

Chapter One

General Provisions

Preamble

The strength and creativity of America's government institutions reflects the ability of a free people to create, control, and use their freedom for the purpose of self-government. The bedrock foundation of that strength and creativity is responsible and responsive local government. It is to local government – and particularly to county government – that citizens turn for day-to-day government needs. It is to the county that citizens turn for equal protection under the laws guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions, and locally provided by the sheriff, courts, and jails. Citizens look to the county for the protection of health, the treatment of physical and mental illnesses and chemical dependency, and for help in times of financial crisis. The county enhances economic well-being through its work in the fields of transportation, business regulation, planning, public safety, agricultural advice, libraries, and the protection and improvement of the built and natural environment.

Yet decisions made by the California Legislature and electorate have restricted counties' ability to provide those services and others at the levels their communities desire. Beginning with its implementation of Proposition 13, the Legislature has entrusted counties, but not funded counties, to provide the most important services to Californians. Counties now face the twin pressures of increasing service demands and statutory requirements on the one hand, and the inability to raise necessary resources to meet those demands on the other.

Local control is the chief principle underlying the California County Platform. Based on that principle, the three major planks of the Platform are:

- 1) to allow county government the fiscal resources that enable it to meet its obligations;
- 2) to permit county government the flexibility to provide services and facilities in a manner that resolves the day-to-day problems communities face; and
- 3) to grant county government the ability to tailor the levels of local revenues and services to citizens' satisfaction.

This Platform is a statement of general principle and policy direction. It recognizes that when dealing in a fast-changing political arena in a state with many local differences almost any policy guideline will occasionally require exceptions. Therefore, it is anticipated that both the CSAC Board of Directors and Executive Committee will support exceptions in appropriate situations upon finding that there exist compelling special conditions.

The Platform is incomplete in that it is continually subject to review and revision. The Platform chapters are arranged in a manner that facilitates additions and amendments without affecting remaining portions.

Section 1: Local Control

Local control calls for the recognition of the differences that exist throughout the state and holds that local government should have the flexibility to develop systems by which services are provided and problems are resolved. It calls on counties to resist externally imposed systems that ignore the differences among them.

Not only does local control fortify counties' position that the state must recognize local differences, it also allows for individual counties to adopt alternatives that might not be acceptable to other counties – provided that these alternatives are not imposed on those who do not wish them.

Counties adopt the principle of local control as the policy cornerstone of CSAC

CSAC will strive to assure that all legislative proposals, policies, and regulations recognize the differences that exist throughout the state. CSAC will strongly resist any externally imposed systems that ignore statewide differences or that erode local determination.

CSAC internally incorporates the principle of local control. In matters limited to county-wide or regional application, counties are free to determine their own solutions, except when the CSAC Board of Directors or the Executive Committee determines them to be of the gravest and most far-reaching proportions.

CSAC will firmly support any county or counties seeking to oppose the external imposition of systems upon them.

CSAC will firmly support any county or counties seeking to resolve local or regional issues through the enactment of legislation or otherwise, as long as the proposal is not contrary to the basic precepts of a strong and viable county government.

Section 2: Intergovernmental Relations

There are various issues and problems that transcend the boundaries of political subdivisions. In implementing the Platform, CSAC will endeavor to foster an understanding of the appropriate levels of governmental responsibility to promote efficient and effective governance for the citizens of the State of California. Within this context, it is essential that the roles of state, regional, and local agencies be recognized as distinct and separate. Areas of mutual concern do exist; however, the appropriate role of each agency varies.

Counties comprehensively plan for future growth, the management of natural resources, and the provision of public services; the state should only add requirements to this local planning in areas the Legislature explicitly finds to be of statewide concern. One useful measure of statewide significance is the Legislature's commitment of funds to local government for related costs.

Counties will fully implement state-mandated, state-funded programs locally. However, doing so is not financially or operationally feasible when state regulations are overly burdensome, internally inconsistent, too inflexible to local concerns, or generally under-funded. Therefore, CSAC supports a process of periodic legislative review to determine each mandated program's benefits, including the fiscal and operational feasibility of the program and related regulations.

Counties, cities, and special districts should adopt formal policies that encourage locally initiated solutions to regional problems.

CSAC will support reasonable proposals that encourage local agencies to resolve disputes without costly litigation and in a way that buoys public confidence in local government, for instance through non-binding mediation.

Section 3: Efficiency, Economy, and Effectiveness

Counties also advocate the principle of local control to improve efficiency, economy, and effectiveness.

CSAC will consider proposals to realign responsibility for public services among levels of government. However, any realigned program responsibility must be accompanied by revenue authority sufficient to fund the ongoing costs of the program.

CSAC will support efforts to align program responsibility with revenue authority among various levels of government.

Many local services are well-suited for the utilization of private contracts. When properly used, private contracts can be an effective method of increasing efficiency and economy. CSAC encourages expanded permission to use private contracts to provide local services in justifiable areas as a means of achieving efficiency and economy.