Board of County Commissioners
Leon County, Florida

2027 State and Federal Legislative Priorities Workshop

Tuesday,
September 22, 2026
3:00 p.m.

Judge Augustus D. Aikens, Jr. Courthouse
County Commission Chambers, 5th Floor
301 S. Monroe St.   Tallahassee, FL 32301

The media and the public can access the meeting in real time on Comcast channel 16, the Leon County Florida channel on Roku, the County's Facebook page, YouTube channel, and County web site.

Notes for Workshop

Leon County Board of County Commissioners

Workshop

September 22, 2026

To: Honorable Chairman and Members of the Board

From: Vincent S. Long, County Administrator

Title: Workshop on the 2027 State and Federal Legislative Priorities

Review and Approval:	Vincent S. Long, County Administrator
Department / Division Review:	Ken Morris, Assistant County Administrator
Lead Staff / Project Team:	Nicki Hatch, Assistant to the County Administrator for Legislative and Strategic Initiatives

Statement of Issue:

This workshop item seeks the Board's approval of recommended state and federal legislative priorities for the 2027 Florida Legislative Session and the first session of the 120th Congress.

Fiscal Impact:

This item has no fiscal impact. However, it recommends requests for state and federal appropriations as well as substantive policy positions that seek to avoid unfunded mandates and cost shifts to the County.

Staff Recommendations:

Option #1: Approve the 2027 state and federal legislative priorities.

Option #2: Provide any additional direction on the County's 2027 state and federal legislative priorities.

Report and Discussion

Background:

Each year, the Board conducts a workshop with the County's legislative staff and contract lobbyists to develop priorities for the upcoming state and federal legislative sessions. This workshop enables the County's legislative team to receive important guidance from the Board regarding priority legislative issues and directs the County's lobbying efforts for the upcoming year at both the state and federal level.

Analysis:

The 2027 Florida Legislative Session will be held from March 2 through May 1, 2027, with interim committee weeks beginning in January 2027. The first session of the 120th U.S. Congress will convene during the first week of January 2027. This workshop item recommends policy and appropriations priorities for the County's advocacy efforts during the upcoming state and federal legislative cycle, organized as follows:

- Proposed projects for state and federal executive agency and legislative line-item appropriation requests;
- State legislative policy priorities, including support of the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) 2027 Legislative Priorities, for the 2027 Florida Legislative Session; and
- Federal legislative policy priorities, including support of the National Association of Counties (NACo) 2027 Legislative Priorities, for the first session of the 120th United States Congress.

Consistent with previous years, the recommended policy and appropriations priorities are intended to focus the County's advocacy efforts on its most significant issues and funding needs while aligning, where appropriate, with anticipated priorities of the Florida Legislature and U.S. Congress. The Board may add, remove, or amend any of the recommended priorities as deemed appropriate for the upcoming legislative cycle.

The County will work closely with The Southern Group in pursuing all of the priority issues approved by the Board. Notwithstanding this, the County's legislative team will assign priority to any issue that the Board designates to receive a special level of attention in the upcoming legislative cycle. As always, staff will keep the Board apprised of legislative issues through agenda items and weekly updates throughout and following the 2027 Legislative Session.

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Overview of the 2027 Legislative Session

The 2027 legislative cycle will occur amid a period of significant transition and uncertainty for local governments. Most notably, the November 2026 General Election will determine the outcome of the proposed constitutional amendment on statewide property tax reform ("Amendment 3"), while also presenting significant changes in state and federal leadership. By the 2027 Session, a newly elected Governor will be in office, new leadership of the Florida House and Senate will be in place, and Leon County will be represented by a new member of Congress for Florida's 2nd Congressional District. Collectively, these changes may significantly influence the policy and funding priorities considered at both the state and federal levels during the upcoming legislative cycle.

<u>Property Tax Reform</u>. Of greatest significance to the County is Amendment 3, the proposed constitutional amendment on property tax reform that will be considered by Florida voters in November 2026. If Amendment 3 is approved by voters, Leon County is projected to experience an approximately $71 million reduction in property tax revenues during the first two years of implementation, including approximately $65 million in general property tax revenue and $6 million associated with the Emergency Medical Services Municipal Services Taxing Unit. As the County prepares for the potential loss of a significant portion of its primary general revenue source, leveraging available state and federal resources—including legislative appropriations—will become increasingly important to advance critical capital projects while preserving limited local resources for essential and mandated services.

<u>State and Federal Leadership Transition.</u> The 2026 General Election will also significantly reshape the governmental landscape in which the County advances its legislative priorities. At the state level, Florida will transition to a new gubernatorial administration and new leadership in both chambers of the Legislature. These transitions may bring changes in state policy priorities, agency leadership, budgetary priorities, and the overall approach to state-local government relations. At the federal level, the election of a new member of Congress representing Florida's 2nd Congressional District will similarly require the County to establish a strong working relationship with a new congressional office while continuing its engagement with the broader federal delegation.

Taken together, the outcome of Amendment 3 and these leadership transitions make the 2027 legislative cycle particularly consequential for Leon County. Accordingly, the priorities recommended in this item are intended to position the County to respond to an evolving legislative environment, establish relationships with incoming state and federal leaders, protect the County's ability to provide essential services, and aggressively pursue available state and federal resources in support of the community.

At the Board's November 17, 2026 meeting, a status report will be presented on the outcomes of Amendment 3 and all of the County-advanced ballot proposals considered on the November 2026 General Election ballot. Of particular relevance to the County's legislative efforts, the report will include the outcome of the countywide, nonbinding advisory referendum on potential consolidation of Leon County and City of Tallahassee governments. Should the Board elect to pursue consolidation following the results of the advisory referendum, the status report will outline potential next steps to take in coordination with the Leon County Legislative Delegation during upcoming legislative cycles.

Status of Leon County's Contract for State and Federal Lobbyist Services

As reflected throughout this item, the County utilizes contract lobbying services to support and advance its legislative priorities at the state and federal levels. In October 2025, as directed by the Board, the County entered into a contract with The Southern Group to provide state and federal lobbying services for $200,000 annually, including $117,500 for state lobbying services and $82,500 for federal lobbying services. The contract provides for an initial three-year term, with two optional one-year extensions through September 30, 2030.

As previously reported to the Board, the practice of retaining contract lobbyists at the state and federal levels is common among local governments and serves to ensure that the County can leverage these relationships to effectively advocate for the County's interests. In recognition of their role in advancing the County's legislative priorities, representatives from The Southern Group will be available during the 2027 State and Federal Legislative Priorities Workshop to provide the Board with updates and perspectives regarding the upcoming state and federal legislative sessions.

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PROPOSED 2027 STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING REQUESTS

Each year, the County aggressively pursues state and federal funding to support local projects and initiatives and maximize the County's limited financial resources. This is a coordinated, organization-wide effort that includes pursuing funding through state and federal executive agency programs, competitive and formula-based grants, and legislative line-item appropriations. While most state and federal funding available to local governments is administered through executive agencies, legislative line-item appropriations provide an additional opportunity to secure funding for priority projects with the support of the County's state and federal delegation members.

Throughout the year, the County's legislative team works closely with County departments to identify projects that are well-positioned to compete for state and federal funding. This process includes reviewing Board-approved projects in the County and Blueprint Capital Improvement Programs, identifying opportunities to advance priorities and initiatives included in the County's Strategic Plan, and assessing projects with identified funding gaps.

As part of this effort, the County's legislative team also works closely with the County's contract lobbyists, The Southern Group, to determine the most appropriate funding strategy (line-item vs. agency appropriation process) for each project. Considerations include project type and readiness, availability and commitment of local matching funds, eligibility for existing state or federal programs, and the competitiveness of pursuing funding through an executive agency versus the legislative appropriations process. Based on this process, the following section identifies specific County projects recommended for state and federal agency funding and legislative line-item appropriations during the upcoming year.

State and Federal Executive Agency Funding

State and federal executive agencies administer numerous programs that provide funding to local governments for a broad range of governmental functions, including infrastructure, hazard mitigation, environmental protection, public safety, transportation, literacy programs, and equipment purchases. The County has been highly successful in leveraging these programs, particularly for major infrastructure projects, with approximately $60 million of state and federal agency program funding leveraged on an annual basis.

