



March 30, 2017

**Before the Ohio House Finance Committee**

**Testimony on HB 49 – the state biennial budget bill**

**Honorable Tom Whiston, Morrow County Commissioner**

Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Tom Whiston. I am a Morrow County Commissioner and currently Secretary of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to offer testimony on behalf of CCAO with respect to our counties' partnership with the State. As you know, counties represent the state through the delivery of services to residents in critical areas. The conducting of elections, administration of justice and public safety, and protection of children from abuse and neglect are three of the most important areas. I am here today to speak to you about Ohio's state/county partnership and how we can strengthen that relationship over the next two years in these three areas.

**Upgrading Ohio's Voting Equipment**

Ohio's current voting equipment, which was largely purchased in 2005 and 2006 to comply with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), is nearing the end of its lifespan. Counties are seeking a partnership with the state to upgrade Ohio's voting equipment. Such a partnership would not be unprecedented.

As many of you may recall, the state appropriated capital dollars earlier this century to pull down federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funding to buy voting equipment. Two years ago, the state budget included approximately \$12 million to forge a partnership with counties to purchase electronic poll books. That partnership has been very successful and well received. Thank you!

There are many positives in the electronic poll book purchase program that we'd like to replicate in upgrading Ohio's voting equipment. These include:



County Risk  
Sharing Authority

Fax: 614-220-0209  
www.corsa.org



Counties Uniting for Affordable Health Benefits

Fax: 614-229-4588  
www.cebco.org



County Commissioners  
Association of Ohio  
Service Corporation

Fax: 614-221-6986  
www.ccao.org

- The state took the lead in targeting an 85 state/15 local percent split in purchase costs. In the end, the arrangement came out a little bit closer to 80/20; nonetheless, the partnership has been outstanding!
- The program allowed counties to secure equipment over a two-year window, and then be reimbursed by the state. This allowed counties to obtain the equipment in conjunction with their strategic and budgetary plans.
- The program also reimbursed counties that had acquired poll books before the program, so as not to penalize them for moving quicker.
- The program allowed boards of elections to select the poll books from state term pricing lists, thereby receiving some economy of scale benefit.

We'd be most appreciative if we could repeat this successful program with one exception. We have been working with our partners in the Ohio Association of Election Officials, the Secretary of State's office, and DAS to negotiate with vendors at the front end. We believe this will result in an even more efficient undertaking. Once that pricing information is released, we understand that the Secretary plans to issue a directive instructing the board of elections to work with their commissioners to develop a statement of intent as to what the county would like to purchase. Those figures will be returned to the SOS three weeks after the directive is issued. This effort will give all of us a handle on the statewide cost.

We fully realize that this is a multi-year effort to get ALL counties upgraded. We are seeking the following:

- Initial seed funding for the program in this year's operating budget.
- Language that would provide the details of this state/county purchase program.
- Clear statement of intent as to how the General Assembly hopes to fund the partnership going forward the next few years.

We understand the Administration is interested in utilizing capital dollars, perhaps in next year's capital budget bill. We appreciate a partnership with a blend of dollars—as capital dollars can help with purchasing going forward and operating dollars could help with reimbursement, just like the electronic poll book program, as well as for counties looking to lease equipment.

While the next presidential election is a few years away, we have counties that need to upgrade or purchase equipment now or in the near future. Therefore, if we could have some statewide plan or road map of which we are all aware, it would be most helpful and very constructive in moving forward.

## **The Impacts of the Drug Epidemic upon our children and the management of our county jails**

### ***Child Protection Services***

Opiate addiction has pushed the child protective system into a state of crisis and counties desperately need more resources in order to care for the children who are coming into our care.

- Counties have seen a 20% jump in placement costs since 2010 with no new investment from the state.
- The children who are entering our care have experienced a higher level of trauma, leading to more intensive needs and longer placements.
- Opiate cases also tend to be extremely traumatic for our child protective caseworkers. We are now facing a workforce shortage due to higher than normal turnover, placing even more pressure on this system.

CCAO supports an additional investment of \$30M per year in the state child protection allocation - \$20M to return us to pre-recession funding levels and an additional \$10M to help manage the increased costs caused by the opiate epidemic. The flexibility of these dollars will help us recruit and support kin, foster care and adoptive families, address the rising costs of child placement and retain our most valuable asset – our case workers who are on the front lines everyday protecting Ohio's children.

### ***County Jail Administration***

The continued incarceration of mentally ill and addicted individuals in county jails places an undue burden of risk and of cost upon these facilities and is clearly outside the purpose for county jails. Jail employees are not trained to manage or treat individuals suffering from mental illness or addiction. This population is at high risk for injuring themselves or others.

Three programs have been outlined by CCAO, Buckeye State Sheriffs Association and the behavioral health community that are specifically designed to assist county jails in managing and caring for the mentally ill and addicted population. We ask that these programs be developed and funded in HB 49 which would:

- Provide direct treatment and counseling services in the county jail through a program managed by the local county behavioral health boards. This program will provide a continuity of care for mental health and addiction services that are so critical for many of the individuals incarcerated in our jails.

