



February 20, 2018

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Dear Senate Budget Leaders:

Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment on the proposed Senate supplemental operating budget proposal. Rather than trying to describe in two minutes at a hearing the variety and complexity of issues counties deal with in the state budget, I am sending a letter to highlight key issues. Unlike special interest groups that may be concerned about one or two pages of the budget, counties have programs and services that span the entire state budget. We have done our best to understand and respond accurately to the 500+ page proposal in the short time provided between budget release and hearing. There may be additional items that rise to our attention in the next several days.

We appreciate you mitigating the impact on local government criminal justice costs from the enactment of HB 1783 (legal financial obligations). We also appreciate the significant investment you make in the state's behavioral health system, and in responding to the opioid crisis, which will have a positive impact on the state's criminal justice system which is operated by counties. Funding for watershed restoration and enhancement is also important to counties as they continue to implement the state's planning responsibilities. These and other budget choices recognize that counties are agents of the state, performing mandated state services.

Requests

There are a number of items we would like to see included in the final budget, and request that you work with the House and Governor to add them.

Study of County Revenues and Responsibilities: Governor Inslee provided the Department of Commerce with \$151,000 to conduct a study on the constitutional and statutory revenue capacity of counties in relation to their obligations. I highlighted this item when you heard the Governor's budget and we respectfully request that you include this item in the final budget.

Funding for Trial Court Indigent Defense: The United States Supreme Court requires the State of Washington to provide counsel for indigent defendants. The state has passed on about 96% of the trial court costs to counties. At the same time that your budget provides additional resources to pay for vendor rate increases in its portion of indigent defense costs, you don't provide any additional county funding for this State mandate. We request that you rectify this in the final budget.

Ballot Box Implementation: Last year the Legislature passed and the Governor signed SSB 5472, which mandated that each county increase the number of ballot drop boxes provided to the public. Several counties have

subsequently made claims to the Office of Financial Management for reimbursement under RCW 43.135.060. We request that you fund these specific reimbursements, and set aside additional resources for the remaining counties who will be making claims in 2018.

Group B Water System Funding: We are seeking \$700,000 this biennium for the Department of Health to continue a local pilot program for the review and approval of smaller water systems. Without this funding, several local programs will likely end, meaning the state would then take over the review and approval process.

State Toxicology Lab: Your budget provides an additional \$1 million for the state toxicology lab. We believe there is the need for a total of \$2.4 million in additional funding. County law enforcement and prosecutors rely on the state lab as they enforce the state's criminal justice system. Current backlogs at the lab are slowing these efforts.

Mitigation for the Impact of Other Legislative Decisions:

The Senate budget recognizes that enactment of legislation on wrongful death (SB 6015), occupational disease presumptions (SB 6213), and providing a cost of living adjustment for PERS 1 retirees (SB 6340) will have a fiscal impact on government agencies. Resources are provided for most state agencies, but counties are notably left out.

While the state's revenue forecast grew 15% this last biennium, many counties have only recently seen revenues hit 2008 levels. Still burdened with an untenable structural deficit between cost and revenue increases, counties, even in a robust and recovering economy, are making cuts, using reserves, and diverting road funds for general expenses. These solutions are not sustainable.

We need the Legislature to take action in the short term by mitigating the cost of its decisions, and in the longer term by helping restructure the county cost and revenue structure. Please start with these additions.

As always, please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Eric Johnson
Executive Director

Cc: Senator Sharon Nelson
Senator Andy Billig
Representative Timm Ormsby
Representative Bruce Chandler
Drew Shirk, Executive Director for Legislative Affairs, Office of Governor Jay Inslee
David Schumacher, Director, Office of Financial Management
Josh Weiss, Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs, WSAC