



2022 AIC Legislative Platform

The AIC Staff and Board of Directors would like to extend a special thanks to members of the 2021-2022 Legislative Committee. Each member donated many hours to help develop this platform.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

Chair: Barb Hackman – Bartholomew County Treasurer
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Nate Rumschlag, PE MCM - Wells County Hwy Engineer
Kevin Russell- Harrison County Highway Engineer
Linda Smith- Madison County Recorder
Mindy Waldron- Allen County Department of Health

The Association of Indiana Counties, Inc. (AIC) was established in 1957 for the betterment of county government. The AIC was founded to represent the interests of county government. AIC's purposes and goals are to seek the betterment of county government through: representation of counties at the Indiana General Assembly; serve as liaison between counties, state and federal agencies; professional training and educational programs; communications through publications and seminars; research and dissemination of information; and technical and managerial assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

The Association of Indiana Counties (AIC) represents over 1,800 county elected officials across the state of Indiana, in all 92 counties. Our membership includes urban, suburban and rural counties. With each county having specific needs, the AIC supports community based decisions to strengthen public services. As many policy decisions as possible should be made by locally elected officials.

The AIC is governed by its membership, through a Board of Directors. An Executive Committee consisting of the president, three vice presidents and treasurer oversee the operation of the AIC office and staff. The Board of Directors elects the Executive Committee at our annual conference. Our Legislative Committee, which prepares the AIC's legislative platform, is a board with each affiliate organization represented; Assessors, Auditors, Clerks, Commissioners, Coroners, Council Members, Recorders, Surveyors and Treasurers as well as Highway Supervisors and Engineers, Health Department Directors, ADA Coordinators and IT Department Directors. Each affiliate's president selects one of their members to serve on the Legislative Committee. The five remaining members of the Legislative Committee are selected to serve by the president of the association, who also selects the chairperson of the Committee.

I. COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

County officials are tasked with making sure the foundation of local government services are provided in a timely and cost efficient manner. Citizens expect and deserve such services; yet local government administration is often hindered by adverse decisions made at other levels of government. The AIC asks state and federal government to be aware of the consequences of such decisions as they relate to additional costs, duties and responsibilities of local government officials.

Boards of County Commissioners are the executives of the county and their responsibilities and authority should be maintained accordingly. Decisions that are local in nature, including those involving planning and zoning, purchasing, permitting, and licensing, should be left to local officials without pre-emption by the federal or state government.

County officials should not be held personally liable for any acts or omissions occurring in connection with the performance of their official duties, unless the act or omission constitutes gross negligence or an intentional disregard of their official responsibilities.

Continuing Education:

The AIC supports post-election training and continuing education for all county officials that will further professionalize all individuals involved in local government, so long as it is training relevant to completion of their duty to citizens. Training should be developed with input from local officials and made available with the support of public funds in order to promote uniform completion.

Local Government Restructuring:

County government supports opportunities to improve efficiencies and reduce costs to the taxpayer, provided it is done in a data-driven process that respects home rule and local accountability for local units. The General Assembly should not mandate restructuring or consolidation, instead it should only occur if it is desired by the public after local citizens have input through community dialogue.

Prior to consideration of restructuring or consolidation, a thorough review should be conducted to determine any overlapping responsibilities and duties between the various offices. This public review should compare government forms against specific benchmarks or performance measures to determine the most effective

delivery of service to citizens (including if actual tax dollars will be saved). If local government restructuring is needed, local elected officials who are directly responsible to the voters should be involved. Local restructuring should be the ultimate form of home rule; letting counties decide for themselves what is their best form of government based upon their own county's demographics.

In any considered restructuring or consolidation, particular care should be paid to relative tax rates and levies between local units who are combining services through inter-local agreements of government consolidation. All taxpayers are residents of a county and county tax rates and levies should reflect countywide services. Consolidations should never increase the burden to the county tax base, nor shift revenues to other units unless those revenues are proven to be needed to cover cost of services shifted from the county to the merged unit. Clearly defined powers and duties of the restructured unit should be a requirement of any restructuring. Government merger statutes should require the new government entity to assume all the duties of the prior units unless tax levies are properly adjusted as well.