- Establish a state-wide behavioral health triage program that provides regional centers that law enforcement can take individuals to who have been taken into custody or are incarcerated which:
  - Serve as a drop-off center and provide crisis beds for crisis intervention
  - Conduct immediate forensic evaluations
  - Manage detoxification
- Provide reimbursement to the counties for the psychotropic drugs prescribed for county jail inmates

**DRC's proposed Targeting Community Alternatives to Prison (T-CAP) program – placing Felony 5 Offenders in the community rather than prison**

While CCAO believes that this program has merit as a best practice, it does not receive our support at this time for the following reasons:

- The disposition and rehabilitation of felony offenders is the responsibility of the state. This program would result in a major paradigm shift transferring that responsibility to the counties. We recommend that this matter be addressed in separate legislation where it can be substantially debated apart from state budget deliberations.
- The state's offer of \$ 32/33 per day in financial assistance is significantly insufficient for the counties. This subsidy would not come close to covering the county's cost. The program becomes an unfunded mandate burdening the county with additional expenses beyond their current budget obligations.
- In many parts of the state there is no infrastructure in place to provide the rehabilitation, treatment and security services required for the program. This applies to counseling, probation and administrative staff; community housing and jail space; and equipment to effectively monitor probation/sentence compliance.
- The program becomes mandatory after one year beginning in July 2018. Even the counties that have the resources necessary to manage the program indicate that it is a practical impossibility for them to plan, identify contractors, start up, and begin to manage this program in 12 months.

As you discuss the priorities for Ohio's 2018/2019 operating budget, CCAO believes it is essential for the General Assembly to address these issues in order to preserve, protect and strengthen our important partnership – a partnership which contributes to Ohio's quality of life and overall success of our citizens.

Attached to my testimony you will find an outline of several other issues CCAO is concerned about and urges you to address during your budget deliberations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

## Ohio House Finance Committee

### HB 49 – the state biennial budget bill

## COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

### Items contained in the Governor's proposed budget which CCAO asks the House to consider during its budget deliberations

- **Adult protective services (APS)** - The state should increase its investment in APS to cover at least one full time APS caseworker per county. An additional \$3.12M added to the current appropriation of \$2.6M would give each county \$65,000 to accomplish that goal. An additional \$10M, made up of \$3.12M for full time caseworkers and the remainder to be distributed by formula for protective services, would give us the resources to build out the infrastructure needed to address our growing APS needs.
- **Increase Funding for Ohio State University Extension** - CCAO supports increasing funding for OSU Extension given the many benefits Ohioans receive from OSU Extension. Two examples of outstanding programs provided by extension include the 4H program which currently trains approximately 250,000 youth across Ohio, and OSU Extension research and education to address water quality concerns. The as introduced version of the budget reduced OSU extension funding compared with the current biennium. CCAO supports increases in the budget for the next biennium to maintain these quality programs.
- **Funding for Soil and Water Conservation Districts** – Currently, county and other local appropriations provide \$14.4 million per year for Soil and Water Conservation Districts while the proposed state match is only \$10.28 million, a historically low level of match at \$.71 per local dollar invested. The state needs to increase funding for soil and water conservation districts to something closer to the historical averages of 90 cents on the dollar for each local dollar invested. Soil and Water conservation districts provide valuable assistance with respect to storm water management, flood prevention, ditch maintenance, stream flow improvements and citizen drainage issues both in rural and urban areas.
- **Bureau for medically handicapped children (BCMh)** - We disagree with the misplaced mandate that allows the Department of Health to require counties to withhold inside millage in order to pay for BCMh. Current language in HB 49 proposes to move the BCMh program to the Department of Medicaid, eventually eliminating the need for county resources to support the program. We support

the plan to move fiscal responsibility of this program to the state, however we understand this poses a big change for the families who depend on the program and any disruption of services must be prevented.

- **Multi-county health district** – HB 49 authorizes a multi-county health district board to propose a property tax levy directly to the voters of the district to pay for its expenses. CCAO supports giving boards of county commissioners and county councils levy authority on all local health district levies. If legislative action is being taken to allow for multi-county levies, county commissioners and council members should be given levy authority and discretion regarding the submission, type, millage or duration of levies submitted to the voters for this purpose.
- **Non-emergency transportation (NET)** – HB 49 shifts responsibility from counties to a state-led brokered system. We have concerns about what the impact would be to counties who have dedicated resources to create a strong county-led transportation system, as well as the citizens who depend on these systems.
- **Multi-agency radio communications system (MARCS) subsidy** - The current budget provides up to \$2.0 million in each fiscal year from the GRF to be transferred to the MARCS Administration Fund to reduce or eliminate MARCS subscriber fees paid by political subdivisions and regional public safety and first response agencies classified as Tier 1 subscribers by the MARCS Steering Committee. This subsidy allows the \$20 per month per unit subscriber fee to be reduced from \$20 to \$10. We ask that this subsidy be continued in the next biennium by adding a similar provision to HB 498.