



Policy Priorities for 2021

(As approved by the Board of Directors November 19, 2020)

California State Association of Counties

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 existing programs.

Those concerns pose particular challenges as they relate to policy issues that CSAC is prioritizing in 2021: responding and recovering from the pandemic, wildfire and disaster preparedness, broadband, housing and homelessness, juvenile justice reform implementation, and local governance and land use authority preservation. The priorities below are issues critical to counties where CSAC will proactively advocate, in addition to responding to issues raised in the coming year.

COVID-19 Response and Recovery. The coronavirus and the serious COVID-19 illness it causes leapt from the local public health silo in March to impact the breadth of every county's operations, including budgeting, workforce, human services, behavioral health, public safety and economic development. In 2020, CSAC helped secure critical federal CARES Act funding, \$750 million in state Realignment Backfill funding, and a number of flexibilities regarding workforce and county operations, including increased Mental Health Services Act expenditure authority and extensions for county eligibility deadlines. CSAC also maintained close engagement with Governor Newsom and his Health and Human Services Agency on the state's reopening plans, the availability of testing, health equity, and myriad other COVID-19 related issues. This record of strident advocacy on behalf of California's counties must continue in 2021 as members grapple with federal funding deadlines, local economic impacts, strained health systems, and skyrocketing rates of domestic violence as well as requests for income assistance and behavioral health services.

County Fiscal Stability. As previously mentioned, county budgets will continue to face significant hardship and uncertainty in 2021 due to the ongoing pandemic. Revenues that counties rely on for normal operations are eroding, while counties also must respond to the unprecedented demands of the ongoing public health crisis as frontline service providers. CSAC will continue to advocate for adequate funding for safety net services that counties provide in order to prevent reductions to the vital health and human services programs that are needed more than ever.

Broadband Infrastructure and Funding. In the space of a generation, the internet has changed from a fringe tool for defense contractors and academia to a necessary utility for modern life. Nothing has made the importance of broadband more apparent than the COVID-19 pandemic, as workers and students move online. Yet a million households in California lack access to reliable broadband at any price and millions more are effectively barred from it for reasons of finances, language, or disability. It is long past time for California to ensure access to broadband and the means to adopt it for every

Californian. CSAC will advocate for program reforms and funding sufficient to close the digital divide as quickly and completely as possible.

Homelessness. COVID-19 has only exacerbated the homelessness crisis in California. While counties have received substantial funding over the last several years to support our efforts in combating homelessness, the need is only continuing to grow. CSAC will continue to advocate for resources, ensure that any new requirements come with commensurate new or ongoing funding, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each level of government.

Resiliency. After another horrific fire season in California, CSAC will advocate on behalf of counties on recovery efforts and the need to improve our statewide resiliency to disasters. CSAC will continue to advocate for flexible funding at the local level to help prepare, respond, and recover from disasters.

Behavioral Health Services. As COVID-19 continues into 2021, the need for individuals to access mental health services is critical. There is a need overall for additional funding to provide behavioral health services, technology for remote services, and for new policy changes, such as the implementation of Laura's Law/AB 1976 expansion, modernization and to protect county fiscal stability and successful services through the state's CalAIM Medi-Cal proposal. CSAC will also focus on cross-sector collaboration and efforts to build robust and responsive services with schools, the criminal justice system, and other stakeholders.

Juvenile Justice. Another top priority for CSAC in 2021 will be the implementation of the recently enacted Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Realignment. The timing of this policy shift, paired with a few concerns about the implementing legislation (SB 823), will present clear challenges. However, this will be yet another opportunity for counties to show success in implementing major policy reform in the face of adversity. CSAC and counties will need to partner with the Chief Probation Officers of California (CPOC) and probation departments to support implementation efforts and regional partnerships at the local level. These partnerships were key to the success of past juvenile justice reforms and crucial to obtaining the positive amendments included in SB 823.

Additionally, CSAC will advocate at the state level for adequate funding for all counties; local flexibility to develop responses and partnerships between counties to effectively serve youth, especially those with higher-level treatment needs; and appropriate oversight and accountability that is commensurate to the responsibility and liability being "realigned" to counties. CSAC also believes that oversight and accountability measures associated with the most complex youth cases that were last to be realigned should not disrupt the success counties have proven with existing juvenile programs and funding streams. To the extent these priorities require future legislation, CSAC will actively advocate for those changes at the state level.