Executive agency funding generally reaches local governments through formula or discretionary allocations and competitive grant programs. Formula-based funding is distributed to eligible recipients according to predetermined statutory or program criteria, while competitive funding is awarded through an application and evaluation process established by the administering agency. In other instances, funding for specific projects may be programmed directly within an executive agency's budget or multiyear work program.

Specifically, the County leverages most of its state and federal funding through executive agencies by securing "discretionary" and "competitive" grant funding for local projects. Discretionary or formula-based grants are noncompetitive awards based on a predetermined allocation process while competitive grants, on the other hand, are awarded to eligible recipients based on an application process and evaluation criteria determined by the funding agency, as follows:

- In some cases, a specific funding amount is included for a local project within the budget of an executive agency. One example includes projects funded through the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) Work Program. Unlike legislative appropriations requests which are sponsored by Legislators and included as individual line-items in the state budget, transportation projects included in the FDOT Work Program are identified and prioritized through a regional planning process. In Leon County, transportation priorities are developed by the Capital Region Transportation Planning Agency (CRTPA), in coordination with FDOT, for consideration in the Work Program. Through this process, substantial funding is identified and programmed for state roadways within Leon County which significantly supports the local transportation needs. For example, over $24 million is programmed in FY 2027 through FDOT Work Program for transportation improvement projects in Leon County, including resurfacing portions of Mahan Drive, Monroe Street, and Capital Circle SW, as well as widening improvements to Crawfordville Road and Orange Avenue.

  <u>FY 2027 & FY 2028 Funding for Crawfordville Road & Woodville Highway.</u> Notably, the FY 2027 FDOT Work Program includes $3.6 million for completion of ROW acquisition of both segments of widening improvements to Crawfordville Road in Leon County (Segment #1 from LL Wallace Road to the State Road 61 intersection; and Segment #2 from LL Wallace Road to Wakulla County Line). Looking ahead to FY 2028, an additional $16.8 million is programmed to fully fund construction of Segment #1 (from LL Wallace Road to the State Road 61 intersection). In addition, in FY 2028, over $6.2 million is programmed to fully fund construction of the Woodville Highway Resurfacing Project, which will include additional safety improvements at the Woodville Highway and Natural Bridge Road intersection. As previously approved by the Board, funding for these improvements, including the addition of a traffic signal and northbound turn lane, has been accelerated by FDOT as a result of the County's cost-share commitment toward ROW costs in FY 2025. Both of these projects demonstrate the County's ongoing and successful coordination with FDOT to secure agency funding for critical infrastructure improvements in Leon County.

- In other cases, program funding is provided in the budget for an executive agency to administer a competitive grant program during the fiscal year. Examples include the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Water Quality Improvement Grant Program and the Springs Protection Grant Program, which the County has successfully leveraged to support major septic-to-sewer and water quality projects. Most notably, the Leon County Water Quality and Springs Protection Infrastructure Improvement Plan, a first-of-its-kind agreement between the State and a county, established a commitment of over $70 million in state and local funding, including more than $40 million through FDEP, for septic system improvement projects throughout Leon County. These investments support the Woodville Sewer Project, Woodside Heights, Northeast Lake Munson, and Belair/Annawood septic-to-sewer projects, as well as the Advanced Septic Systems Pilot Project.

The County aggressively seeks these funding opportunities to support County projects and has been successful in recent years securing funding through many of these programs, particularly for major infrastructure projects. Recognizing this, Table #1 proposes specific County projects to pursue funding through state and federal agency appropriations and grant programs during the upcoming year, which:

- Are identified in the County or Blueprint Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan;
- Align with existing state and/or federal grant programs anticipated to be available in the upcoming year; and/or
- Address infrastructure project funding gaps that exceed the maximum funding available through legislative line-item appropriation requests.

Table #1: Proposed 2027 State and Federal Executive Agency Funding Projects

Project:	**Request:**	**Phase:**
Northeast Gateway: Welaunee Boulevard *(Phase 2: I-10 to Roberts Road)*	$3 million	Construction
Airport Gateway *(Segment G: Springhill Road)*	$20 million	ROW
Southside Gateway: Woodville Highway *(Capital Circle to Paul Russell Rd.)*	$18 million	ROW
Northwest Connector: Tharpe Street *(Ocala Rd. to Capital Circle NW)*	$5 million	Design
Northeast Connector: Bannerman *(Phase 2: Quail Common Drive to Meridian Road)*	$60 million	Construction
Orange Avenue Widening *(Monroe Street to Cypress Lake Street)*	$21 million	ROW
Westside Student Gateway *(Capital Circle NW to Appleyard Drive)*	$3.4 million	Design
Magnolia Drive Trail *(Phase 3: Diamond Street to Apalachee Parkway)*	$8 million	Construction
Orange/Meridian Placemaking *(East Ditch Stormwater Improvements)*	$3 million	Construction
Market District *(Phase 2: Maclay Road Trail)*	$2 million	Construction
Lake Lafayette & St. Marks Regional Linear Park *(Apalachee Parkway Trail)*	$375,000	Design
Veterans Memorial Drive Bridge Replacement	$2.8 million	Construction
Woodville Sewer Project *(Phase 2)*	$10 million	Construction
Emergency Communication Systems *(Next Generation 911; Text-to- 911)*	$700,000	Operations

Project:	**Request:**	**Phase:**
Fort Braden Community Center Renovation	$5 million	Construction
Apalachee Regional Park Master Plan *(Phase 2)*	$5.6 million	Construction
County Recreational Amenities *(Various improvements as identified in CIP)*	$3.5 million	Construction
County Sidewalk Program *(Various project sites as identified in CIP)*	$3 million	Construction
Roadway Intersection, Traffic Calming and Safety Improvements *(Various project sites as identified in CIP)*	$7 million	All Phases
Critical Stormwater Repairs *(Various project sites as identified in CIP)*	$4 million	All Phases
Hazard and Flood Mitigation Projects *(*as prioritized in the County's Local Mitigation Strategy)*	TBD*	All Phases

In addition to the projects identified in Table #1, the County will continue to identify and pursue additional competitive regional, state, and federal grant opportunities throughout the year as appropriate. This ongoing effort allows the County to maximize available external funding and respond to new funding opportunities as they become available.

As noted previously, executive agency funding represents the primary source of state and federal funding available to local governments, while legislative line-item appropriations provide opportunities to supplement funding for local projects. The County will coordinate with The Southern Group in advocating in support of the County's funding requests for local projects through the state and federal executive agency process, as well as the legislative line-item process as detailed in the next section.

State Legislative Line-Item Appropriation Requests

Each year, the Florida Legislature develops a state budget based on revenue projections prepared by the State's Office of Economic and Demographic Research (EDR). These forecasts provide important context for the Legislature's annual budget deliberations, including the availability of funding for legislative line-item appropriations. In August 2026, EDR produced updated revenue estimates in preparation of the 2027 State Legislative Session, with general revenue collections projected to increase by nearly $1 billion across the current and upcoming fiscal years. Despite a modest improvement in the State's near-term revenue outlook, state economists have cautioned that projected revenues will not support state spending at its recent rate of growth. Accordingly, continued fiscal restraint is anticipated as the Legislature develops the State Fiscal Year 2027-28 budget.

At the same time, the upcoming legislative cycle will occur amid significant uncertainty regarding the future of local government revenues due to statewide property tax reform. As the County prepares for the potential loss of a significant portion of its primary general revenue source, leveraging available state and federal resources—including legislative appropriations—will become increasingly important to advance critical capital projects while preserving limited local resources for essential and mandated services.

Prior to each annual State Legislative Session, the House and Senate establish processes for legislators to submit local project funding requests for consideration as line-item allocations in the state budget. These requests may be submitted on behalf of local governments, nonprofit organizations, and other eligible entities and generally require detailed information regarding the project scope, available matching funds, project readiness, estimated completion schedule, and ownership and management responsibilities. The County's legislative team submits forms for each of the County's local project requests to the County's Legislative Delegation members for sponsorship and the County's contract lobbying team, The Southern Group, provides a daily presence by advocating for these requests throughout the legislative process.

The legislative appropriations process is highly competitive and saturated, with legislators receiving funding requests from numerous local governments and community organizations throughout their respective districts. Unlike established executive agency programs, legislative line-item appropriations considered directly through the annual legislative budget process are largely subject to political considerations, such as influence of legislative leadership, membership of appropriations committees, legislative delegation members, and ultimately the Governor's line-item veto authority.