County Government Structure:

The AIC supports the three member board of county commissioners governing structure as the best way to represent multiple views and constituencies within the executive and legislative branches of county government.

The AIC firmly supports the election of county officials. While they serve within the county government structure, these office holders do not exclusively administer county government; rather they serve the taxpayers and all units of government within the county.

Federal/State Mandates:

We support legislation and corresponding regulations requiring the state and federal government to fund programs and activities mandated to local government by the U.S. Congress, Indiana General Assembly and state or federal agencies. We specifically support a state constitutional amendment to limit legislative mandates on local governments.

Public Employee Retirement:

We believe all county elected officials in the Public Employee Retirement Fund should be entitled to be vested fully in PERF upon the completion of no more than eight years of service. We believe PERF benefits should be based on the highest 12 quarters of employment. Current benefits are based on the highest 20 quarters of employment. Adequate funding for current and future retirement needs require each county to have the flexibility necessary to adapt to changes in revenue and workforces. More retirement options should be made available for counties as employers.

Public safety pensions should convey benefits consistent with other public safety pensions for other local units and the state fully recognizing that public safety officials are deserving of benefits different than traditional PERF benefits. However, public safety pension decisions should be made by the county officials who are

elected to set priorities for expenditure of county funds.

Purchasing:

County officials place a high value on hiring local workers and purchasing local products. State mandates for the use of local workers and local vendors should, however, be avoided or designed to allow local officials latitude to take into account specific skills and costs. Mandates for the purchase or use of specific products or services should also be prevented. While fiscal realities drive local officials to choose, in most cases, the lowest costs for purchasing and public works, county officials should be allowed to consider professional recommendation on use of appropriate materials and the long-term costs associated with such decisions. The flexibility and efficiency of cooperative purchasing should also be maintained and expanded to allow local officials to use public funds economically.

County Boards and Appointments:

The county executive, within their regulatory and administrative powers, should have the authority to approve the recommendation of appointments made by non-elected boards and remove such appointments. Elected individuals and bodies should make all decisions and actions of a policy nature. Granting of policy-making authority for local boards and commissions should occur only with the approval of locally elected officials, not state legislative action. Further, the county executive should have authority to remove their appointments during a term for failure to perform the duty to which they were appointed.

Access to Public Records, Publication of Notices and the Open Door Law:

The AIC strongly supports open and accessible government. There is a point, however, when the costs of notification and public accessibility exceed the value to the voters. The General Assembly should consider the cost-benefit ratio for the taxpayer when expanding public access and open door requirements.

The AIC supports reforms providing for the greater use of technology to provide notice and virtual public meetings to reduce the costs associated with these rules and increase transparency. When possible and cost effective, central websites for tax information should be used to provide information free to taxpayers and at a low cost to county governments.

We support copy fees being charged consistently to all persons according to amounts set by statute. We believe documents that are required to be filed by statute should be legible and filed in compliance with state law or the officeholder may refuse to accept the document. We believe the public should only be allowed to handle public records after the proper archival or filing process is complete. Records retention, particularly for electronic documents and email, is a growing expense for county governments. Retention schedules should be developed with the cost to county governments in mind.

Annexation Issues:

We believe counties should have an active voice in all annexation issues, especially involuntary or forced annexation of citizens of

the county by municipal units of government. Annexation should be related to the efficient municipal services, not merely to expand the tax base of a municipality at the expense of overlapping local units of government. The elected county officials who are responsible for the governance of the proposed annexation areas should also be vested with legal standing to challenge the annexation in court.

Involuntary annexation should be abolished. Annexing municipalities should be required to gather approval signatures, certified by the County Auditor, from a majority of landowners in the annexation area prior to an annexation ordinance being filed. Waivers of the right to remonstrate against annexation should be invalidated and no longer allowed under law.

