

COUNTY OF KERN

2010 STATE LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The County of Kern supports legislation that provides governmental decision making at the level closest to the people whenever it is likely to produce the most effective and efficient results. We support further reforms in the State-local fiscal relationship that will improve the County's ability to finance and efficiently administer both mandated and discretionary services while opposing legislation that creates mandates without State funding sources to carry them out.

It is also our general legislative aim to preserve and build the County's job base and to improve the regulatory climate for private enterprise. We support State investment in local infrastructure; State/local initiatives to provide venture capital; tax and financial incentives that will encourage the growth of new and existing businesses in the County; and development and funding of a local education and workforce training investment plan that matches the requirements of growing and emerging industries.

LOCAL CONTROL

Land Use: We support legislation that promotes local land use authority and that authorizes, but does not mandate, the formation of regional alliances. We oppose legislation that withholds local transportation funds pending compliance with State-mandated regional land use plans. We support incentives to encourage counties to preserve farmland and open space. The County supports a flexible approach to addressing climate change that uses incentives to meet technically achievable goals in reducing emissions. The County supports full restoration of Williamson Act subventions to encourage farm land preservation.

Programs: The County supports reforms that will promote accountability in program performance at the State and local level. We require local control over program scope and implementation, including the ability to privatize services when it is more effective and cost-efficient to do so. Legislation and administrative changes are also needed that simplify, consolidate, standardize, reduce or eliminate data-gathering, reporting and licensing requirements imposed on counties. Administrative burdens should be reduced for local government and those whom we are mandated to regulate.

Labor Relations and Employee Benefits: State legislation should not intrude into the local collective bargaining process nor interfere with the County's ability to manage and compensate its employees as it sees fit. We support reforms in Civil Service laws to allow counties to rely solely upon the collective bargaining process to establish terms and conditions of employment. We support reforms in disability retirement statutes to remove incentives for abuse of this system. We support Workers' Compensation reforms that will lower costs to employers while delivering equitable benefits to employees.

COUNTY FINANCES

Revenue, Fees and Taxation: The County supports reforms that build upon Proposition 1A to provide greater authority to generate local revenues for discretionary services and to protect local revenue streams against State budgetary incursions. Responsible government at all levels – State, Federal and local – dictates that any proposed new or increased fees must represent the actual cost of service delivery. We support State payments to counties in lieu of property taxes for State lands and facilities. Finally, we oppose any legislation that would enact an oil severance tax on California producers.

State Mandated Programs: All mandated programs must be fully and equitably and timely funded by the mandating authority as intended by voter enactment of Proposition 1A. Mandated programs that are not fully funded should be made optional at the local level, and counties should have broad management authority of all mandated programs. We support legislation requiring the State to pay interest to counties on all delayed payments for State mandated programs.

COUNTY SERVICES

Criminal Justice and Public Protection: Public protection is the most important obligation of counties, which administer the local portion of California's criminal justice system. Corrections realignment must deliver sufficient resources to counties to accompany any added incarceration and treatment responsibilities for adult and juvenile offenders. We oppose the early release of State inmates and sentencing reforms that would send more convicted felons to county jails, because both actions will shift a huge law enforcement and cost burden to counties.

We support more education and training of inmates to reduce recidivism as well as mandating that inmates perform labor for public and community agencies. We support enhanced victim compensation requirements for criminal offenders.

We support strengthening State search and seizure statutes to help combat gang crime. We support State expenditures to promote local law enforcement training, to aid in drug and rural crime prevention, to bolster juvenile justice intervention and prevention efforts, to counteract and prevent gang violence, and to help prepare and equip local law enforcement agencies to fulfill their new role in preventing and responding to terrorist attacks.

We support full State funding for the appropriate number of State funded judicial positions and for any State-mandated upgrades of court facilities.

Health and Social Services: The County recognizes and supports the continued reform of health and welfare entitlement programs, provided that these reforms do not shift additional cost burdens from the State to counties. Counties must have sufficient program flexibility to coordinate and consolidate the delivery of services to children, adults, senior citizens, and veterans as cost-effectively as possible. We support annual adjustments in State payments to counties that reflect the increased costs of administering mandated health and human services.

State health care reform must ensure that hospitals operated by California counties receive sufficient continued funding to care for the indigent and uninsured populations they are mandated to serve, and it must not reduce the flow of health and human services realignment money to counties. We support reimbursement policies that acknowledge health care burdens for counties having unusual levels of poverty and uninsured populations. We oppose State administrative or legislative actions that reduce the amount of Medicaid disproportionate share hospital funding or Medicaid safety-net care pool funding that California public hospitals receive.

Transportation: We support legislation that provides equitable State funding for roads, highways, and public transit and that promotes the timely development of local transportation projects at counties' discretion. We support continued State funding and assistance formulas for grade separation projects,

Proposition 42 and Proposition 1B payments to counties for road maintenance, and Proposition 1B financing for State Traffic Congestion Relief projects. We oppose legislation that shifts taxation from fuel sales taxes, which are constitutionally guaranteed for local transportation, to excise taxes, which are not similarly protected.

Energy: We support incentives to encourage development of alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal. To encourage local siting of renewable energy facilities, we support restoring counties' authority to assess alternative energy facilities such as commercial solar that are currently exempt.

Water: We support stable water supplies for urban and agricultural users in the County and enactment of a State appropriation or bond measure that will fully fund the San Joaquin Valley Water Reliability program to expand facilities for storing, banking, conveying, distributing, conserving, and reclaiming water; flood control and storm water management; and enhancing and restoring wetlands and open space.

Environmental Quality: In carrying out State mandates for environmental protection and waste disposal, the County must retain the ability to manage programs efficiently, cost-effectively and without excessive permitting requirements. Toward that aim, we support streamlining of environmental regulations and consolidation of permitting in order to reduce costs and unnecessary delays. We also support the sovereignty of land use ordinances to protect the people and the environment of Kern County against encroachment by agencies acting outside their boundaries. We oppose attempts to override County ordinances governing the land application of sewage sludge with less stringent State regulations. We support implementation of the Federal and State Endangered Species Acts that balances social and economic benefits with species protection and ensures that policies are based on good science.

Quality of Life Services: We support State funding assistance for local libraries, parks, and museums.