Given the competitive nature of this process, the County has historically advanced a concise and targeted slate of funding requests that are well-positioned for legislative consideration. The County's legislative team utilizes the guidance of The Southern Group to identify local project requests which meet the following specific criteria:

- Have local matching funds committed,
- Are "shovel-ready" with design and permitting completed (if applicable),
- And, most importantly, align with the anticipated priorities of legislative leadership and/or have been specifically requested by a delegation member.

Accordingly, Table #2 recommends a concise list of County projects for which to seek legislative line-item funding during the 2027 Session based on the guidance provided by The Southern Group.

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Table #2: Proposed 2027 State Legislative Line-Item Appropriation Funding Requests

Request:	**Amount:**	**Project Phase:**
Courthouse Security Improvements *(Phase 2)*	$500,000	Capital/Fixed Assets
Antler Pond Dam Stabilization	$1.25 million	Construction
Hopkins Crossing Wetland Facility Repair	$300,000	Construction
Intersection & Safety Improvements *(Old St. Augustine Rd./Blair Stone Rd.)*	$2 million	Construction
Intersection & Safety Improvements *(N. Monroe Street/Crowder Rd.)*	$750,000	Construction
Community Sidewalk Enhancements *(Maclay Rd – Meridian Rd. to City Limits)*	$3 million	Construction
Community Sidewalk Enhancements *(Tram Rd – Crossing Rocks Rd to Capital Circle)*	$2 million	Construction

Additional detail on the proposed projects listed in Table #2 is provided as follows:

1. **County Courthouse Security Improvements:** This request will seek $500,000 for completion of security enhancements at the Leon County Courthouse as identified by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Leon County Sheriff's Office. The Legislature's adopted FY 2027 budget, as passed during the 2026 Session, included an allocation of $250,000 which will support the first phase of recommended security improvements across the building entrances, including security screening system and security camera upgrades. Phase 2 planned improvements include replacement and law enforcement integration of internal access control and other physical security measures to promote public safety which has been a priority area of the Legislature in recent years. Funding is available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

2. **Antler Pond Dam Stabilization:** This request will seek $1.25 million to restabilize the deteriorating earthen dam on Antler Pond, located in northeast Leon County off Buck Lake Road, which impounds stormwater for flood control in the surrounding area. This project has been identified as a critical need as the dam restablization is needed to prevent loss of property and/or life resulting from a future dam failure. Funding is available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

3. **Hopkins Crossing Wetland Facility Repair:** This request will seek $300,000 for the repair of the Hopkins Crossing Wetland Facility, an aging stormwater system located in west Leon County south of Capital Circle NW. The project will replace the facility's failing outfall structure and broken gate valve, which controls water levels within the wetland system. Failure of the structure could result in the uncontrolled draining of the wetland, causing downstream flooding and adverse environmental impacts. Funding is

available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

4. **Intersection & Safety Improvements (Old St. Augustine Rd/Blair Stone Rd.):** This request will seek $2 million to improve traffic operations and safety along Old St. Augustine Road by enhancing the intersection's turn-lane capacity, pedestrian facilities, traffic signal infrastructure, and stormwater drainage. Improvements include adding eastbound and westbound right-turn lanes, extending left-turn storage capacity in both directions, and constructing sidewalks within the project limits. The project will also replace the existing span-wire traffic signal with a mast-arm system, optimize signal timing to improve traffic circulation, and complete associated drainage improvements. Funding is available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

5. **Intersection & Safety Improvements (N. Monroe Street/Crowder Rd):** This request will seek $750,000 to enhance traffic operations and capacity along Crowder Road at North Monroe Street by improving turn-lane capacity, traffic signal infrastructure, pedestrian facilities, and drainage. Improvements on Crowder Road include adding a dedicated right-turn lane, converting the existing through/right-turn lane to a through-only lane, and extending the existing left-turn lane. The project will also add signal heads to accommodate the new lane configuration, reconstruct the sidewalk along the north side of Crowder Road to nearby retail entrances, and construct an enclosed drainage system. Funding is available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

6. **Community Sidewalk Enhancements (Maclay Rd – Meridian Rd. to City Limits):** This request will seek $3 million to support construction of a six-foot-wide sidewalk along the north side of Maclay Road, from Meridian Road to approximately 50 feet east of Bobbin Brook East. The remaining segment of this sidewalk project (Bobbin Brook East to Maclay Boulevard) will be completed by the end of 2028 as part of the Blueprint Market District project. The improvements will provide a safe, continuous pedestrian connection along the corridor and improve access to Maclay School, surrounding neighborhoods, Market District retailers, and the new Market District Park being developed by Blueprint. This project is one of two projects included under Tier 1 of the County's Community Sidewalk Enhancement (CSE) projects which are currently in progress. Funding is available through the County's CSE program budget to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

7. **Community Sidewalk Enhancements (Tram Rd – Crossing Rocks Rd to Capital Circle**): This request will seek $2 million to support pedestrian and bicycle safety and connectivity improvements along Tram Road by constructing approximately 9,615 linear feet of 10-foot-wide multiuse trail from Crossing Rocks Road to Capital Circle Southeast. As presented to the Board in May 2024, the Tram Road/Capital Circle Southeast intersection is prioritized in the CRTPA's Safe Streets and Roads for All Safety Action Plan and identified as a High Hazard Street within the region's High Injury Network. This request seeks a portion of the total project costs which the County continues to pursue through grant opportunities. This project is one of two projects included under Tier 1 of

the County's Community Sidewalk Enhancement projects which are currently in progress. Funding is available through the County's CSE program budget to provide a competitive local funding match.

Community Partner Organization Requests

In addition to advancing funding requests for County projects, the Board may wish to support legislative line-item appropriation requests submitted by community partner organizations for projects that align with the County's strategic and legislative priorities. Unlike the County's project funding requests, which are identified in advance through the process described previously, community partner requests often emerge closer to the Legislative Session as organizations finalize their funding needs and coordinate with members of the Leon County Legislative Delegation. While these requests are submitted directly by the respective organizations through the legislative appropriations process, the Board has provided direction in past years to support community partner requests as part of the County's legislative priorities. For instance, during the 2026 Florida Legislative Session, the Board provided direction to support three community partner requests (Farm Share, Second Harvest of the Big Bend, and Lake Jackson Restoration) as part of the County's legislative priorities.

For the 2027 Legislative Session, staff recommends that the County support community partner legislative appropriation requests to the extent they align with, and do not conflict with, the County's priorities. This approach would provide flexibility to support eligible community partner requests throughout the legislative cycle without requiring each request to be separately identified as a County priority. Examples of community partner requests anticipated for submission during the 2027 Legislative Session include:

- **Lake Jackson Habitat Restoration**: During the 2026 Session, the Board supported the Cypress Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America's funding request in support of continued habitat restoration at Lake Jackson, including removal of nutrient-rich muck and invasive vegetation. While this request was not included in the state budget last session, the Lake Jackson Habitat Restoration project request is anticipated to be resubmitted for consideration during the 2027 Legislative Session.

- **Volunteer Fire Department Critical Equipment Needs:** In recent years, Leon County's Volunteer Fire Departments (VFDs) have submitted legislative funding requests for critical emergency response equipment and facility improvements, including fire apparatus, rescue equipment, firefighter protective gear, and station upgrades. Similar requests are anticipated for the 2027 Legislative Session to supplement the County's annual $400,000 allocation to the VFDs and help address significant capital and equipment needs that exceed available local funding.

- **Farm Share and Second Harvest of the Big Bend:** Each year, Farm Share, Inc. and the Second Harvest of the Big Bend submit funding requests to support food assistance programs serving Leon County and the surrounding region, including community food distributions, daily feeding programs, and disaster relief efforts. Both organizations are anticipated to submit similar funding requests during the 2027 Legislative Session to continue addressing food insecurity and emergency food needs in the community.

