

COMMENTS ON 2001 LOCAL IMPACT STATEMENT REPORT

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

The 2001 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, townships, or municipalities. Of the 12 bills that became law with a Local Impact Statement during 2001, all 12 impacted counties. At the same time, 9 of the bills impacted municipalities, 6 impacted townships, and 4 affected school districts.

Unfunded mandates continue to be a "hot button" with county commissioners and other county elected officials. The Local Impact Statement process is a valuable tool that makes members of the General Assembly more aware of how their decisions have financial implications to counties and other local units of government.

Yet, this report does not give a comprehensive and accurate view of unfunded mandates from the perspective of counties. The report does not include any review or analysis of how the state biennial budget financially impacts counties. This is not the fault of the Legislative Service Commission, as the General Assembly has exempted budget bills from the LIS process and thus the report.

All county officials know of the major reductions that have occurred as a result of the enactment of the current biennial budget. However, a casual observer reading this report would not know about the cuts that have been sustained by local governments as a result of cuts to the Local Government Funds, a form of state revenue sharing with local governments.

Likewise, the casual observer would not be aware of additional cuts in the state budget that have increased county costs for such functions as public defenders, adult and youth detention and corrections programs, and to run the state and federal child support program, to name a few. Yes, in our view, these are also unfunded mandates, and more significant mandates than those included in this report.

In a similar vein, this report does not mention the fact that, in the state budget bill, the county responsibility to pay for office space for Educational Service Centers was eliminated by the General Assembly, as recommended by the Governor. This was one of those old unfunded mandates that our Association has been trying to eliminate for over 20 years.

Finally, CCAO would be remiss if we did not mention the fact that this session of the General Assembly eliminated the State and Local Government Commission. While there is no direct fiscal impact on local governments, the Commission served a useful role in providing a forum for discussions on intergovernmental issues and with the General Assembly and Administration. Chaired by the Lt. Governor, the Commission gave local governments direct access to the Administration. Over the years, the Commission actually had a significant impact on unfunded

mandates, and its elimination is unfortunate. CCAO hopes it does not signal an attitude on the part of the Legislature and the Administration that local governments are not important.

We again thank the Legislative Service Commission for the opportunity to comment on this report. The LSC staff is always fair and objective and they provide a true service to local governments in preparing professional Local Impact Statements under what is often challenging circumstances.

We hope that the General Assembly will consider including state budget bills under the LIS process and that these bills will be included in these reports in the future. Only then, will we have a true picture of the impacts of unfunded mandates on local governments.