



Draft Policy Priorities for 2023

California State Association of Counties

Homelessness. Counties are at the forefront of responding to California's growing homelessness crisis. Although state and local governments have made significant investments in housing and homelessness programs over the last few years, California still lacks a comprehensive, holistic strategy that provides sustained funding and clear levels of responsibility for all levels of government. CSAC is embarking on a major policy initiative through the newly created Homelessness Policy Solutions Group to develop policy solutions that map out a comprehensive system to address homelessness. Working with guidance from the CSAC Homelessness Action Team and CSAC Board-adopted Homelessness Principles, CSAC will also continue our advocacy on policies that address the causes of homelessness, calling for ongoing and flexible funding for the ongoing costs associated with providing services to unhoused residents and those at risk of homelessness, and prioritizing the development of an adequate housing continuum accessible to all Californians.

CalAIM Implementation. California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) is a multi-year initiative to enhance care coordination and improve health outcomes through state and federal proposals to simplify the Medi-Cal program. CalAIM has significant implications for many county health and human services functions, including behavioral health services, social services eligibility, county public hospitals, and cross-sector initiatives for foster youth and those who are homeless or justice-involved. CSAC will continue to focus on the federal, state, and local finance implications, as well as the impacts on county operations, programs, and the people served. Additionally, CSAC will continue to advocate for prioritization and funding of counties to provide services that leverage counties' existing expertise, and for the state to consult with counties in formulating and implementing all changes of this initiative.

Behavioral Health. The state is making significant investments in behavioral health housing, children's behavioral health services, and CalAIM. To successfully harness these investments to make transformative change requires addressing underlying county mental health plan funding shortfalls, and the expanding set of roles and responsibilities on these agencies continues to create challenges for successful progress. CSAC will advocate for behavioral health workforce assistance and adequate, sustained funding to match new services and administration expectations.

Workforce Challenges. Counties are facing significant workforce challenges, even as California has regained most of the nonfarm jobs lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the workforce challenges are particularly acute for county health and human services and public safety agencies, nearly all county departments face recruitment and retention challenges. CSAC will engage on opportunities for increased investments to support the county workforce, as well as policies that can help counties more effectively recruit, hire, and retain qualified and talented workers.

Drought. As California continues to experience extreme drought, the need for state and federal investments has become more important than ever. CSAC will support counties through advocacy for diversified regional water investments, continued watershed restoration and improved management of local water supplies. CSAC will emphasize core county roles including groundwater management, dry well monitoring and support, and water projects with co-benefits. This includes dam retrofits, flood and

water-recharge investments, and support for low-income communities. CSAC will support efforts to bring options to areas with lower water availability through funding and actions with state agencies.

Wildfire. Hand in hand with drought comes extreme fire. CSAC will continue efforts to reduce wildfire risk through active participation in partnerships such as the Forest Management Task Force and land stewardship actions. CSAC will support efforts to increase prescribed burning with best available practices, appropriate insurance risk, and training. In addition, it is critical to invest in programs that have co-benefits of reduced community wildfire risk and watershed conservation, advocate for regional wildfire and watershed program actions, community wildfire insurance, and wildland fire risk reduction through public and private working lands.

Cannabis. Throughout 2022, CSAC worked to update the County Platform to better reflect the ever-changing world of cannabis. CSAC will use the newly approved language to further our advocacy. The state must invest in resources to combat illegal cannabis and give counties the tools to ensure that they are able to appropriately address the fallout from unlicensed activity. However, cannabis is a major economic driver for many counties and CSAC's advocacy will go beyond enforcement to support the licensed market in new and creative ways.

Easing Administration of the Public Records Act (PRA). Counties and other local governments have faced an enormous increase in the number and size of PRA requests over the past few years. The intensive work required to review records and redact the material that is exempt or prohibited from disclosure has grown exponentially. Further compounding this problem is that counties must make tough judgment calls on whether to release some records, especially when doing so is specifically prohibited, for example because doing so would violate privacy laws or employee confidentiality. Counties have also seen an increase in vexatious litigants using the PRA to grind government work to a halt. CSAC will develop proposals that seek to reduce the impact of these growing issues.

Available, Accessible & Affordable Housing. The need for increased production of permanent housing in the state continues to be an issue of great importance. Addressing California's housing production challenges is also now broadly recognized as an important component of the state's efforts to address the rising rates of homeless and housing vulnerable families and individuals. In recent years, the state has created a variety of programs and allocated funding to improve the housing availability and affordability. Unfortunately, many of these programs often have narrow eligibility standards and cumbersome administrative processes for counties to access and administer. CSAC will continue efforts to find reasonable modifications to these programs that address local needs, as well as additional resources to assist counties in their efforts to address the housing challenges they face.