When annexations occur, shifts in income and property tax revenues should be minimized and then only consistent with the service shifted to a municipality from other units of government. Appropriate legislation should be enacted to require DLGF to certify the actual increase in costs associated with an annexation. Further, any additional expenses incurred by county government as a result of an annexation, such as additional precinct changes and election costs should come with compensation from the annexing municipality.

911 Administration:

Providing top quality 911 dispatch system assistance is an important function of county government. Changes in technology and phone usage are causing a decrease in 911 funding. The users of any communication device that can access the 911 system should contribute the funding of that system and the funding structure should not favor one technology over another.

The AIC recognizes the state’s need for revenue to support statewide 911 dispatch system functions. Inter-local agreements that share funding responsibilities should be honored. The AIC supports an ongoing partnership with the State to collect accurate data on the costs and revenue needs, especially at the local level, of Indiana’s 911 dispatch system.

II. COUNTY FINANCES

The state should grant counties “fiscal home rule” and let those elected locally administer fiscal decisions without state influence. We support legislation to give counties increased flexibility in the ability to generate funds and to use those funds with limited state oversight. This flexibility should extend to fund expenditure, especially when leveraging federal dollars and grant opportunities. The county fiscal body should have appropriation authority on all county revenues. We oppose any effort to further restrict local revenue enhancement.

Combining revenue sources for multiple layers of government leads to fiscal inefficiency, over-taxation, and a lack of clarity for taxpayers about how their tax revenues are distributed. We support researching the concept of giving counties the ability to raise revenues to pay for county services without being required to distribute those funds to other taxing units. A study should be undertaken to determine if each layer of government should be

afforded their own ability to raise revenues within their geographic boundaries without reliance on other units. This may further prevent undesired fiscal shifts due to competing local interests, such as in annexation and TIF use by other units.

The AIC wishes to abolish the non-binding review of elected civil tax unit budgets by the county fiscal body. The current process utilizes significant county resources with no ability to effect change if desired. The AIC supports a local option allowing county fiscal bodies to perform binding review of all civil tax unit budgets and levies.

Taxing Authority:

The ability to tax should be limited to elected officials. We support the binding review, by an elected body, of budgets and debt incurred by all appointed boards and commissions. The county fiscal body should be in control of any county wide tax rate.

Property Tax Caps:

The constitutional property tax caps make permanent a system that provides tax breaks without any reflection on the cost of local services or the ability to pay. While the financial impact of the circuit breaker will depend on the number of credits eligible to taxpayers, the loss of property tax revenue will either result in higher local income taxes and fees or the cutting of public services. The ability of local officials to increase or decrease local income taxes to offset the circuit breaker loss is limited in effectiveness and can actually exacerbate the shifts in tax burden associated with dramatic cuts in property tax revenue. Even economic development may not result in increased revenue to local units. AIC supports creation of a mechanism that allows units to receive increased revenue from AV growth rather than allowing all the benefit of economic development to cause incremental lowering of property taxes or mere reduction in cap loss.

The AIC opposes legislation that statutorily reduces (or limits growth of) assessed values, that raises taxes on those who are not yet at the tax caps and causes an additional loss to the tax caps without any reduction in service costs. The Association opposes measures that limit revenue without authorizing an alternative funding mechanism to replace the revenue loss.

In addition to supporting voter-approved (by referendum) projects being outside of the tax caps, the Association supports allowing more government entities the ability to seek greater funding for public services through referenda. Further, other existing property tax funds such as the Cumulative Bridge Fund should be allowed to be placed outside the property tax caps at local option. The AIC supports minimal essential service fees for exempt properties, excluding houses of worship, to ensure funding for public safety services.

Mental Health Levy:

The costs of supporting CMHC mental health services should be transferred to the state since provision of care is not tied to county geographic boundaries. Absent that shift, the required distribution of county revenue to state designated CMHCs should be consistently reviewed to determine if the distribution is providing

real benefits in each county, consistent with the amount of distribution, in return for its payment. If any county feels they are not receiving benefits consistent with their investment, the county should be empowered to seek other providers who can benefit their county in exchange for the revenues mandated by the state. If the CMHC does not provide data that is legally required, the county should be allowed to withhold the mandatory distribution due to the CMHC until the data is received.

