natural Gas Task Force are available at www.pacounties.org by clicking on 2016 Priorities. You can also obtain copies by contacting the CCAP government relations staff at PaCountiesGR@pacounties.org.

The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) is the voice of county government, a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan association representing all of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties. CCAP membership includes county commissioners, council members, county executives, administrators, chief clerks and solicitors. CCAP strengthens the counties’ abilities to govern their own affairs and improve the well-being and quality of life for every Pennsylvania resident. It advocates for favorable state and federal legislation, programs and policies on behalf of counties. CCAP is committed to service excellence through education, information, insurance, technology and other programs that support

effective county government. Founded in 1866, CCAP is an affiliate of the National Association of Counties.