



California State Association of Counties 2009 State Priority

Approved by CSAC Board of Directors – March 2009

CSAC State Legislative Priority: Addressing the Fiscal Crisis

After consideration of a number of potential 2009 legislative priorities for the Association, the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) determined that, in this unprecedented economic climate, CSAC's legislative advocacy will focus on addressing the fiscal crisis that grips all levels of government and the citizens we collectively serve.

California counties are experiencing significant revenue shortfalls and rising caseload demands, and are taking dramatic steps to resolve their budget imbalances while maintaining services to the most vulnerable Californians. The economic crisis that has crippled the housing market, eroded consumer confidence, and resulted in dramatic job losses has led us to a single, unifying focus: rebuild the economy to grow public revenues, to reduce demand for public services, and to improve the quality of life for all Californians.

While local economies wither, counties are especially concerned about the severely constrained fiscal circumstances of the state and are committed to providing expertise and assistance to develop remedies that get the California economy back on track. With that goal in mind, CSAC has identified the following principles for addressing the fiscal crisis that all Californians are grappling with:

- **Protect the health and safety of all Californians.** During this time of economic crisis, demands for government health services, human services, and public safety services far outpace resources. Counties across the state are seeing a spike in health and human services caseloads – coming on the heels of eight years of underfunding. CSAC supports efforts to maintain core public services for those who need assistance the most.
- **Seek budget solutions that provide long-term results.** The state's chronic budget troubles require meaningful changes that survive the short-term problem. Cost shifts, borrowing, and other short-term "solutions" only serve to create additional budget stress in the out years and exacerbate the state's chronic budget imbalance. All levels of government must focus on the long-term objective of developing reliable, adequate revenue sources to fund priority programs and services that are efficient and effective. Reevaluating the state's revenue structure and reviewing program outcomes are the first steps to developing a sensible state budget.
- **Rebuild the economy.** Government has the ability to help restore the economic vitality of the state. CSAC endorses economic stimulus proposals that use government funds to produce infrastructure solutions that benefit the public at large, while creating jobs and stimulating demand for goods and services.
- **Focus on long-term reforms.** CSAC supports reforming the budget process to establish priorities and goals for government services and to create public services that are valued by citizens. Counties also welcome discussions with the state that seek to align accountability and responsibility for public services with the authority to effectively govern those services.



California State Association of Counties 2009 Federal Priorities

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CSAC's contract for federal affairs services with Waterman and Associates provides for a nine-issue agenda. CSAC staff, in consultation with Waterman and Associates, developed the following list of five federal issues of significance to California's counties, with four issues left in reserve to accommodate emerging topics.

NEW AUTHORIZATION OF THE NATION'S SURFACE TRANSPORTATION LAW (SAFETEA-LU)

SAFETEA-LU expires in September of 2009. Lawmakers held a series of hearings during the 110th Congress, with additional hearings expected early next year. Congressional authorizing committees will begin to draft the reauthorization legislation in the near future.

For its part, CSAC continues to actively promote its transportation reauthorization agenda with key policymakers. Among things, the association is recommending a more streamlined and flexible approach to allocating federal transportation funds to state, regional, and local agencies. This could take shape by reducing the current 108 programs under SAFETEA-LU into a smaller number of more flexible programs, such as the 10 new federal programs recommended by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission.

MEDICAID

The congressionally mandated moratorium on implementation of six of seven pending Medicaid regulations issued by the Bush Administration will expire in March. Lawmakers will need to decide the fate of those regulations, and may consider additional reforms to the Medicaid program as part of a broader health care package.

CSAC remains active in opposing Medicaid budget reductions that would harm health service delivery in California and supports an increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP) as part of any economic stimulus package.

STATE CRIMINAL ALIEN ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SCAAP)

The SCAAP program is a critically important budget item for a large number of California's counties. CSAC is one of the leading local government organizations in the fight to protect and enhance funding for SCAAP, which continues to be underfunded by Congress. CSAC will continue to advocate for maximum funding levels to offset the cost of housing undocumented criminals in county detention facilities.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Although Senator Barbara Boxer's (D-CA) climate change legislation fell short in 2008, a stronger Democratic majority in the upper chamber likely means that the bill will have a better chance of advancing in 2009. Additionally, President Barack Obama has made climate change a major priority for his Administration.

