

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
COMMENTS ON 2000 LOCAL IMPACT STATEMENT REPORT

The 2000 Local Impact Statement Report prepared by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC) shows the impact of unfunded mandates on county government. The data this year again shows that counties are more heavily impacted than are schools, municipalities, or townships. Of the 28 bills that became law during 2000, 25 impacted counties, 21 affected municipalities, 15 impacted townships, and 5 affected school districts.

The bills that impact counties generally fall into three categories. First, bills dealing with public safety, law enforcement and criminal justice continue to be the most devastating to county budgets. The fact that counties spend more than half of their general fund budgets for these purposes is often a direct result of incremental actions by the General Assembly. Many of these individual enactments are often well meaning, however, the overall impact on county budgets is significant. Second, tax law changes often reduce county revenues and also impact receipts from the Local Government Funds. Finally, changes relating to the administration of the motor vehicle license tax by the Bureau of Motor Vehicles “whittle away” at revenues counties receive to improve and maintain the deteriorating county system of roads and bridges.

While unfunded mandates continue to be a “hot button” with county commissioners and other county elected officials, the Local Impact Statement process is generally a valuable tool that makes members of the General Assembly aware of their actions. The General Assembly as an institution is much more sensitive to unfunded mandates than it was ten years ago. We feel this is a direct result of the LIS process.

One of the more costly mandates detailed in this report was H.B. 712. This legislation significantly increased the compensation of county elected officials by reducing the number of compensation classes from 14 to 8 and by allowing for cost of living increases through 2008. While costly to counties, the legislation was promoted by CCAO to assure that qualified officials seek office to run the increasingly complex business we call county government. It is indeed unfortunate, however, that the Legislature did not take the opportunity to assure that all three county commissioners earn the same compensation as we had proposed. Legislation increasing compensation is never easy, and we acknowledge and thank the General Assembly for “stepping up to the plate” on this issue.

Likewise, the General Assembly has shown support for unfunded mandates by appropriating funds to the Unfunded Mandates Line Item in the state budget during the current and the last biennium. It is, however, unfortunate that the State and Local Government Commission (SLGC) has been abolished in the current state budget bill. The SLGC was in the forefront in establishing this line item in the state budget, worked to enact legislation requiring the preparation of Local Impact Statements, and served an important coordinating role between the Administration, Legislature, and local units of government.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge the work of the staff of the Legislative Service Commission in the preparation of this report, and in the work performed in both drafting complex legislation and professionally preparing fiscal notes and local impact statements throughout the year.

The 2000 Local Impact Statement Report is a source of information that should be of value of all members of the General Assembly as it attempts to better understand how legislation affects local units of government across the state.