



Policy Priorities for 2022

California State Association of Counties

(As Approved by the Board of Directors December 2, 2021)

County policy concerns are most often centered on resources to carry out state and local service responsibilities, the authority to carry out those responsibilities in local communities, and partnership with the state to improve programs. This year, CSAC will be focused in large part on the successful implementation of last year's extensive state policy changes and programmatic investments. CSAC will advocate for the resources and flexibility counties need to address immediate and ongoing challenges.

County COVID-19 Response and Recovery. CSAC will work to secure the resources, flexibility, and workforce necessary to maintain local ongoing coronavirus response efforts, including outreach to underserved populations and collaboration with schools and businesses. This includes negotiating a sustainable state investment in local public health activities while obtaining short-term funding and/or statutory flexibility for urgent needs. CSAC will partner with county affiliates to increase awareness of county public health activities while protecting the public health workforce and fostering a new generation of public health workers.

Behavioral Health Funding. The state is making historic investments in behavioral health housing, children's behavioral health services, and CalAIM. To successfully harness these investments to make transformative change requires addressing underlying county mental health plan funding shortfalls and an ever-expanding set of roles and responsibilities threaten this progress. CSAC will advocate for behavioral health workforce assistance and adequate funding to match new responsibilities.

Addressing Wildfire in the Modern Age. CSAC will focus on seeking proactive, sustained investments from state and federal sources to match fire suppression funding and bring about investments in every community that builds lasting change to address wildfire. These investments should improve each county's professional capital to match the challenge. A proactive policy and regulatory strategy is critical to developing a long-term, successful statewide wildfire prevention program.

Modernize the Brown Act and Promote Safe, Welcoming Public Meetings. The Brown Act ensures that public decisions are deliberated on and made in public, at noticed meetings in which the public can participate; however, some of its out-of-date provisions make it difficult for members of boards, commissions, and advisory bodies to participate. Without safe harbor limits on subject matter or participation, the same statutes that guarantee the public be heard lead to public meetings that are hours-long airings of vitriol, hate speech, and direct threats of violence directed at public officials and other members of the public. CSAC will pursue solutions to modernize the Brown Act and to foster public meetings that are safe and welcoming for all members of the community.

Homelessness Funding Implementation. CSAC's homelessness advocacy has focused on direct county funding to combat factors that contribute to homelessness, including the cost of housing and the need for additional support systems. In 2021, the state made significant multi-year investments in homelessness and housing programs and services. These investments highlight the state, county, and city roles in ending homelessness in California. CSAC will continue to advocate for resources and for the flexibility in the use of current and future homelessness funding. CSAC will also closely monitor and

engage with our state partners on program guidelines and implementation efforts to ensure the successful completion and sustainability of county homelessness projects and services.

Affordable Housing. CSAC will continue to advocate for locally driven planning to implement statewide housing goals. CSAC will also advocate for flexibility and housing element reforms that recognize the unique characteristics and infrastructure limitations of unincorporated areas. Finally, CSAC will continue to support affordable housing funding for all types of communities, with a focus on housing-supportive infrastructure in unincorporated areas.

Broadband. Last year’s historic investments in last-mile and middle-mile broadband infrastructure lay the foundation for community resilience, economic, and educational opportunity; CSAC will focus its advocacy on successful implementation of those investments. CSAC will also lead the charge for affordability, digital literacy, and other efforts to ensure Californians can access, adopt, and meaningfully use broadband service.

Drought Preparedness. CSAC has built a strong connection with state and federal agencies to create ongoing funding streams, disaster aid, and planning funding for counties as they continue to grapple with a multi-year drought. CSAC will continue these efforts by advocating for increased local support for the Sustainable Groundwater Management Program, water storage infrastructure, continued health and safety disaster funding, and streamlining the processes that counties use to secure state and federal aid.

Organic Waste Recycling Implementation Counties are moving into the implementation phase of SB 1383’s organic waste regulations. CSAC will continue to advocate for ongoing funding and implementation support, regulatory streamlining, and common-sense approaches to waste reduction. CSAC will advocate to make implementation of this mandate manageable, while reducing the impacts to customers. CSAC will also advocate to include funding for organic waste diversion infrastructure as a necessary component of any bond measure.

Illegal Cannabis. CSAC will continue to advocate for counties to secure resources and assistance as they deal with increasing levels and sophistication of illegal cannabis grows. Highlighting successes and replicating these throughout the state, from targeted enforcement to emphasizing the impacts of illegal cannabis, will be part of the CSAC strategy.

Felony Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST). CSAC is actively participating in a stakeholder work group developing short, medium, and long-term solutions to the Department of State Hospitals’ Felony IST waitlist issues. Given the pressing need to significantly shorten days individuals spend on the waitlist, the state included provisions in a budget trailer bill that would authorize the suspension of county LPS patient intake at state hospitals if IST solutions are insufficient; a requirement to return existing LPS patients back to counties would follow. CSAC opposes the state utilizing this LPS “trigger/backstop” and is engaged in helping develop alternative IST solutions, as well as ensuring the necessary resources and infrastructure align with any change to the division of state and county responsibilities.

Aging Programs Initiative. The Department of Aging is leading an initiative to revisit the local leadership structure for Area Agencies on Aging (AAA). CSAC will advocate to ensure that counties maintain the flexibility and decision-making authority to determine locally how best to administer these critical aging services. In addition, CSAC will work with partner organizations to support additional funding for these services to meet the diverse and growing needs of this population.

Federal Priorities

Infrastructure and Build Back Better. On November 15, President Biden signed the long-awaited *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA)* in law. The Act (P.L. 117-58), which represents a major portion of the president's economic agenda, will provide historic, multi-year investments in local roads and bridges, public transit, broadband, aviation, and water infrastructure. As the Biden administration begins the process of implementing new programs and funding authorized by the law, CSAC will work closely with federal departments and agencies to ensure that California's counties are best positioned to capitalize on the programmatic reforms and investments of the IIJA.

As of this writing, Congress was still debating the *Build Back Better Act (BBBA)*, a \$1.75 trillion social program and climate resiliency investment package. While passage of the legislation (H.R. 5376) will ultimately depend upon securing the support of all 50 Democratic senators, expectations are that a final deal is within reach and, if so, the bill could be signed into law before the end of the year. As in the case of the IIJA, CSAC will work closely with the Biden administration on key issues surrounding the implementation of the BBBA.

Strengthening the Social Safety Net. While the BBBA provides significant funding for housing, child care, adult protective services, health care and other key program areas, it is expected that there will be opportunities in 2022 to further strengthen programs that support indigent families, children, disabled, the elderly, persons experiencing homelessness, and other vulnerable populations. CSAC will continue to focus on prioritizing investments in programs that support these populations.

Resilience. Both the IIJA and the BBBA include much-needed investments designed to address the ongoing impacts of climate change and extreme weather events. In addition to working with federal agencies on key issues stemming from the implementation of the aforementioned bills, CSAC will continue to work closely with members of the California congressional delegation who are pursuing additional investments and reforms to various disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response programs.

American Rescue Plan Act Funding. The federal response to COVID-19 and the associated economic consequences included significant flexible fiscal relief for counties. CSAC will coordinate information and advocacy with NACo and relevant federal and state agencies to ensure California counties can not only use ARPA funding to support recovery in their communities, but also leverage additional dollars to maximize local investments.