



2013 Legislative Initiatives

County Budget Security – County governments have taken the deepest cuts of any part of the state’s budget during the Great Recession. Local governments have lost some \$1.8 billion in State support since Fiscal Year 2010, affecting nearly every essential local service: roads and bridges; law enforcement; health departments; and jails. Temporary cuts have been made permanent or extended with each budget cycle, and state administrative costs have been shifted to counties without any county control. In addition to aid reductions and cost shifts, the State’s recent teacher pension shift sends to counties massive new costs that lie completely outside the county government’s management.

Although the State continues to face long-term funding challenges to meet its spending commitments to education, Medicaid, and general government – the State’s fiscal situation clearly remains stronger than that of its counties, whose reliance on property taxes lags behind the overall economy. MACo urges State policy makers to restore eclipsed funding, ease financial burdens of prior costs shifts, and reinforce capital commitments to schools and other county priorities. The State should resist creating any further burdens on county budgets, local services, and their constituents.

County Government Voice in State Pension Administration – MACo has argued that shifting funding responsibility to county governments has done nothing to improve the sustainability of state pension funding, it has simply relocated the cost burden to the level of government that has played a far lesser role in these cost changes. Counties have minimal representation on the Board of Trustees for the Retirement and Pension System; have no control or say in plan design changes and benefit enhancements; nor a role in making investment decisions. The state should include two seats on the Board of Trustees to specifically represent the interests of county governments as major payers of system costs, and should ensure that ongoing studies of the system examine investment practices and other functions with cost implications.

Defend Local Land Use Autonomy – Multiple policy proposals, often developed in the name of environmental protection, threaten the central notion that locally elected officials are best suited to make community land use decisions. Between the implementation of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load requirements, PlanMaryland, legislation and regulations limiting development on septic systems, required code enforcement burdens, and proposed county transportation mandates based on climate change, county governments must reinforce the importance of local accountability and direct public input into land use decisions. Widespread State mandates have burdened local planning staff and impeded the practicality of adopting a timely and effective comprehensive plan. No statewide law, planning document, or set of aspirational goals can ever replace the value of locally accountable and citizen-informed planning and zoning.

County Tax Application and Fairness – As several state laws govern the application and administration of tax systems affecting local government, counties seek more reasonable treatment and local administrative flexibility. Among the county priorities in this area are: granting local governments the same exemption from motor fuel taxes afforded to the State; exempting local governments from locally-imposed gross receipts on heavy equipment rentals; and allowing greater local flexibility in applying rates and offsets toward the personal property tax on business taxpayers.