Among other things, CSAC is urging Congress to provide financial incentives to states that adopt and set greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets. CSAC also is urging Congress to

provide additional funding for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant, which provides resources to local governments for a variety of energy efficiency programs.

FUELS MANAGEMENT

Although fuels management legislation from the 110th Congress does not carry over into next year, key lawmakers, including Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), are expected to renew legislative efforts aimed at preventing and responding to wildland fires.

CSAC has actively supported legislation that would provide at-risk communities with incentives to improve fire prevention efforts. The association also has worked to defeat the Bush Administration's proposed budget reductions to federal programs that support fuels management, fire preparedness, and state and local fire assistance.

CSAC Internal Monitoring

In addition, CSAC will continue to provide internal monitoring on a number of issues that are of significance to California's counties.

TRIBAL GAMING

The 111th Congress, like the last several Congresses, is expected to examine options for amending federal laws and regulations that govern tribal gaming activities. It remains to be seen how the Obama Administration plans to move forward on issues related to Indian gaming.

CSAC has been a leader in promoting legislation that would require tribes, counties and other local governments to reach judicially enforceable agreements that address mitigation of off-reservation impacts, service impacts, and public safety costs associated with tribal gaming and other related development.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG)

Like most other federal spending programs, the CDBG is frozen at fiscal year 2008 levels through March 6. Once lawmakers reconvene early next year, final funding figures for individual spending programs will be settled. CSAC has actively promoted full funding for the CDBG, which has been consistently zeroed out by the Bush Administration.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS REFORM

Unlike its predecessor, the 110th Congress did not consider major video franchising reform legislation. Looking ahead, it remains to be seen if the new 111th Congress – along with the Obama Administration – will promote a telecommunications overhaul.

For its part, CSAC has resisted efforts in Congress to grant the Federal Communications Commission with additional decision-making authority over state and local telecommunications matters. However, CSAC supports funding for increased broadband penetration to rural and hard-to-serve areas.

FOSTER CARE REFORM

The 111th Congress is expected to consider legislation to reform the foster care financing system, as well as provide additional resources to stabilize families and train and retain child welfare staff. CSAC supports additional programmatic flexibility along with an updated foster care payment methodology.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Funding for homeland security-related programs was one of the few areas of the fiscal year 2009 federal budget that was finalized by Congress. All told, lawmakers provided \$4.2 billion for first responder programs, or \$2 billion above the Bush Administration's request and \$24 million above 2008 levels.

CSAC has successfully advocated for increased funding for first responder programs, including the State Homeland Security Grant Program and Emergency Management Performance Grants. The association also has successfully lobbied to ensure that high-threat states, such as California, receive a greater share of homeland security grant funds.

BYRNE GRANT FUNDING

The Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) received a nearly two-thirds cut during final negotiations on the fiscal year 2008 budget. Since that time, a group of lawmakers has been working to restore the \$490 million reduction. CSAC strongly supports congressional efforts aimed at restoring funding for the JAG program.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

CSAC supports comprehensive immigration reform that recognizes the role that county governments play in the immigration arena. Any federal reform efforts should include the following elements: (1) a state and local impact grant program for health and education services; such a grant program should recognize that county governments – particularly along the southwest border – incur significant unreimbursed health care costs related to the provision of services to undocumented immigrants; (2) full funding for the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP); (3) border security strategic planning; (4) federal training dollars for county law enforcement officers targeted to jurisdictions along the borders; and (5) the promotion of access to health care.

CLEAN WATER ACT

Support amendments to Section 404 of the Clean Water Act to define maintenance of flood control channels or facilities as a non-prohibited activity thereby exempting maintenance from requiring Section 404 permits.

COOPERATIVE ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION FUND

Support increased funding for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund from the \$73.8 million current-year level to \$125 million in FY2010. This will restore the fund to approximately its fiscal 2001 level, adjusted for inflation and provide much needed support to regional Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) in California and nationally.