- **Florida Civil Rights Museum:** Across 2022 and 2023, the Board provided $120,000 in startup funding to the Florida Civil Rights Museum, Inc. (FCRM) for a virtual civil rights museum. Since that time, the Board has also provided support of the FCRM's legislative funding requests to secure legislative line-item funding to expand its efforts statewide. Most recently, the FCRM secured $250,000 in the FY 2027 State Budget as approved during the 2026 Session. The FCRM plans on submitting a funding request during the 2027 Legislative Session in support of its statewide virtual museum.

Federal Earmark Line-Item Appropriation Requests

At the federal level, members of Congress may submit requests for direct funding of specific local projects through the annual federal appropriations process. Commonly referred to as "earmarks", these funding requests are formally known as Community Project Funding requests in the U.S. House of Representatives and Congressionally Directed Spending requests in the U.S. Senate. Similar to the state legislative appropriations process, earmarks provide an opportunity for members of Congress to seek direct, line-item funding in the federal budget for specific projects within their districts.

While these requests can be submitted by U.S. House and Senate members, Florida Senators Scott and Moody do not accept earmark requests in opposition of the earmark process. Accordingly, in recent years, the County has pursued federal earmark funding through Representative Dunn's office. Earlier this year, Representative Dunn announced that he will not seek reelection, with his current term concluding on January 3, 2027. Following the November 2026 General Election, the County's legislative team will engage with the newly elected representative for Florida's 2nd Congressional District regarding the federal earmark process and opportunities to advance the County's priority funding requests during the 120th Congress.

In the U.S. House, earmark funding requests are limited to certain appropriations accounts and subject to specific eligibility criteria established annually by the House Appropriations Committee. In past years, House members have been limited to submission of 15 requests for consideration which must be ranked upon submission. It is important to note that Florida's 2nd Congressional District is among the largest districts in the state in geographical size, with Leon County among the 16 counties represented.

Given the limited number of requests each member may submit and competing priorities within congressional districts, the County's legislative team works to identify Board-approved priority projects that meet the eligibility criteria and coordinate submission of funding requests with our local delegation. Recognizing that eligible appropriation accounts and project requirements are established annually and may change from one federal appropriations cycle to the next, the County works with The Southern Group to identify the most competitive local project requests based on the latest guidance available. In prior years, eligibility considerations (which can vary by appropriations account) have included:

- Alignment with an eligible appropriations account and its requirements (e.g., only transportation projects included in a local/regional/state Transportation Improvement Program can be eligible for certain Department of Transportation funding);

- Funding requests that do not exceed $5 million or require multi-year funding as funds must be obligated within one year; and
- Commitment of the required local cost share, which may range from 20% to 50% depending on the appropriations account.

The County will coordinate with our local delegation to identify and advance the County's highest-priority eligible project from among the projects approved by the Board. Table #3 identifies potential projects organized by federal appropriations accounts that have been eligible for earmark funding in prior years. Final eligibility and submission of any County request will be based on the requirements established for the applicable federal appropriations cycle and coordination with local delegation members.

Table #3: Proposed 2027 Federal Earmark Appropriation Funding Requests

Request:	**Amount:**	**Phase**
Department of Transportation: Highway Infrastructure Projects		
Veterans Memorial Bridge Replacement	$2.2 million	Construction
Environmental Protection Agency: Clean Water Infrastructure		
Woodville Sewer (Phase 2)	$5 million	Construction
Department of Agriculture: Natural Resources Conservation		
Antler Pond Dam Restablization	$1.25 million	Construction

Additional details on the proposed projects in Table #3 is provided as follows:

1. **Veterans Memorial Bridge Replacement:** This request will seek $2.2 million for the completion of the Veterans Memorial Drive Bridge Replacement project, which is anticipated to meet the earmark eligibility criteria of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) for DOT Highway Infrastructure Project funding. In 2023, the County secured a federal earmark for the project which, together with the County's local match, provided approximately $2 million in project funding administered by FDOT. In January 2025, FDOT notified the County of a $2.8 million funding shortfall needed to complete construction of the project. Based on the project's eligibility and the County's previous success in securing federal funding for the project, it has been identified as a competitive earmark request. This funding will support a portion of the total project costs which, if funded, would be matched utilizing the County's Transportation Fund reserve.
2. **Woodville Sewer (Phase 2):** This request will seek $5 million to support the second phase of the Woodville Sewer System project which is anticipated to meet the earmark eligibility criteria of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment for clean water and drinking water infrastructure project funding. This funding will support a portion of

the total project costs which, if funded, would be matched with local sales tax revenues as drawn from the County's share of Sales Tax Water Quality funding.

3. **Antler Pond Dam Stabilization**: This request will seek $1.25 million to support the Antler Pond Dam Stabilization project, located in northeastern Leon County off Buck Lake Road, which is anticipated to meet the earmark eligibility criteria of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture and Rural Development for natural resources conservation project funding. This project will restabilize the deteriorating earthen dam on Antler Pond which impounds stormwater for flood control in the surrounding area. Funding is available through the County's Capital Improvement Plan to provide a competitive local funding match to support project completion.

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PROPOSED POLICY REQUESTS
2027 STATE LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Leon County's legislative policy priorities generally focus on issues specific to the County that may require sustained advocacy over multiple legislative sessions, as well as emerging issues affecting County programs, services, and operations. Throughout the year, staff evaluates the trends and issues affecting all County programs and services to identify potential legislative policy priorities for the Board's consideration. The County's legislative team will monitor the budgetary and programmatic decisions made by the Legislature to determine the impact, if any, on local governments in the form of cost shifts or unfunded mandates.

In addition to priorities specific to Leon County, a significant portion of the County's legislative advocacy focuses on issues of statewide importance in coordination with the Florida Association of Counties (FAC). The County's legislative team works closely with FAC and other counties to advocate on significant issues affecting local governments, including preservation of local home rule authority, opposition to unfunded mandates and cost shifts, and protection of the local revenue sources necessary to provide essential and state-mandated services. During the 2026 Session, for example, the County worked closely with FAC in opposition to property tax proposals that would significantly reduce local government revenues and directly engaged legislators regarding their potential impacts on Leon County.

These statewide advocacy efforts will remain particularly important during the 2027 legislative cycle as counties continue to navigate significant changes to Florida's property tax structure and other legislative proposals affecting local revenues and home rule authority. Accordingly, the County will continue to coordinate closely with FAC to provide a unified county perspective on legislation affecting local governments while also advancing the specific policy priorities established by the Board.

The proposed policy priorities for the 2027 State Legislative Session are as follows:

- Support the 2027 FAC legislative program unless specific issues conflict with Leon County's interests.
- Support preservation of local fiscal authority and adequate, diversified revenue sources necessary to fund state-mandated obligations and essential County services; oppose reforms that significantly reduce local revenues without providing adequate replacement funding; and actively engage in the 2027-2028 Taxation and Budget Reform Commission process to protect the long-term fiscal sustainability of county government.
- Support legislation to provide increased flexibility to counties participating in the State Housing Initiative program (SHIP) to utilize funding for rental housing developments.
- Support targeted statutory revisions to Section 125.595, Florida Statutes, to preserve local governments' ability to recognize longstanding community observances, such as Emancipation Day, Pride Month, Black History Month, and Women's History Month, and seek targeted statutory clarification to allow local support of single-sex sporting events, community services, and other activities.

- Support legislation establishing clear and consistent firearm restrictions for sensitive government and community spaces identified in Section 790.06, Florida Statutes, including application of such restrictions to all firearms, including openly carried rifles and shotguns.
- Support the continuation of comprehensive federal PFAS standards and, where federal standards are not established or maintained, support appropriate statewide PFAS standards to protect drinking water and address PFAS contamination.
- Support the establishment of statewide standards governing law enforcement agencies' use of Automated License Plate Recognition Systems and associated data, including appropriate safeguards for access, retention, sharing, security, and use, and preservation of home rule authority to regulate or prohibit such systems within the County's rights-of-way.
- Support the protection of the state workforce and oppose any reductions to state employee benefits.
- Support efforts to restore passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast region through Leon County and urge the State of Florida to join the Southern Rail Commission.
- Support legislation to expand the notice and first right of refusal requirements for the sale of manufactured-mobile home parks to include unsolicited offers by a third party so that property owners have an opportunity to counter the purchase offer and remain in their homes.
- Support a revision to Sec. 119.071(4)(d)2, F.S., to exempt personally identifying information of elections personnel from public records requests.