Debt Administration:

AIC supports the ability to include in the operating balance of a debt service fund one principal and interest payment.

Payment in Lieu of Taxes:

If the state removes property from taxation, the state should be required to make a payment to the local government in lieu of taxes.

Assessment Administration:

County Assessors are the primary assessing officials for Indiana’s taxpayers. Since County Assessors assumed the township workload, additional funding should be allocated by the state to the county as needed. Also, the shifting of the burden of proof from the petitioner taxpayer to the county has increased the cost of appeals. In order to ensure adequate funding, we support a countywide tax rate to fund all assessment and reassessment costs associated with the assessing process. The “Assessment Tax Rate and Levy” should be outside the county max levy due to unknown costs associated with recent assessing requirements, and be reviewed by the Department of Local Government Finance.

The property tax appeals process in Indiana is fundamentally flawed. Over the years, the General Assembly has allowed legal decisions to create a system for property tax appeals that is far too expensive, time consuming, and cumbersome for assessing officials and taxpayers alike. The current system has also led to non-uniformity between parcels assessed under DLGF rules and those whose taxable value is established on appeal. The General Assembly must reorganize the property tax appeal process to reflect uniformity while minimizing cost to both taxpayers and county government.

The increasing complexity of assessments, particularly for unique or high value business property, requires additional expertise for assessing officials. The AIC supports creating a statewide pool of qualified individuals who could, at the counties request, sit on a county’s Property Tax Board of Appeals with two local individuals. Also, the IBTR Indiana Board of Tax Review should be augmented by appraisers, either at the state level or through a regional approach.

Because appeals may last for years, local units of government should not be required to pay any interest on a refund while the appeal is being considered by the state or the Tax Court. Also, local units should not be responsible for refunds after a certain number of years if the taxpayer refuses to move forward on their appeal. Working with the DLGF, technology should be fully utilized allowing for more efficient inspection of property.

County Assessor Qualifications and Training:

County officials support continuing education requirements and certification that will further professionalize all individuals involved in the assessment and appeals process. The inclusion of more varied certification subject matter, including assessment administration and personal property, would be further improvements. Also, the cost of the assessor training (including travel expenses) should be included as part of the expenses funded through the aforementioned “Assessment Tax Rate and Levy.”

Property Tax Assessment Standards:

The basis of Indiana’s property tax system is the “value in use” of land and improvements. The General Assembly should undertake an effort to define “value in use” reflecting that the taxable value is the property’s value for its current use, as differentiated from the “value in exchange” standard which is not Indiana law. For taxation purposes, assessed value of commercial and industrial property should not be based upon comparison to abandoned or vacant properties unless the subject property is vacated itself, as is already law for residential property. Allowing comparison to vacant properties does not reflect the true value to the owner, and allows property owners to avoid paying the property taxes which support the services they rely upon. If a property tax appeal is successful, and accounts for 5% or more of the unit’s levy, the state should participate in covering that revenue loss.

Fee Based Revenues:

As sources of general tax revenue were reduced by property tax caps, many county offices seek to base their budget on user fees on transactions completed within the office performing the transaction. AIC supports user fees, and the dedication of that revenue to specific functions, as an option to offset lost general taxation. The state should not limit the ability of the county to charge a fee for specific services to those that are using the service.

School Funding:

We support decreasing the reliance of school funding on local property taxes and increasing state support. Additionally, we encourage communities to urge their local school systems to improve efficiencies and reduce costs when possible. Any necessary school consolidations should be handled at the local level and should not be mandated by the General Assembly. Debt restructuring by schools should only be made when the impacts to other local units is fully explored and made known to other units and to the public prior to action. Added debt without a public referendum reduces other local units’ revenues by increasing losses to the tax caps.

Gaming Revenues:

County governments are under an increasing fiscal burden. The AIC opposes efforts by the state to reduce current county gaming revenues. The state should allow for a growth formula, so the money received by counties without a gaming facility continues to increase if gaming revenue increases for the state, ensuring an equitable distribution for all units of government.

