



Maryland Association of
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2012 Legislative Initiatives

County Budget Security – Counties have been a casualty of State budget shortfalls – 2010 actions imposed deep ongoing reductions and additional reductions and cost shifts occurred for FY 2012. The deepest reductions have occurred to local roads and bridges, law enforcement, health departments, and county jails. Other areas, including Program Open Space and State Park Distributions, continue to be threatened each year as adjustments are made to meet the States bottom line. Now counties find themselves repaying a state reserve fund beginning in FY 2013, which was raided to balance the budget three years ago, and the transfer of teacher pension costs remains a massive threat to local finances.

While MACo is acutely aware of the long-term funding constraints facing the state, counties continue to struggle as their largest revenue source is in continuing decline. Therefore, MACo urges state policymakers to resist any further State actions to compromise county budgets and local services. In addition, it urges state policymakers to work with counties to protect current state support for these essential local services, and take other actions to ease the ongoing financial burdens resulting from prior cost shifts and aid cutbacks.

Defend Local Land Use Autonomy – Land use controls are best in the hands of local elected officials, as they best understand the unique concerns and needs of their residents. However, multiple statewide policy proposals – including many developed in the name of environmental protection or sustainability --have threatened this core notion. Between a proposal limiting rural development, an agency-driven “State Development Plan,” and statewide implementation of federal pollution targets – county governments must reinforce the importance of local accountability and direct public input into land use decisions. No statewide law, planning document, or set of goals can ever replace the value of locally accountable and citizen-informed planning and zoning. The addition of any further planning, zoning, or reporting mandates should also be scrutinized against the burden and cost they will place on county planning staff, who already struggle to meet current requirements and schedule deadlines.

School Board Fiscal Accountability and Process Reforms – Recent years’ struggles over school funding have highlighted county difficulties in managing public school expenses. These difficulties have resulted in differences over budget submissions, employee actions, and Maintenance of Effort (MOE). Counties do not seek any governance over curriculum or programmatic functions of delivering education, but do seek a stronger partnership in guiding these investments of public funds. The range of approaches includes the equitable treatment of school/county personnel, improvements to the maintenance of effort calculation and waiver process, governance and disclosure of outside reserve funds, reasonable refinements to the school budget process, clearer categorical budget classifications, and determination of non-recurring costs. Enhancing these laws and relationships could leverage more accountability and responsiveness within the largest element of every county’s budget.

School Construction and Renovation Funding – While the State has laudably increased its school construction and renovation efforts in recent years, the need for funding remains high. Every state dollar invested in school projects leverages roughly two county dollars of local funding. MACo urges the General Assembly to continue its commitment by keeping school construction and renovation funding a high priority, and support a funding level consistent with its own adopted multi-year goals. Additionally, MACo urges the State to develop and adopt a new multi-year funding strategy as the current goal expires in FY 2013.