The following provides a summary of each proposed priority, including a brief overview of the issue and the specific legislative action recommended for Board approval. The Board may add, remove, or amend the proposed priorities as deemed appropriate.

Florida Association of Counties (FAC) Issues

Issue: The Florida Association of Counties (FAC) mission is to help Florida's counties serve and represent Floridians by preserving county home rule authority through advocacy, education, and collaboration. Representing all 67 counties before the Florida Legislature, FAC addresses issues that have broad statewide appeal such as the opposition of unfunded mandates or cost shifts to counties, preservation of home rule, growth management, annexation, revenue-sharing, and water management issues.

As every year, the County's legislative team will work closely with FAC on significant substantive issues facing counties. In many cases, the County joins FAC to advocate for or against legislation that would substantially impact counties, such as (but not limited to):

- Preserving local ad valorem taxing authority and supporting enhancement of other locally available revenue sources to meet current and future public service demands.
- Maintaining the integrity of county home rule power which allows counties to develop and implement community-based solutions to local problems, without State limitations or mandates.

- Retaining the full amount of dedicated documentary tax revenues to fund state and local affordable housing programs and providing increased flexibility to counties to maximize these funds to advance local affordable housing priorities.
- Supporting the provision of adequate state funding for constitutionally prescribed county officers that are required to perform duties on behalf of the state.
- Preserving and increasing state funding for water quality improvement projects designed to reduce nutrient pollution in impaired waterbodies from sources such as stormwater runoff, wastewater and septic systems, and industrial water use.
- Allowing for flexibility in the delivery of health and human services within communities to achieve the desired level of services based on local needs and priorities.
- Opposing policies that further shift state Medicaid costs to counties, while supporting continued evaluation of the county-state Medicaid cost-share arrangement, taking into consideration the impacts of state policies designed to contain growth in Medicaid costs.

FAC will finalize its legislative policies during the upcoming Legislative Conference scheduled for December 2-4, 2026, in St. Johns County. The statewide issues identified by the FAC membership will assist staff in identifying the most critical issues facing counties during the state legislative session.

Action: Support the 2027 FAC legislative program unless specific issues conflict with Leon County's interests.

Property Tax Reform: Preparing for the 2026 General Election and Beyond

Issue: On June 2, 2026, the Legislature passed a proposed constitutional amendment on property tax reform to be placed on the November 2026 ballot as "Amendment #3". Amendment #3, titled "Increased Homestead Exemption; Lower Cap on Increases in Non-Homesteaded Property Assessments" would raise the homestead exemption from $50,000 to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028. The proposal also directs the Legislature to establish uniform procedures for counties to eliminate homestead property taxes over time at their discretion. Except for school districts, the proposed reduction, and eventual elimination, would be applicable to all homestead property taxes including taxes collected through special districts (the Leon County Children's Services Council) and Municipal Services Taxing Units (the EMS MSTU). Among other provisions, the proposal would also reduce the annual assessment cap on non-homestead properties (such as rental property, second homes, and commercial real estate) from 10% to 5%.

Based on preliminary estimates prepared by the Property Appraiser, the proposed $250,000 homestead exemption and 5% cap on the assessable value increase for non-homestead properties would result in a loss of approximately $71 million, or 30%, of property tax revenue for Leon County in the first two years of implementation, including $65 million in general property tax and $6 million in EMS MSTU revenues. The revenue that remains is almost exactly what it takes to fund our state mandates and constitutional officers at today's costs, with insufficient funding to support all the other valued services the County provides (disaster response, parks, solid waste, transportation, veterans services, libraries, etc.). The proposal is subject to voter approval (60%) during the 2026 General Election to take effect January 1, 2027. Looking ahead, the January 1st property values will provide the latest revenue projections to inform the upcoming FY 2028 budget development process.

Recognizing the potential impact to the County's primary general revenue source, the County's legislative advocacy will continue to focus on preserving local fiscal flexibility and discretionary funding, including local ad valorem taxing authority and access to other locally available revenue sources necessary to meet current and future service demands. The County will also advocate for adequate state funding for state-mandated obligations and constitutionally prescribed county officers that perform duties on behalf of the State.

<u>2027-2028 Taxation and Budget Reform Commission.</u> Property tax and broader local government revenue reform may remain a significant statewide issue beyond the November 2026 General Election. Florida's Taxation and Budget Reform Commission (TBRC), a constitutionally established commission that convenes every 20 years, is scheduled to reconvene beginning in 2027. The TBRC is charged with examining the State's budget and expenditure processes, Florida's tax structure, governmental productivity and efficiency, and the ability of state and local governments to tax and adequately fund governmental operations.

The TBRC provides a significant avenue for changes to Florida's tax structure because, in addition to recommending statutory changes to the Legislature, it has the authority to place proposed constitutional amendments directly before Florida voters. Of particular importance to counties, the TBRC is specifically directed to examine the ability of state and local governments to tax and adequately fund governmental operations, alternative methods of generating sufficient revenues, and constitutional limitations on state and local taxation and expenditures. The Commission may recommend statutory changes to the Legislature and, with approval of two-thirds of its full membership, directly propose constitutional revisions related to taxation or the state budgetary process for consideration by Florida voters. The upcoming TBRC process will begin in 2027 and extend into 2028, with any proposed constitutional revisions required to be filed no later than 180 days before the 2028 General Election for consideration by voters on the November 2028 ballot.

Accordingly, regardless of the outcome of the November 2026 property tax amendment, the County's legislative team will closely monitor and engage in the 2027-2028 TBRC process and advocate for reforms that preserve local fiscal flexibility, provide adequate and diversified revenue sources, and recognize the resources necessary for counties to fund state-mandated obligations and essential local services.

Action: Support preservation of local fiscal authority and adequate, diversified revenue sources necessary to fund state-mandated obligations and essential County services; oppose reforms that significantly reduce local revenues without providing adequate replacement funding; and actively engage in the 2027-2028 Taxation and Budget Reform Commission process to protect the long-term fiscal sustainability of county government.

Promotion of Affordable Rental Housing Development

Issue: According to the Shimberg Center for Housing Studies at the University of Florida (Shimberg Center), the highest affordable housing need in Leon County is rental housing for very low-income households. This challenge is not unique to Leon County, as Florida faces a statewide shortage of more than 600,000 affordable rental units. To address this need locally, however, Leon County has taken a proactive, multifaceted approach to expanding the supply of affordable rental housing, with several initiatives that have or will result in more than 1,200 new affordable rental units over the next year. A key component of these efforts has been providing gap financing to support the development of rental housing serving low- and very low-income households, including through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program.

SHIP serves as the primary funding source for the County's Housing Program, supporting activities such as down payment assistance, home rehabilitation, and affordable rental housing development. However, Florida Statutes currently limit the amount of SHIP funding that may be used for rental housing activities to 35% of a local government's annual allocation. To help address the need for gap financing for affordable rental developments, the Board established the Leon County Rental Development Program in 2023 using SHIP funding. The program provides gap financing to developers constructing new affordable rental units for very low- and low-income households. The County currently allocates approximately $125,000 annually in SHIP funding to the program, representing the maximum amount available for rental activities under the statutory limitation.

The County has also committed additional local resources to expand affordable rental housing. At the June 2025 Budget Workshop, the Board approved an annual allocation of $250,000 in general revenue to provide gap financing for affordable housing developments serving very low- and extremely low-income households. In addition, beginning in FY 2025, the Blueprint Intergovernmental Agency Board dedicated $250,000 annually—$125,000 each for the City and County—to establish the Affordable Housing Gap Finance Incentive Program administered by the Office of Economic Vitality (OEV). Collectively, the County currently commits approximately $500,000 annually toward gap financing for affordable rental housing through SHIP, general revenue, and the County's share of the OEV program.

Recognizing that increasing the supply of affordable rental housing in Leon County is a longstanding priority of the Board, this proposed priority supports increased flexibility for counties participating in SHIP to utilize a greater share of their allocations for rental housing development. Such flexibility would increase the funding available for the County's Rental Development Program in future years. Furthermore, as the County prepares for the potential impacts of property tax reform, this flexibility will allow the County to maximize its use of dedicated SHIP funding in addressing the greatest affordable housing needs while reducing reliance on limited general revenue resources. As a shared priority of FAC and the Florida League of Cities, the County will continue to work with counties and cities throughout the State in supporting legislation that would allow for greater flexibility to invest SHIP funding on affordable rental developments.