The state should not place any restrictions on how gaming revenues are appropriated by the county council. Licensing fees established for local governments should remain in the local communities, as they were part of the understood agreement during the local referendum process. Further, if gaming options are expanded, the same percentage of revenue currently provided to counties should be expanded to those new gaming revenues. Out-of-state competition is a growing concern to counties that contain gaming facilities and the AIC encourages coordinated planning between the state and locals to address these issues.

Dedicated and Unappropriated Funds:

We support the General Assembly's creation of new dedicated funds only when county fiscal body appropriations are required.

III. COURTS and CORRECTIONS

The General Assembly should consider all potential fiscal implications to counties when addressing correction topics. Counties should be reimbursed by the state for the full cost of housing or providing programs to Level 6 felons who are no longer being housed at Dept. of Corrections facilities. The daily reimbursement rate must be increased to reflect current year actual costs. The state should also cover the cost of the state share of Medicaid for inmates no longer being housed at DOC facilities.

Any court reform measures must give counties significant fiscal relief. We strongly urge the General Assembly to address the basic funding inequity of the requiring counties to pay for a state court system, when the system is largely not subject to control by the county. We support moving the costs associated with all court officials, employees, and staffing mandates being paid for by the state, including pensions and public defense costs.

We believe that staffing, salaries, and caseload levels should either be decided at the local level, as they impact local budgets and tax rates, or the state should pay for the programs. Absent state funding, compensation and benefits paid by the county tax base should be determined by county elected officials. The state should help to defray the costs of expensive, high profile court cases that drain county resources. If personnel is to continue to be paid for by the county, the AIC supports a clear policy that court employees are county employees subject to the same health insurance, salary and employment policies as other county workers. Further, without state funding, court officials and employees should be required to abide by county personnel policies.

Counties also support increasing court fees to defray the increasing cost of operating the trial court system. It is wrong for state government to use local court fees as a source of state

revenue, which then requires counties to increase local taxes to fund court-related services. If a new court is created in a county, this event should trigger an automatic levy increase to cover the cost of the added court.

Alternatives to Incarceration:

The state should be open to creating and supporting robust

alternatives to incarceration, including probation, mental health services, community corrections, substance abuse rehabilitation and other programs. As part of state support for locally driven programs, the state should provide funding for alternatives to incarceration which help to reduce recidivism and cost of criminal justice at both the state and local level.

Judicial Mandates:

We support any effort to limit the impact of judicial mandates on county government. As judges are members of the state court system, any costs associated with judicial mandates should be reimbursed to the county by the state. We also believe that judges, as state employees, should be represented by the Attorney General in mandate litigation. Alternatively, any private representation of judges during mandate proceedings should be required to be paid for by the state.

Probation Management:

State mandated salary levels for probation officers should be repealed. Probation services should consolidate to a single probation department per county.

IV. ELECTIONS

Election Reforms:

The General Assembly should allow the Clerk additional options to encourage more citizens to be active voters. Town conventions held apart from the primary elections should be eliminated to expand access to voters and reduce confusion.

All election reforms should consider the financial burdens on counties. Going forward, the state or federal government should pay for new election systems when they are being mandated by those levels of government. Money for new voting equipment should automatically be outside of the property tax controls. If taxpayers support reforms, the money to pay for the reforms should not jeopardize other county services. The AIC encourages a comprehensive review and simplification of the Indiana election statutes.

Referendum:

All public questions should take place on the traditional election dates in either May or November. Special elections for public questions called in the non-election year or in the municipal year should be fully funded by the political subdivision requesting the referendum.

