



County Fiscal Relief

THE CHALLENGE

Counties are facing many of the same fiscal challenges as the state. Revenues are stagnant or even declining while costs continue to rise. All the while, service demands are growing.

There's no denying this is a fiscally challenging time for both the state and local governments. Counties are constantly being asked to do more and more, without adequate resources to meet all needs. While current costs rise, existing revenue sources are not growing fast enough and, in some cases, are actually declining. We must think differently to ensure our collective fiscal health now and into the future. One strategy is to focus on cutting costs, especially for outdated and unneeded requirements.

THE FIX

Help counties save valuable resources during this difficult financial climate by taking the following actions:



- 1. Support local providers for county jail medical services.**

SHB 1743

- 2. Create more flexibility for county procurement requirements.**

HB 2566 enhances flexibility for local government procurement requirements and increases thresholds to improve purchasing efficiency.

- 3. Protect local governments with reasonable liability limits on state-mandated services.**

HB 2393 clarifies that state and local governments are not liable for inmate injuries related to illegal substances.

SB 6239 requires all tort claims against the state and local government to go to arbitration before a trial.

- 4. Improve the new tax increment financing program.**

HB 2451 makes important changes to the tax increment financing program to protect county resources.

- 5. Pass the local government tax resources and fund flexibility bill.**

HB 2442 creates flexibility with existing resources and adds new authority for counties to raise revenue for critical services.



- 6. Implement state labor policy for local governments.**

SB 6135 ensures that, just like for the state, arbitrators must consider the finances of local governments when making labor contract decisions.





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Reasons to Support County Fiscal Relief



1. Counties across the state are struggling to provide jail medical services. Proper health care in a carceral setting reduces recidivism by:

- Stabilizing individuals' physical and mental health
- Addressing root causes of crime (substance abuse/mental health)
- Fostering skills for reintegration
- Improving employment and housing prospects

Counties need help controlling costs.

- Liability insurance costs are pricing out most local providers
- Counties are forced to contract with fewer and fewer providers
- Local or even in-state providers are dwindling
- Lack of competition is leading to high costs.



2. Local government liability costs are out of control.

- Counties are required to provide several state-mandated services that no other entity provides, which are fraught with risk and high costs.
- Even in cases where gross negligence isn't found, jury awards are increasing at unprecedented rates and amounts.
- Insurance rates have tripled as a result.
- Taxpayers are footing the bill at the expense of other important services.



3. The new Tax Increment Financing program disadvantages counties in favor of cities and ports.

- Requirements for designating new tax increment areas are not being enforced properly.
- Counties lose valuable resources needed to meet new demands created by the Tax Increment Area designations, with no ability to negotiate or recover.
- Over time, county budgets will be further strained without reforms.
- TIF project creation and spending can be opaque, hidden from normal transparency requirements.

