

Federal Priorities for NC Counties

Spring 2021 Update



North Carolina Association
of County Commissioners

2021 (FY22) Federal Priorities for NC Counties: A Quick Guide to Our Issues

Go to www.ncacc.org/federalissues for more information.

Support Funding and Legislation to Expand High-Speed Broadband Access — Adequate digital infrastructure is essential for education, economic development, health care and social services; however, many portions of North Carolina counties do not have access to high-speed Internet. Counties urge Congress to provide digital infrastructure funding and adopt legislation that clarifies Federal Communications Commission (FCC) definitions for speed thresholds and unserved areas.

Support Efforts to Promote Food System Resiliency to Strengthen North Carolina's Food System and Increase Access to Affordable, Healthy Food Options — Access to food is a basic human need and a critical component to a healthy society. Food system resilience can be defined as the capacity over time of a food system to provide sufficient, quality food accessible to all, in the face of various and often unforeseen disturbances. When people are food insecure, meaning they lack access to high-quality and affordable food to sustain a healthy lifestyle, it has wide impacts on a community. NCACC's 2020-2021 presidential initiative, developed by President Ronnie Smith, Martin County Commissioner focuses on food system resiliency, with an emphasis on logistics and getting food to the people who need it.

Support Funding for Behavioral Health Programs and Services to Address the Opioid and Substance Abuse Epidemic and Support Flexibility for Counties to Use Funds for Prevention and Recovery — The United States is in the midst of an unprecedented opioid and substance abuse epidemic. North Carolina counties are on the front lines of this battle working with the state to develop and fund substance abuse and overdose inhibition programs, but progress is limited without consistent funding and support from Congress.

Support Measures to Reduce the Number of People with Mental Illness in County Jails Such as Those Identified in NACo's "Stepping Up Initiative" — In North Carolina, 17 percent of the total inmate population has a mental health diagnosis. Without appropriate treatment and services, people with mental illnesses can continue to cycle through the criminal justice system. Legislation and federal funding are needed to help counties develop and implement efforts to reduce the number of people with mental illness in county jails.

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Support Robust Funding for Disaster Preparation, Assistance and Mitigation — In 2016, Hurricane Matthew caused an estimated \$4.8 billion in damage to North Carolina. Before Matthew recovery was complete, Hurricane Florence caused at least \$17 billion in damage and took 43 lives in September 2018. One month later, Tropical Storm Michael took additional lives, caused millions more in damage, and left state and local resources strained even further. Counties in North Carolina also sustained damage from Hurricanes Dorian and Isaias, and Tropical Storm Eta. Counties throughout the state need long-term federal assistance for recovery and disaster preparedness efforts before more storms occur. Counties need flexibility when receiving and prioritizing funds, and counties need resources to get to communities in a timely manner.

Oppose Unfunded Mandates and Changes in Eligibility for Federal Programs that Shift Costs to Counties — Reductions in federal deficits should not be accomplished by shifting costs to counties, imposing unfunded mandates. Counties also oppose any legislative or regulatory initiatives that undermine local government decision making authority or pre-empt county programs and taxing authority.

Support Federal Reclassification of 911 Telecommunicators as First Responders — The Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) system is a tool used by federal agencies to classify the workforce into useful, occupational categories. Currently, the SOC system categorizes 911 dispatch as “office and administrative support occupations,” which includes secretaries, office clerks and taxi-cab dispatch. Due to the complex and often stressful nature of 911 calls, counties urge Congress to update the SOC classification to “Protective Service Occupation,” which currently includes lifeguards, firefighters, TSA baggage screeners and even playground monitors, to also include 911 telecommunicators.

Support Funds for Health, Human and Economic Services Programs Including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food and Nutrition Services and Federal Block Grants — Counties are the first responders providing services to the public locally and, in particular, our nation’s vulnerable populations. Since many of these services are mandated by federal law and the federal government provides funding to assist states and counties in meeting local demands, this funding should be protected in upcoming budgets.

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Support Funding Increases as Authorized by the Supporting Older Americans Act — According to 2019 data, North Carolina ranks 9th in the number of people 65 and older. At the same time, 82 counties had more people 60 and over than under 18 years. By 2025, this number is expected to increase to 89 counties and by 2038 to 95 counties. While the Supporting Older Americans Act (SOAA) that was signed into law in 2020 reauthorizes the OAA for five years (through 2024), with increased funding levels, Congress should also meet these funding levels in annual appropriations.

Support Additional Funding for Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT), Agricultural, Conservation, Workforce, Economic Development, and Infrastructure Programs that Help Counties Meet Public Needs — Funding for programs that maintain partnerships between federal and county governments in meeting demand for public services should remain a priority for Congress. In both rural and urban areas, counties rely on federal-local partnerships to support community and economic development, and public infrastructure.

Support Strong Regulations and Enforcement Along with Funding Assistance or Reimbursement to State and Local Governments when a Federal Agency, such as the EPA, Regulates Emerging Contaminants and other Discharges into Drinking Water Sources — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) classifies certain large and complex industrial chemicals called per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) as “emerging contaminants” that need research so that the agency can set limits. Counties urge Congress to insist that the EPA maintains coordination with state and local governments throughout this process.