V. ENVIRONMENT

Solid Waste Management:

We strongly believe that federal, state, and local government must share the responsibility for solving critical environmental problems that have an impact on all citizens. The continued reduction in landfill capacity is more than a county problem. The economic vitality of our state depends upon our ability

to provide safe methods of waste reduction and disposal. We support alternative methods of planning and funding material recovery facilities, recycling and composting projects, and final disposal facilities. Assistance from state government is needed to

help counties and solid waste districts implement waste assessments and management plans. Counties and solid waste districts must be given the authority to control waste streams in order to finance solid waste facilities. We also support state financial assistance to local governments to promote recycling projects and other waste reduction projects. State assistance, once provided, should not be used to supplement the state budget forcing local organizations to rescind commitments.

Clean Air Act:

The solution to the national air pollution control problem depends on effective participation between the agencies of the federal, state and local governments. The federal and state governments should be required to work cooperatively with local governments to help formulate guidelines, and technical assistance programs for the administration, implementation, maintenance, and enforcement of those plans which affect local land use and resource allocation decisions. Elected county officials having jurisdiction over affected areas must be equal partners with the state in developing plans to control air pollution, including air emission trading or banking programs.

Clean Water Act “NPDES” Phase II:

The AIC supports the goals of the Clean Water Act. Phase II is an EPA mandated statewide stormwater quality program designed to reduce the number of pollutants in Indiana’s waterways originating from stormwater runoff. Several stipulations included in Phase II (Rule 13) place an excessive and unwarranted burden upon county government. Phase II is an unfunded mandate and as mentioned earlier in the text, the AIC does not support unfunded mandates for counties. The AIC supports state funding assistance that directly offsets the financial burden shouldered solely by counties. Local governments have the primary responsibility to plan, construct, and operate storm water treatment facilities and programs, including control of non-point sources and stormwater runoff. The AIC believes that IDEM rules in this area should be no more stringent than those set by the federal government.

Wetlands:

In enforcement of Section 401 Water Quality Certification, AIC urges both the General Assembly and the Department of Environmental Management to avoid duplication of effort with the Army Corp. of Engineers Section 404 permit review and to use a more practical method of determining the worth of a wetland in deciding protection standards. IDEM rules regarding wetlands should be no more stringent than those set by the federal government.

State government should work in cooperation with local government to implement additional federal regulations and provide funding or assistance in obtaining funding to properly implement the regulations. In developing a state permitting program for isolated wetlands, AIC urges both the General

Assembly and IDEM to adhere to only the authority granted to them for only the wetlands discussed in the Supreme Court SWANCC case and to use the same method of practicality in

determining the worth of a wetland in determining protection standards. The AIC believes the Clean Water Act should only apply to navigable waterways.

Scenic River or Outstanding Water Designation:

We support the local control of creeks and streams in Indiana through the active oversight by each county’s governing bodies and the State of Indiana. Any rule promulgated should require an economic impact study, by the rule making authority, to determine loss of revenue or additional costs that may be borne by local governments. Such designations should be locally controlled.

Green Initiatives:

The Association supports counties’ environmentally friendly and energy savings initiatives. Green construction should only be mandated when the savings to the county in energy and workplace efficiency over the life of the building (as compared to the additional construction costs) can be conclusively demonstrated and captured as part of the financing of the facility.

Water Resources:

The AIC believes that the time has come for a comprehensive review of Indiana’s water resource policies. Clear lines of authority of water rights between individuals, local governments and state government entities should be developed. Water resource policy should balance the needs of residents, businesses and agriculture while maintaining future resources for the next generation.

VI. TRANSPORTATION

Highway and Bridge Funding:

County roads in Indiana are an integral part of a statewide network essential to the economic vitality of all Hoosiers. Nearly 90% of all road miles in Indiana are maintained by local governments. The transportation needs of the public should be supported on a statewide tax basis. We support an increase in highway user fees, including motor fuel taxes, electric vehicle fees, and any further revenue sources, provided additional revenues are dedicated to local roads and bridges. We continue to support a permanent increase in revenue for county roads. In addition to current local revenue options available for road funding, we support a local option gas tax, referendum options for local road and bridge maintenance and removal of revenue caps on local wheel tax and excise surtax.