Action: Support legislation to provide increased flexibility to counties participating in the State Housing Initiative program (SHIP) to utilize funding for rental housing developments.

Statutory Exceptions for Local Government DEI Restrictions

Issue: During the 2026 Legislative Session, the Legislature passed SB 1134, which prohibits local governments from funding, promoting, or taking official action related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as defined by the legislation. Effective January 1, 2027, Section 125.595, Florida Statutes, as amended by SB 1134, will prohibit local governments from adopting or enforcing ordinances, resolutions, programs, or policies related to DEI and restricts the use of local government funds by employees, contractors, vendors, and other entities for DEI-related activities.

As Leon County has worked to implement SB 1134, the County has identified opportunities to clarify and refine the law to allow local governments to continue supporting important community activities without conflicting with its DEI restrictions. SB 1134 notably does not restrict local governments from recognizing or honoring holidays, special observances, monuments and memorials that are recognized by state or federal law; however, there are many longstanding community observances which are not similarly protected under the law. Specifically, the County will seek legislation recognizing Emancipation Day, Pride Month, Black History Month, and Women's History Month under state law for purposes of SB 1134, thereby allowing counties to continue recognizing and promoting these longstanding observances.

Furthermore, statutory clarification is also needed regarding local support of sporting events, such as those historically supported through the County's Sports Tourism Grant Program. In particular, SB 1134 may restrict the County's ability to support single-sex athletic competitions, such as male or female sporting events. Such restrictions could affect the County's ability to attract, sponsor, and support single-sex sporting events which generate over $6 million in economic impact locally on an annual basis. Finally, although the law currently provides limited exceptions for certain nonprofit services, including single-sex programs serving persons experiencing homelessness and trauma-involved or at-risk youth, these exceptions do not encompass all community-based services that may be affected by the law. Accordingly, the proposed priority would support statutory clarification to preserve the ability of counties to support single-sex sporting events, community services, and other activities that may be affected by the law.

Action: Support targeted statutory revisions to Section 125.595, Florida Statutes, to preserve local governments' ability to recognize longstanding community observances, such as Emancipation Day, Pride Month, Black History Month, and Women's History Month, and seek targeted statutory clarification to allow local support of single-sex sporting events, community services, and other activities.

Statewide Restriction of All Firearms in Sensitive Government and Community Spaces

Issue: On September 10, 2025, the Florida First District Court of Appeal ruled the State's ban on openly carrying firearms, as set forth in Section 790.053, Florida Statutes, unconstitutional. The ruling, however, created a potential unintended loophole under a separate section of Florida Statutes governing the carrying of concealed weapons. Specifically, Section 790.06, F.S., prohibits any person from openly carrying a handgun or carrying a concealed weapon or concealed firearm into specified places such as courthouses, meetings of legislative governing bodies, police stations, and prisons. This section, however, does not expressly address the open carrying of other types of firearms, such as rifles, shotguns, or AR-15s into places where handguns remain prohibited. Accordingly, the court ruling has resulted in a loophole effectively allowing long guns to be carried into sensitive government and community spaces.

Following the ruling, Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Carlos Muñiz issued guidance affirming the authority of local chief judges to prohibit weapons in courthouses and courtrooms. However, similar statewide clarification has not been provided for the other sensitive government and community spaces identified in Section 790.06, F.S. During the 2026 Legislative Session, HB 321 and SB 406 sought to address this issue by expressly prohibiting all firearms in these locations; however, both bills died in committee without being heard.

Accordingly, this proposed legislative priority seeks statutory clarification that the firearm restrictions applicable to sensitive government and community spaces identified under Section 790.06, F.S., apply to all firearms, including openly carried rifles and shotguns. Such clarification would establish consistent statewide standards for local governments and law enforcement, while preserving appropriate safety protections in locations already identified by the Legislature as warranting firearm restrictions.

Action: Support legislation establishing clear and consistent firearm restrictions for sensitive government and community spaces identified in Section 790.06, Florida Statutes, including application of such restrictions to all firearms, including openly carried rifles and shotguns.

Comprehensive Standards to Address PFAS Contamination

Issue: Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), commonly referred to as "forever chemicals", are a broad group of synthetic chemicals that have been widely used in consumer and industrial products. As PFAS break down very slowly, these chemicals can persist and accumulate in the environment, including in water and soil, as well as the human body. In 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the first enforceable federal drinking water standards for six PFAS including PFOA and PFOS, two of the most widely studied PFAS compounds. Specifically, the rule established Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) of 4.0 parts per trillion for PFOA and PFOS.

In May 2026, the EPA proposed two rules that would modify these requirements. The first would rescind the existing standards for the four other PFAS substances (PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA, and the Hazard Index requirement for mixtures containing these PFAS and PFBS), while the second would maintain the existing limits for PFOA and PFOS at 4.0 parts per trillion but allow eligible water systems up to two additional years, through 2031, to achieve compliance. Both proposals remain pending following the close of the public comment period in July 2026; therefore, the existing 2024 federal standards remain in effect while the rulemaking process continues.

At the state level, Section 376.91, Florida Statutes, requires the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) to establish statewide cleanup target levels for PFAS in drinking water, groundwater, and soil if federal standards have not been finalized by January 1, 2027. Any cleanup target levels adopted by FDEP must subsequently be ratified by the Legislature before taking effect.

As the federal rulemaking process remains ongoing, changes to federal PFAS standards could affect the need for additional state-level action. Accordingly, this priority seeks to support the continuation of protective federal PFAS standards and, where federal standards are rescinded or otherwise not established, support appropriate statewide PFAS cleanup standards. The County's legislative team will continue to monitor the evolving federal and state regulatory processes and advocate for a consistent regulatory framework that protects drinking water and provides clear standards for addressing PFAS contamination.

Action: Support the continuation of comprehensive federal PFAS standards and, where federal standards are not established or maintained, support appropriate statewide PFAS standards to protect drinking water and address PFAS contamination.

Statewide Standards for Automated License Plate Recognition Systems

Issue: Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) systems use cameras to capture license plate images and related vehicle and location data that can be searched and shared by law enforcement agencies. While ALPRs can serve as an effective law enforcement and public safety tool, their expanding use has raised concerns regarding privacy, data security, accuracy, appropriate access, and potential misuse of collected information.

Florida law currently regulates certain aspects of ALPR systems, including their placement within the State Highway System, confidentiality of identifying information, and retention of ALPR records. However, existing law does not establish comprehensive statewide standards governing law enforcement agencies' use of ALPR technology and access to resulting data. This is particularly significant for counties, which may regulate ALPRs within their own rights-of-way but generally cannot regulate the activities of independent law enforcement agencies or ALPRs located on state highways or municipal streets.

Accordingly, this priority seeks legislation establishing uniform statewide standards for the use of ALPR systems and associated data, including requirements governing permissible uses; access to and searches of ALPR databases; data retention and sharing; security and auditing; and law enforcement agency policies. Such standards would provide a consistent statewide framework that preserves the legitimate public safety uses of ALPR technology while establishing appropriate safeguards for privacy and the use of collected data. In addition, this priority would support the preservation of existing home rule authority to regulate or prohibit the use of ALPRs installed within the County's rights-of-way.

Action: Support the establishment of statewide standards governing law enforcement agencies' use of Automated License Plate Recognition Systems and associated data, including appropriate safeguards for access, retention, sharing, security, and use, and preservation of home rule authority to regulate or prohibit such systems within the County's rights-of-way.

Protection of the State Workforce

Issue: Recognizing that the state employees who live in Leon County are vital to our community, economy, and diversity, protecting the jobs of these workers from privatization, and advocating for fair wages has continuously been a top priority of the Board during the annual legislative process. This is an issue also strongly supported by members of Leon County's Legislative Delegation.

As approved during the 2026 Legislative Session, the final SFY 2027 state budget did not provide an across-the-board pay raise for state employees; with targeted 4% pay increases provided only for state law enforcement agents and firefighters, park rangers, and correctional officers. Salary increases in the amount of $10,000 for state attorneys and $3,500 for public defenders were also included in the budget. The County's legislative team will continue to monitor for any legislation affecting employee pay and benefits and will advocate on behalf of efforts that support state employees during the 2027 Session.