Protecting Local Revenues. The Legislature, for a variety of reasons, has for the past few years been reexamining some aspects of who should bear the costs of funding government. CSAC will advocate for decisions about local revenues to be made by local agencies, not the state, and will oppose legislation that would reallocate revenues away from counties or would reduce county revenues.

CARE Court Funding/Implementation. SB 1338, the Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act, includes a requirement that the state consult with county stakeholders in developing a state allocation to counties to implement the CARE Act process. CSAC will advocate to secure adequate, flexible, and sustained funding across all impacted local agencies to support counties' efforts in this new statewide initiative. Additionally, CSAC will advocate for any necessary changes related to implementation as planning efforts progress for all counties.

Aging Programs. As implementation of California’s Master Plan for Aging moves forward, CSAC will continue to engage directly on opportunities to strengthen and enhance services for older adults. One key area of focus remains the local leadership structure for aging services. The state’s newly formed CA 2030 Steering Committee includes two CSAC representatives, and is charged with examining local governance, geography, funding formulas, core services, and performance measures. CSAC will advocate for county priorities throughout this process and engage on other aging initiatives, legislation, and budget investments to help better serve the growing and more diverse aging population in our state.

Broadband Implementation. CSAC will continue to focus its advocacy on successful implementation of historic state investments in broadband, to ensure Californians across the state can access, adopt, and meaningfully use broadband service.

Juvenile Justice Realignment. Implementing juvenile justice realignment will remain a priority for years to come. Ongoing funding will be critical for the outcome of our youth and overall county success. This includes building off the \$100 million secured in last year’s budget to address treatment and secure residential capacity, as well as modernizing county-operated juvenile facilities with an emphasis on creating environments that support trauma-informed care, restorative justice, and rehabilitative programming. CSAC will continue advocating for funding so counties are in a position to implement infrastructure plans that meet the short-term and long-term, individualized needs of youth. Further, CSAC will remain involved with efforts of the County Probation Consortium, designed to tackle the most complex challenges of the realigned population through direct inter-county collaboration.

Federal Priorities

Resilience. Counties continue to prepare for and respond to increasing numbers of extreme weather events and natural disasters. CSAC will continue to work with federal agencies to implement key programs under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, and to work closely with the California congressional delegation to pursue additional investments and reforms to various disaster preparedness, mitigation, and response programs.

Housing and Homelessness. California’s affordable housing and homelessness crises continue to impact counties statewide. CSAC will continue to work with key members of the California congressional delegation, several of whom have championed a series of association-supported housing and homelessness initiatives. CSAC also will work to protect and enhance funding for key housing and homelessness programs administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Protecting and Strengthening the Social Safety Net. Entitlement reform and potential discretionary budget cuts are expected to be hot-button issues during the 2023 legislative session and beyond. As lawmakers consider the possibility of a wide-ranging budget and debt-ceiling package, CSAC will work with allies to protect key county-administered safety net programs.

Rural Development and Public Lands. With the current farm bill set to expire at the end of fiscal year 2023, Congress will focus on reauthorizing the law. CSAC will advocate for a robust rural development title and will seek to maintain and expand funding and eligibility for key nutrition programs, including SNAP/CalFresh. In addition, and as Congress considers modifying federal forest management policy, CSAC will support efforts to enhance wildfire protection, preparedness, and forest resiliency. Finally, CSAC will advocate for a long-term reauthorization of both the Payments in Lieu of Taxes program and the Secure Rural Schools program, including support for the National Center for Public Lands Counties.



Supervisor Ernest "Buddy" Mendes, Chair
Fresno County

Supervisor Keith Carson, Vice-Chair
Alameda County

UCC 2023 ****DRAFT**** Advocacy Priorities

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Taking the Lead: Implementing Investments and Initiatives

The state continues to look to counties to partner or lead on solutions to persistent and complex state challenges. In addition to ongoing efforts associated with prior year reforms and initiatives, the recently enacted Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act contemplates a major role and implementation responsibilities for counties. UCC will work to ensure that urban counties have appropriate flexibility and sufficient resources to carry out the following efforts, each of which will impose urban county workload in 2022.