We support all highway user fees and taxes being dedicated for road and bridge administration, maintenance and construction. These funds should be used exclusively to provide Hoosiers with safe, accessible, and efficient transportation infrastructure. We support allocating all taxes relating to motor fuels, including sales tax on gasoline purchases and interest earned on the investment of motor vehicle highway account funds, directly into the vehicle highway accounts without off-the-top reductions for non-road uses. Further, AIC supports flexibility of funding to allow Counties to meet the transportation needs of the public and the economy without restriction on use of funds. AIC believes that dedicated highway revenues should not be restricted by the state beyond the level of new revenue provided from the state.

As counties are responsible for supporting all local bridge needs

throughout Indiana, AIC supports changes to the INDOT Community Crossings Grant Program which recognize the statutory assignment of bridge responsibility to Counties. Bridges, whether inside a municipality or not, are a significant infrastructure responsibility that should be recognized in this program that accounts for a sizeable portion of local funding. Without special designation for bridges, counties are at a numerical disadvantage for awards from the program based solely on the fact there are more city and town units who are eligible for the same maximum award as counties, despite having fewer road miles and no bridges to maintain.

The system of funding roads in Indiana is based on the concept that the users will pay for their development and maintenance. Highly fuel efficient cars, electric cars and vehicles running on compressed natural gas, bio-diesel and ethanol, all are now users of the system, have challenged the way these users are taxed. A system for taxation and fee collection must continue to evolve to require these vehicles to adequately cover their share of road use.

Given the current trend toward public-private partnerships for our state's roadways, we encourage the General Assembly to remember the importance of local roads. As future agreements are reached at the state level, it is important that funding be included for local projects and that local road networks be left intact by private road construction planning. Also, when such agreements are made, we encourage the General Assembly and INDOT to work in conjunction with county officials to understand, and plan for, any impact on local roads that may result from the agreement. Also, the General Assembly should open up the public works restrictions to allow counties to do as much work "in house" as possible to provide the most efficient use of these limited dollars.

As counties work to improve the condition of local roads, the General Assembly should refrain from passing any legislation that would allow the use of higher weight limits for transportation across our roads and bridges without local approval. Higher load limits only serve to further degrade the infrastructure that counties must maintain. State overweight permit fees should be shared with local units to cover the cost of damage done by overweight vehicles when they leave the state highway system. Even with new investment in roads and bridges, it continues to be an ongoing struggle to improve our infrastructure over the long term.

AIC supports counties receiving an enhanced stipend from the county share of the Motor Vehicle Highway Fund for highway superintendents who achieve advanced educational and professional designations.

VII. REGULATORY AUTHORITY

County officials are elected by citizens to provide an appropriate level of regulatory authority to protect citizens. Pre-emption of local authority to regulate property or behavior assumes a single approach is proper for all areas of the state. Local officials are elected by citizens to provide proper regulation for their unique community, and not every community will share

similar outlook on what constitutes "proper" regulation. As such, county powers to regulate public health and safety should not be diminished, including the authority to establish housing standards.

Local Land Use Control:

Local governments should retain the authority to control development of land and property within their jurisdictions. Such authority properly assumes that local elected officials are best suited to make decisions affecting land use for their communities.

Statutory overrides of local zoning ordinances impose arbitrary standards without regard for local circumstances. All land use, zoning, eminent domain, and annexation decisions should remain at the local level with appropriate remonstrance procedures. AIC opposes pre-emption of local land use controls for any reason, including zoning for short-term rental property, mining, agricultural operations, utility installations and energy generation.

VIII. UTILITIES

Public Right-of-Way Easements:

County government should retain full authority over their rights-of-way in order to properly manage this public asset for the benefit of all authorized users and the motoring public alike.

Telecommunications:

The AIC asks the Indiana General Assembly and Congress to enhance the ability of county governments to protect the interests of both consumers and taxpayers through the development of high-quality telecommunication service that serves the needs of both counties and the public. Counties have the right to control the use of their public rights-of-ways. These rights-of-ways should not be used without permission of the responsible local government authority. Local governments should be allowed to collect a fee for the commercial use of the right-of-way by a telecommunications provider, regardless of the type of installation. Elimination of franchise fees should only occur if accompanied by revenue replacement for local units.

