



STRONGER COUNTIES. STRONGER OHIO.

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**Ohio House of Representatives Finance Committee
Proponent Testimony – House Bill 33
Glenn Miller, Henry County Commissioner**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Glenn Miller; I serve as a Henry County Commissioner and as President of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO). Counties are responsible for delivering state services and programs at the local level. Recently, counties have experienced an increase in the cost required to effectively deliver these services due to workforce shortages and inflation. It is vital that House Bill 33 continues to support a strong state-county partnership, which will allow counties to serve Ohioans effectively.

CCAO has three main priorities for this operating budget: ensuring full state reimbursement for indigent defense costs, a restoration of the Local Government Fund (LGF), and continued funding for vital county jail projects. We appreciate Governor DeWine's proposed investments in these key areas and look forward to working with the General Assembly to strengthen the state-county partnership.

Full State Reimbursement for Indigent Defense

Indigent defense is one of the many services that counties provide on behalf of the state. As a constitutionally mandated service, counties have less flexibility in how they can deliver that service. If an individual is accused of a crime and is determined to be indigent, they are entitled to an attorney provided by the county. The attorneys report their time to the local court and the local court submits that bill to the county commissioners for payment. The commissioners then seek repayment of their costs from the state. As you can see, commissioners have little control over the operation of the indigent defense system in the county. They often have to use county general fund dollars to pay for the indigent defense services that are not reimbursed by the state due to insufficient state funds allocated for this purpose.

CCAO appreciates the recent unprecedented levels of financial support for indigent defense reimbursement from the General Assembly and the DeWine-Husted Administration. However, counties across the state are seeing costs increase for indigent defense due to factors outside of their control. There is an alarming lack of attorneys available to perform this work and those that are willing to do the work, can demand a higher fee as this service must be provided under the constitution. Therefore, CCAO is asking for this committee's support of additional funding for county indigent defense reimbursement, as well as



language to allow for the county to contract with the state for services, to hopefully alleviate the attorney shortage in many counties. In lieu of these changes, CCAO would ask that the state be statutorily required to fully fund the indigent defense program.

Local Government Fund

The Local Government Fund is the primary revenue sharing device between the state and counties, municipalities, and townships. The LGF historically received 3.68% of state GRF tax revenue but that figure was cut to 1.66% in 2011. The Executive Budget increases the percentage to 1.7% of state GRF tax revenue.

CCAO and the Ohio Township Association (OTA) have been working on a proposal for several months to strengthen this vital state-local partnership by modestly increasing the LGF and providing additional targeted support for other political subdivisions. The proposal includes increasing the LGF to 2.5% of state GRF tax revenue and doubling the supplemental small village and township fund from \$12 million to \$24 million per fiscal year. Additionally, our proposal would raise the lowest amount a county jurisdiction can receive from \$750,000 to \$850,000. Lastly, we would require that the County Budget Commission hold a meeting with the local jurisdictions within each county to review the distribution formula at least once every five years. CCAO and OTA respectfully request the committee include these provisions in HB 33.

Jail Funding

Public safety expenses often account for nearly 60% of a county's budget, with the largest expense being the operation of the county jail. County jails are facing many challenges including workforce shortages, and inmates with complex substance abuse and mental health issues. Unfortunately, many jails in Ohio are in desperate need of repair or are so far beyond repair that a new jail will need to be constructed to ensure safety for both inmates and staff.

CCAO appreciates the previous \$50 million allocated for jail construction/renovation in HB 687 from the 134th General Assembly. ODRC, who administers the funding, received applications totaling nearly \$500 million dollars worth of projects from counties. CCAO is thankful for the \$50 million contained in HB 33 for jail construction projects, however, the need for jail funding far exceeds this number. Therefore, CCAO respectfully requests that this committee support an amendment to increase the jail construction funding to \$200 million total over the biennium. This additional funding will allow counties to construct new jail facilities and result in increased public safety.

In addition to the budget priorities listed above, CCAO would like to express its support for several additional budget items. CCAO testified in support of these initiatives during the subcommittee process, but I would like to reiterate their importance in my testimony.

Next Generation 9-1-1

Counties also provide public safety services through wireline and wireless 9-1-1 systems. Unfortunately, many of our local 9-1-1 systems are outdated and operate primarily through a landline-based system. The Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1) system provides necessary upgrades to the existing 9-1-1 system to adapt to how people communicate today – largely through mobile and digital devices. NG 9-1-1 will move 9-1-1 technology and infrastructure to digital, internet-protocol technology, improving speed and effectiveness, along with first responders' ability to save lives, protect property, and ensure their own safety.

CCAO is supportive of the nearly \$46 million dollars contained in HB 33 that would support county efforts to upgrade and connect to a NG 9-1-1 system. However, the upgrade is only half of the equation. Counties will need additional funding to operate this new system. CCAO supported HB 445 from the 134th General Assembly, which would enact a statewide user fee of 70 cents to fund 9-1-1 operations in the state. Over 70% of that revenue would flow to local governments for the continued operation of the NG 9-1-1 system. CCAO respectfully requests that the 70 cent universal user fee be included in the operating budget.

Children Services

Counties are also partners with the state in administering many key human services programs and CCAO appreciates the increased investments proposed to support children, families, and seniors. One of the greatest challenges facing counties is the administration of child welfare with elevated placement costs, a growing placement crisis, and continued workforce challenges. CCAO supports the additional \$60 million in the state child protection allocation over the biennium to help counties meet these challenges.

Child Care

The availability of affordable child care is a known barrier-to-entry of the workforce for many Ohioans and affects all of our counties. CCAO appreciates the proposed increase in the eligibility threshold for publicly funded child care to 160% of the federal poverty level and supports a further increase to 200% of that level.

Healthy Aging Grants

The governor's proposed budget includes \$40 million in one-time Healthy Aging Grants designed to help Ohioans age in place and delay the transition to institutional care. These grants would flow through the boards of county commissioners in all 88 counties. Commissioners would have the flexibility to choose local partners to address gaps and provide a variety of services, including: minor home improvements, transportation, and personal care. CCAO supports this investment to foster increased independence and a high quality of life for our seniors.

H2Ohio

CCAO is pleased to see \$307 million in funding to the H2Ohio Fund. My home county of Henry has close to 1000 Department of Agriculture phosphorus reduction projects that have removed 32,300 pounds of phosphorus from our local waterways. Over 1.2 million acres of farmland have been enrolled in nutrient best management practices, dozens of wetland projects are underway and hundreds of failing home septic systems and lead service lines have been replaced. All of these actions promote improved water quality for a healthier environment and healthier citizens.

The governor's proposed budget allocates an additional \$58.8 million to the H2Ohio fund. The additional funding will support the H2Ohio Rivers Initiatives, a new program dedicated to maintaining water quality, protecting wildlife, and supporting economic development within Ohio's river systems.

Furthermore, CCAO supports the agricultural producers who utilize best management practices to reduce nutrient runoff. These producers should be recognized for their efforts to improve water quality.

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the committee, the budget before you invests in each and every county and strengthens the state-county partnership. My fellow county commissioners, executives, and council members are eager to work with you to build upon the strong foundation that Governor DeWine and his administration proposed.

Thank you for your time today. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.