Action: Support the protection of the state workforce and oppose any reductions to state employee benefits.

Amtrak Passenger Rail Restoration

Issue: In August 2005, Amtrak's Sunset Limited passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast between New Orleans and Jacksonville, including service through Leon County, was suspended following Hurricane Katrina. Since that time, Leon County has engaged the local legislative delegation, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), and state and federal partners to advocate for restoration of passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast route.

In recent years, state and local governments in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama have been successful in securing federal funding to address key infrastructure needs and to support operations of passenger rail service between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama. In 1982, these three states formed an interstate rail compact now known as the Southern Rail Commission (SRC) for the purpose of supporting rail service. To date, the SRC has secured funds to resume twice-daily passenger rail service between New Orleans and Mobile. Restored rail service within this segment along the Gulf Coast, named Amtrak's "Mardi Gras Service", was officially opened in August 2025 (more detail provided in the federal priorities section).

The SRC allows for membership by contiguous states; however, Florida has not elected to join the SRC or efforts to extend passenger rail service into the state. The State of Florida's participation in the SRC would strengthen efforts to secure federal funding for passenger rail restoration throughout the remainder of the Gulf Coast region, including Leon County. During the 2026 Legislative Session, HB 53 and SB 1254 were filed which sought to authorize the State of Florida to join the SRC; however, both bills died in committee. Similar legislation is anticipated to be filed again for the 2027 Legislative Session. The County's legislative team will continue to monitor and advocate for legislation authorizing the State of Florida to join the SRC and engage the state as well as other stakeholders in supporting the restoration of Amtrak passenger rail service.

Action: Support efforts to restore passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast region through Leon County and urge the State of Florida to join the Southern Rail Commission.

Promoting Resident Ownership of Manufactured-Mobile Home Communities

Issue: According to the Manufactured Housing Institute, more than 20 million residents nationwide live in manufactured housing, also commonly referred to as mobile homes. As affordable housing needs continue to grow, manufactured-mobile homes provide a comparatively affordable housing option and are often located in land-lease communities ("manufactured-mobile home parks"), where residents own their homes but lease the land on which they are located. In recent years, increased acquisition of these communities by private investors has raised concerns regarding park closures and significant increases in lot rents, which can place residents, particularly low-income households, at risk of displacement.

During the 2026 Legislative Session, the Legislature enacted Chapter 2026-173, Laws of Florida (SB 594), which expanded the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program to provide additional assistance for manufactured-mobile homeowners. Among other provisions, the legislation requires local governments to include strategies in their Local Housing Assistance Plans to address households affected by mobile home park closures and provide lot rental assistance to eligible mobile home owners. The legislation also removed the previous statutory limitation on the amount of SHIP funding that could be used for manufactured housing. These changes provide additional tools for local governments to assist manufactured-mobile homeowners facing housing instability.

Building upon these efforts, additional opportunities exist to strengthen protections for residents when a manufactured-mobile home park is sold. Chapter 723, Florida Statutes, currently provides certain purchase protections when a park owner offers the property for sale, including notice and an opportunity for an eligible homeowners' association to purchase the park. This proposed priority seeks to strengthen existing protections by extending notice to individual homeowners and providing residents with an opportunity to pursue ownership when a park owner considers an unsolicited offer, helping preserve manufactured-mobile home communities as a source of affordable housing.

Action: Support legislation to expand the notice and first right of refusal requirements for the sale of manufactured-mobile home parks to include unsolicited offers by a third party so that property owners have an opportunity to counter the purchase offer and remain in their homes.

Public Records Exemption for Election Workers

Issue: Since 2021, the Board has supported a request from the Leon County Supervisor of Elections in support of legislation establishing new exemptions from Florida's public records laws for elections personnel. The proposal, which has also been advanced by the Florida Supervisors of Elections, is intended to provide additional protections in response to threats and security concerns involving election personnel.

Florida law currently provides public records protections for specified personal information of Supervisors of Elections; however, comparable protections do not extend to all elections office employees and poll workers. Specifically, the proposal seeks to amend Section 119.071(4)(d)2, Florida Statutes, to exempt personally identifying information (home addresses, phone numbers, and dates of birth) of current and former employees of county supervisor of election offices and poll workers, as well as their spouses and children. The Board has supported this policy proposal during the past four legislative sessions, and the Supervisor of Elections Office is requesting the Board's continued support for this issue in the 2027 Session.

Action: Support a revision to Sec. 119.071(4)(d)2, F.S., to exempt personally identifying information of elections personnel from public records requests.

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PROPOSED POLICY REQUESTS
120th UNITED STATES CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Each year, the County's legislative team evaluates emerging federal policy, funding, and regulatory issues affecting County programs and services to identify potential legislative priorities for the Board's consideration. Given the national scope of federal policymaking, many substantive issues affecting counties are advanced collectively through the County's participation in the National Association of Counties (NACo), which advocates on behalf of county governments before Congress and federal agencies. The County also works closely with The Southern Group on select federal policy issues that have been identified as Leon County priorities by the Board.

The proposed policy priorities for the first session of the 120th Congress are as follows:

- Support NACo's federal legislative program unless specific issues conflict with Leon County's interests.
- Support comprehensive federal standards to address PFAS contamination and, should existing standards for certain PFAS be rescinded, support EPA's continued evaluation and appropriate regulation of these substances.
- Support efforts to facilitate the restoration of passenger rail service in the Gulf Coast region.
- Support federal legislation related to the decriminalization of marijuana at the federal level, including the descheduling of marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act.
- Coordinate and engage with the County's federal delegation and lobbying team in evaluating future opportunities to acquire eligible, non-conservation, federal lands for the provision of affordable housing and public services.
- Support the City of Tallahassee's application for a Foreign Trade Zone at the Tallahassee International Airport.

The following provides a summary of each proposed priority, including a brief overview of the issue and the specific legislative action recommended for Board approval. The Board may add, remove, or amend the proposed priorities as deemed appropriate.

National Association of Counties (NACo) Issues

Issue: The National Association of Counties (NACo) advocates with a collective voice on behalf of America's 3,069 county governments. Its membership includes urban, suburban, and rural counties. NACo's advocacy efforts are guided by a policy platform and single-subject policy resolutions adopted at each annual conference by policy committees and the full membership. Each year, most of the County's substantive federal priorities align with NACo's policy platform. For the first session of the 120th Congress, NACo will be advocating for or against a variety of substantive federal issues on behalf of all counties across the nation including infrastructure funding, health care and mental health reform, economic and workforce development, development of broadband technology and infrastructure, disaster relief and resilience, and more. NACo's current federal policy priorities are included as Attachment #1 to this workshop item.

Action: Support NACo's federal legislative program unless specific issues conflict with Leon County's interests.

Comprehensive Standards to Address PFAS Contamination

Issue: Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), commonly referred to as "forever chemicals", are a broad group of synthetic chemicals that have been widely used in consumer and industrial products. As PFAS break down very slowly, these chemicals can persist and accumulate in the environment, including in water and soil, as well as the human body. In 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established the first enforceable federal drinking water standards for six PFAS including PFOA and PFOS, two of the most widely studied PFAS compounds. Specifically, the rule established Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) of 4.0 parts per trillion for PFOA and PFOS.

In May 2026, the EPA proposed two rules that would modify these requirements. The first would rescind the existing standards for the four other PFAS substances (PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA, and the Hazard Index requirement for mixtures containing these PFAS and PFBS), while the second would maintain the existing limits for PFOA and PFOS at 4.0 parts per trillion but allow eligible water systems up to two additional years, through 2031, to achieve compliance. Both proposals remain pending following the close of the public comment period in July 2026; therefore, the existing 2024 federal standards remain in effect while the rulemaking process continues.

As reflected in The Southern Group's September 2026 "Federal PFAS Drinking Water Regulatory Update" (Attachment #2), the EPA has indicated that it intends to continue evaluating these substances for future regulation and has not ruled out establishing more stringent standards as an eventual outcome of its efforts. Accordingly, this federal legislative priority seeks to support the continuation of comprehensive federal standards to address PFAS contamination. Should EPA rescind existing standards for certain PFAS, the County will support the continued federal evaluation and appropriate regulation of these substances as EPA completes its ongoing rulemaking and scientific review. Maintaining a comprehensive federal framework will provide consistent standards for addressing PFAS contamination while reducing the potential for varying regulatory requirements among states.

