



Justice, Health & Safety for all Washingtonians

Counties play an essential role in keeping Washington residents safe and secure by preserving public health and well-being, protecting public safety, and safeguarding justice. Enactment of the Washington State Association of Counties' 2017 Legislative priorities will help counties sustain the basic government services that ensure justice, and protect the health and safety of all Washington citizens.

50%

Almost half of county general fund revenues are delivered from property tax -by far our largest revenue source

60%

Over 60% of the requests for public records are fulfilled in 5 days or less

\$50M

Increase in counties' costs for providing public defense services from 2006-2015 (56%)

1 Limit Property Tax Revenue Growth to Inflation and Population (HB 1764/SB 5772)

Property taxes are counties' top revenue source, comprising approximately 50% of general fund revenue. Property taxes are capped and can't keep up with growing costs. Public safety and criminal justice services make up about 75% of counties' total general fund expenditures. Thus, property taxes are inextricably tied to justice, health and safety for Washington citizens.

The Legislature should protect citizens' access to justice, health and safety by tying property tax revenue growth to inflation and population growth – the factors that cause costs to grow – so that counties' aren't forced to make dangerous cuts to core governmental services.

2 Update the Public Records Act (HB 1594 & HB 1595)

The Public Records Act (PRA) is a cornerstone of government transparency in Washington. Counties implement the Public Records Act every day and advances in technology and increases in the volume and complexity of records requests are undermining the PRA.

The Public Records Act must be updated to reflect 21st century realities in order to fulfill its original purpose, provide government transparency, and make wise use of taxpayer dollars.

3 Provide Adequate Funding for Indigent Defense Services (HB 2031)

Access to a defense attorney in criminal matters is a basic constitutional right. Counties were assigned by the Legislature to provide adequate defense for indigent citizens; yet, the state funds less than 5% of the cost for these services. Counties currently spend approximately \$136 million annually with the state providing only \$5 million to cities and counties.

"The state must invest significant, targeted funding in our public defense systems."

- Status Report on Public Defense in Washington State, 2007

In order to continue effective access to justice, the Legislature must fund the full cost of indigent defense services - \$272 million additional in the next biennium.

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