- **CARE Act**—The recently enacted CARE Act (SB 1338, 2022) offers a new civil court framework for individuals with severe mental health issues, as defined, to receive individualized care plans. The legislation identified seven counties, four of which (Orange, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco) are urban counties, in an initial cohort ("Cohort 1 Counties") that will implement the CARE Act beginning October 1, 2023. During this period of planning to support the Cohort 1 counties' CARE Act implementation, UCC will:
 - Continue collaborative efforts with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) to ensure appropriate resources, authority, and flexibility are provided to maximize success for counties and participants alike;
 - Actively engage in follow-up/clean-up legislation;
 - Work collaboratively with the Administration to determine and secure ongoing funding for long-term, statewide implementation; and
 - Provide support and assistance to all urban counties in planning for CARE Act implementation.
- **Homelessness Solutions**—The 2022-23 Budget continues limited-term investments in statewide homelessness responses. Specifically, the budget includes \$1 billion in 2022-23 and \$1 billion in 2023-24 for the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program, \$1.3 billion in 2022-23 for Project Homekey, \$1.5 billion total over the next two years for a new Behavioral Health Bridge Housing program, and \$700 million total over the next two years for the Encampment Resolution Grant program. However, as urban counties diligently prepare applications and implementation plans for these funds, it is clear that UCC will need to:

- Advocate for the simplification and streamlining of competing grant deadlines, complex application requirements, and overlapping or duplicative reports.
- Partner with the state to ensure ongoing county service commitments are matched with ongoing funding.
- Work with the Administration and Legislature to make sure programmatic deadlines and processes appropriately balance the need for urgent action with the complexity of local solutions and associated planning.
- Contribute proposals and feedback through CSAC's broad-based Homelessness Policy Solutions Workgroup.
- **Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Realignment**—With the passage of SB 823 (2020) and SB 92 (2021), counties are now responsible for the care, treatment, and – where required – custody of all youth in the juvenile justice system. As of June 30, 2023, all remaining DJJ facilities will close and those youth who are unable to discharge or otherwise transition from DJJ prior to the closure date must be accommodated. To create positive youth outcomes, UCC will partner with the new Office of Youth and Community Restoration, support cross-county collaboration, and advocate for state legislation and resources to promote successful program delivery.

Building the State's Critical Workforce

Despite state support for retention incentives, California continues to face worker shortages across many sectors, including county government. Counties are struggling to compete with private sector employers to attract and retain workers, especially for some of the most critical services that counties provide – county hospitals and clinic systems, public health departments, as well as human services and probation agencies offering services to some of California's most vulnerable populations. Urban counties are keenly aware that workforce shortage have a profound impact on Californians served by counties. Accordingly, UCC supports state efforts to:

- Expand health care professionals, including physicians, nurses, and behavioral health clinicians.
- Expand public health workforce.
- Expand Master of Social Work student pipelines.
- Expand childcare/early childhood education provider pipeline.
- Expand recruitment, training, and advancement opportunities for probation agency professionals.
- Expand other relevant vocational training opportunities, as they relate to county government workforce.

Investing in the Next Generation

Children are society's greatest asset, and smart investments in our communities' youth and the systems that support them will drive improved downstream health, social, and educational outcomes. Building on important early childhood investments the Newsom Administration has made and recognizing recent policy changes that ask counties to expand local responses for some of the most vulnerable young people in our communities, UCC will engage in the following advocacy actions:

- Partner with the state to ensure counties and their community partners have appropriate access to investments and supports to provide responsive services for youth in the foster care and juvenile justice systems.
- Join with other stakeholders and coalitions to support high-quality early care and early education programs.
- Support services and funding, including for housing, that promote self-sufficiency among transition-age foster youth, non-minor dependents, and former foster youth.
- Support enhanced child welfare and permanency services.
- Support evidence-based child abuse and neglect prevention services.
- Engage with the appropriate state departments on policy conversations regarding Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program and associated federal waivers.

Sustaining Critical Local Services in Face of Economic Uncertainty

After a prolonged period of economic growth, including two years of somewhat unexpected pandemic-influenced surpluses, economic indicators and actual revenue performance are decidedly diminished. Urban county advocacy will focus on the following actions to ensure continuity of and sustained service delivery in an era of likely economic contraction:

- Sufficient funding for health and human services, particularly if caseloads begin to increase, to ensure children, families and seniors have access to critical safety net services.
- Sustained and ongoing funding for public health.
- Sustained and ongoing funding for behavioral health services, especially in light of the growing demand for services coming out of the pandemic.