Affordable Housing. The affordability and availability of housing is at crisis levels in California. The housing issue is not only a crisis in its own right, it's also a main driver of California's homelessness emergency. CSAC will advocate for funding for affordable housing, including new state funding for construction of homes affordable to households at all income levels. CSAC will continue to focus on

implementation of recent housing legislation, including allocation of approved bonds, as well as full implementation of new homelessness programs.

Federal Legislative Outlook and Potential Priorities

COVID-19/County Fiscal Stability. With critical funding for COVID-19 response running out at the end of 2020, CSAC will continue to advocate for a fifth COVID-19 relief/economic stimulus package that will help California counties respond to and recover from the pandemic. CSAC will also make county fiscal relief and federal investment in other key programs major priorities for any current and/or future coronavirus response measures moving through Congress.

Health Care Reform. If the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down the *Affordable Care Act* (ACA) in the case of *California v. Texas*, millions of Californians would lose their health insurance and millions of others would lose important protections provided under the law. For California's counties, repeal of the ACA would mean one in three residents covered by Medi-Cal could lose health coverage or face substantial coverage limits. In addition, safety-net hospitals and other health providers that serve low-income individuals and families would be forced to scale back investments in health care programs and services. Finally, with more than a quarter of patients with serious mental illness relying on federal Medicaid program dollars, Medi-Cal expansion under the ACA has played a critical role in providing mental health services and substance abuse treatment to Californians, including people experiencing homelessness. The outcome of the Supreme Court case and the election results will influence the direction of potential health care policy in 2021 and CSAC will continue to prioritize the health care needs of individuals and families that we serve in any of these efforts

Resilience. Extreme weather events and natural disasters are occurring more frequently and becoming more severe. Among other challenges, California has been confronted with persistent drought conditions, warming temperatures, and insect infestations, all of which have led to an unprecedented tree mortality crisis. Dead and dying trees, combined with the rapid growth of the wildland urban interface, have been identified as key factors in the devastating fire seasons in recent years and will continue to increase the likelihood of more severe wildfires in the future. On the heels of historic wildfires, California also has confronted severe winter storms, which have caused widespread flooding, mudslides, and damage to critical infrastructure across the state.

In light of recent disasters, including this year's wildfires – which represent the largest and most destructive in recorded history – it is essential for CSAC to continue to advocate for federal assistance and pre-disaster mitigation funding to help counties prepare for and recover from the aftermath of devastating events. While Congress approved a major disaster reform bill in 2018, FEMA has yet to implement several major provisions of the law, including one that would provide assistance to state and local governments for building code implementation and enforcement. The agency also has yet to define the terms “resilient” and “resiliency.”

Communications Priorities

Strategic With Communications

The CSAC Communications Team functions with two primary goals in mind: support legislative advocacy and tell the County Story. We will continue to strategically leverage written, graphic and video communications to support the Associations' policy priorities, as well as state and federal advocacy efforts. Working closely with CSAC Officers, County Supervisors, the Executive and Legislative Teams, messaging and tactics will all focus on enhancing our advocacy efforts while promoting our membership and the critical role counties play in our communities.

The Communications Team will utilize the strong foundation and relationships it has developed over the past two years in the areas of earned media and social media. Since FY 2017-18, views of CSAC Tweets have increased more than 70 percent and we plan to work with all 58 California Counties and the CSAC Advocacy Team to continue this momentum. Since FY 2019-20, CSAC has worked diligently to respond and leverage a 75 percent increase in media inquiries from state and national media outlets. This effort has allowed CSAC to build strong relationships with high-profile journalists while explaining CSAC positions on key priorities. The Communications Team will continue responding to media inquiries – and be proactive when it's needed to advance counties' priorities to the Capitol Press Corps and other targeted outlets. These traditional media relations efforts will be leveraged further through various CSAC Social Media channels.

Focusing on Member Services, or telling the County Story, is the other goal of the CSAC Communications Team. Our efforts in this area are designed to strategically spotlight county leaders' services, highlight excellence in county service and raise the visibility of counties as a whole. Tactics include local media outreach for awards and recognitions; the Letters for Our Friends program; local media outreach promoting CSAC Challenge Awards and various other media outreach efforts. Communication and promotion tactics include the Profiles in Leadership series highlighting CSAC Board Members; The County of the Week series and Membership Mondays, which profiles various county professionals; The County Voice blog, the CSAC Bulletin and the Leadership Letter.

The CSAC Communication Team will continue to analyze existing and emerging communications channels and vehicles to determine the most effective ways to support the Association's advocacy and Member Service efforts.