Energy:

The future of our economy is directly related to our energy supplies and the cost of those supplies. The AIC recognizes that a strong state energy policy is vital to the long-term economic stability of the state. However, county government officials should be consulted prior to any new energy generating plants being developed in their county. Local zoning decisions should not be overridden by the state. The state government should encourage the efficiency of energy use by counties. Above all, federal and state governments should create an environment that allows local governments to play a central role in the formulation of local energy policies.

Broadband Connectivity:

Greater options should be made available to local governments for cost effective access to fiber-optic networks to better protect electronic public data with fair reimbursement for use and maintenance of those networks. AIC supports state and local collaboration in investment to expand rural broadband deployment

opportunities. Rural economic development, rural health, and quality of life all stand to benefit from such investment. Such opportunities should not be limited by artificial means to favor any specific format or provider of connectivity. Any state broadband grant should provide connectivity at speeds recognized in federal regulations as being high speed connectivity.

IX. Economic Development

Tax Increment Financing:

Tax Increment Financing (TIF), when used appropriately, is an excellent economic development tool. By providing a flexible mechanism to finance infrastructure and provide other incentives, TIF insulates the taxpayer from increased taxes and risk. However, TIF should be used only when the project would not occur “but for” the use of TIF. Growth in assessed value – the increment – should only be captured when necessary to pay off debt or make specific payments as part of a development plan. If incremental AV is able to be passed thru to other units, it should be. The AIC supports the automatic pass-through of an appropriate percentage of new assessed value to other taxing units.

The planned use of TIF should be discussed in an open forum with input from all stakeholders. Notice should be provided directly to units impacted by TIF areas of meetings of the appropriate Redevelopment Commission. Any county owned infrastructure within a TIF area should be maintained and upgraded at TIF expense in the same measure as other related infrastructure. Redevelopment Commissions, which control TIF funds, should be held to a high standard of fiscal accountability and transparency. TIF agreements should include voluntary taxpayer agreements which guarantee a minimum property tax payment, even if their valuation or tax status is appealed.

Abatements:

Property tax abatements are another good tool used by local units and are often the foundation of incentive packages. Abatements should be offered on a per project basis with maximum local flexibility. State mandated abatements or outright exemptions, such as proposals to exempt business personal property taxes, or local option to abate or exempt property on a county-wide basis, are not conducive to effective economic development. Property tax abatements should also include mandatory disclosure of property valuation to assure that the taxpayer delivers on promised investment in the community, agreement to not appeal the valuation of any property (real or personal) during the life of the agreement, and include clawbacks if the promised investment does not become reality.

Regional Initiatives:

The AIC supports counties and other local units working together on a regional basis for economic development projects. These efforts help reduce competition between counties, increase efficiency and effectiveness of economic development operations and build a larger regional brand. However, counties must have a foundational role in creating these agreements, especially if

the revenue is based on a tax format for which the county is the adopting body.

X. COVID-19 Response

As every layer of government reacts to the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, the services of county government are on the front line of the response. From county health Departments to county jails to election administration, counties are spending scarce resources to continue government operations while meeting the public health needs of Hoosiers.

As such, AIC supports federal and state assistance to cover the additional costs of direct COVID-19 response. AIC further requests an easy to use platform of accounting standards for local officials to use when requesting reimbursement for these costs.

Reduced revenues from taxes and fees are already being felt by county government. Due to tax caps and the political realities of government budgets, counties operate on lean margins which have been and will be further decimated by reduced employment, consumer spending, and other economic activity. Federal and state funding for COVID response should be flexible to allow each county to use the assistance in a means that reflects the unique needs of that county.

COVID-19 has also highlighted the need for fast, reliable internet service to unserved areas. AIC supports continuation of the Next Level Connections broadband grant to aid in this expansion.

AIC urges all levels of government to use this outbreak as a learning opportunity to identify necessary plans for continuity of services in the event of any further emergency, whether related to COVID-19 or any other disaster.

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