Action: Support comprehensive federal standards to address PFAS contamination and, should existing standards for certain PFAS be rescinded, support EPA's continued evaluation and appropriate regulation of these substances.

Amtrak Passenger Rail Restoration

Issue: Amtrak's Sunset Limited passenger rail service for the Gulf Coast Region, between New Orleans and Jacksonville through Leon County, was suspended following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Since that time, Leon County has engaged the local legislative delegation, FDOT, and federal and state partners to advocate for the resumption of passenger rail service along the Gulf Coast route. In July 2017, the Gulf Coast Rail Service Working Group, established by Congress to evaluate the restoration of the Gulf

Coast rail service route, presented its final report identifying sustained financial support for capital improvement needs and projected operating losses as a key challenge to service restoration. The final report identified short-term and long-term phase projects and federal funding opportunities to support restoration efforts including the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program, and the Restoration and Enhancement Grants (REG) Program.

In recent years, state and local governments in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama have been successful in securing grants through CRISI and REG to address key infrastructure needs and to support operations of passenger rail service between New Orleans, Louisiana and Mobile, Alabama. In 1982, these three states formed an interstate rail compact now known as the SRC for the purpose of supporting rail service. The SRC allows for membership by contiguous states; however, Florida has not elected to join. Working with local, state, and federal governments, the SRC has secured funds to resume twice-daily passenger rail service between New Orleans and Mobile. Restored rail service within this segment along the Gulf Coast, named Amtrak's "Mardi Gras Service", was officially opened in August 2025 with two trains daily between New Orleans and Mobile, with stops in Bay St. Louis, Gulfport, Biloxi, and Pascagoula, Mississippi. Staff will continue to advocate for the restoration of passenger rail service along the full Gulf Coast route.

Action: Support efforts to facilitate the restoration of passenger rail service in the Gulf Coast region.

Federal Reclassification and Decriminalization of Marijuana

Issue: Since 2020, the Board has maintained a federal legislative priority supporting the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act and similar legislation related to the decriminalization of marijuana at the federal level, including its removal from the federal Controlled Substances Act (CSA). The CSA classifies controlled substances into five schedules based on factors including accepted medical use, potential for abuse, and safety or dependence liability. Since enactment of the CSA in 1970, marijuana has been classified as a Schedule I substance, which includes substances determined to have a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use under federal law. By contrast, substances in Schedules II through V have accepted medical uses and may be dispensed by prescription under federal law.

Although several states have passed laws in recent years authorizing the use of marijuana for medical and/or recreational use, federal law continues to govern the national scheduling and control of marijuana which remains illegal and punishable under the CSA. The placement, reclassification, or removal of a substance under the CSA can only be effectuated through either legislation or an administrative rulemaking process overseen by the Attorney General and administered through the Department of Justice (DOJ). In 2022, the U.S. House passed the MORE Act (H.R. 3617) which sought to deschedule marijuana under the CSA, and to effectively eliminate criminal penalties for the manufacturing, distribution, or possession of marijuana, among other provisions. The MORE Act, as well as other legislation introduced in recent years to deschedule and/or decriminalize marijuana, however, have failed to advance through both chambers of Congress.

In December 2025, President Trump issued an Executive Order directing the U.S. Attorney General to expedite the rescheduling of marijuana to Schedule III under the CSA. Subsequently, on April 23, 2026, the DOJ issued a final order reclassifying FDA-approved medical marijuana products to Schedule III of the CSA. On the same day, the DOJ also initiated an expedited administrative hearing process to consider the broader reclassification of marijuana to Schedule III. Formal hearings were conducted from June 29 through July 15, 2026; however, a final rule broadly reclassifying marijuana has not yet been issued. Accordingly, the County's legislative team will continue to monitor the federal rulemaking process and related legislation and provide updates to the Board as appropriate.

Action: Support federal legislation related to the decriminalization of marijuana at the federal level, including the descheduling of marijuana from the Controlled Substances Act.

Federal Lands for Affordable Housing and Public Services

Issue: The federal government owns 99 parcels within Leon County totaling nearly 106,000 acres of land; which includes a portion of the Apalachicola National Forest, post offices, federal agency offices, Federal Correctional Institution-Tallahassee, and a U.S. Navy Reserve Station. Recognizing that the federal government owns a substantial amount of land within the County, the Board adopted the following Strategic Initiative during its January 2024 Board Retreat:

Evaluate future opportunities to acquire eligible, non-conservation, federal lands for the provision of affordable housing and public services. (2024-84)

The disposal of federal real property is governed by the Federal Management Regulation (Title 41, Section 102, Code of Federal Regulations, referred to as “FMR” under this section) and administered by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). Federal agencies are required to periodically evaluate their properties and identify those that are underutilized or no longer needed. Once a property is determined to be excess, it is first made available to other federal agencies. If no federal need exists, the property may be declared surplus and, where eligible, made available to state and local governments or nonprofit organizations through a public benefit conveyance. Certain federally reserved lands, including National Forest lands, generally require Congressional authorization before they may be disposed of. In support of the County’s Strategic Initiative (2024-84), the County’s legislative team will continue to engage with the County’s federal delegation to identify and pursue opportunities to acquire eligible, non-conservation, federal lands for the provision of affordable housing and public services.

Action: Coordinate and engage with the County’s federal delegation and lobbying team in evaluating future opportunities to acquire eligible, non-conservation, federal lands for the provision of affordable housing and public services.

Foreign Trade Zone Application

Issue: In 1934, the United States created the U.S. Foreign-Trade Zone (FTZ) Program to improve the competitiveness of U.S. companies engaged in international trade. An FTZ is a federally designated area where businesses can import, store, manufacture, or process foreign goods with certain customs benefits. Depending on the type of business activity and federal authorization granted, benefits may include duty exemptions or deferrals, reduced duties on certain finished products, and reduced merchandise processing fees. By allowing businesses to defer, reduce, or eliminate certain customs duties, FTZs can lower operating costs and make U.S. locations more competitive for manufacturing, distribution, and other international trade activities.

There are currently nearly 300 active FTZs nationwide, with over 20 located in Florida. However, the Tallahassee-Leon County area is not directly served by an existing FTZ, creating a service gap between Panama City and Jacksonville. In 2014, the Tallahassee City Commission authorized staff to pursue the creation of an FTZ at the Tallahassee International Airport, which would provide local and regional businesses access to these federal customs benefits while strengthening the area's ability to attract and retain companies engaged in international trade, manufacturing, and distribution. Over the past decade, the City has coordinated with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to complete the prerequisite steps necessary to establish the FTZ. In November 2023, at the Board's direction, Leon County provided a letter supporting the City's application. The City's formal application was subsequently submitted to the Foreign-Trade Zone Board and is now pending approval. The City anticipates its FTZ application will be approved concurrent with the completion of the International Processing Facility by the end of the year. Once completed, the FTZ is projected to generate over 1,660 jobs and an annual economic impact of $304 million by 2034.

Action: Support the City of Tallahassee's application for a Foreign Trade Zone at the Tallahassee International Airport.

Options:

1. Approve the 2027 state and federal legislative priorities.
2. Provide any additional direction on the County's state and federal legislative priorities.
3. Do not approve the 2027 state and federal legislative priorities.
4. Board direction.

Recommendation:

Options #1 and #2

Attachments:

1. NACo Federal Policy Priorities
2. The Southern Group's September 2026 Federal PFAS Drinking Water Regulatory Update

2026 NACo

Federal Policy Priorities

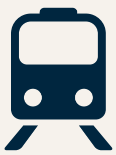
America's 3,069 county governments provide essential building blocks for healthy, safe and vibrant communities.

Counties represent a foundational layer of American government. With 3,069 counties across the nation, nearly 40,000 elected officials and a workforce of more than 3.6 million, counties are on the frontlines delivering essential public services – from infrastructure and public safety to health, housing, elections and disaster response. Because counties implement numerous federal programs and enforce various regulations, NACo urges meaningful intergovernmental consultation throughout the federal policymaking process.

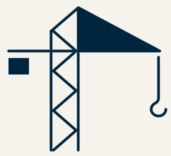
NACo stands ready as a nonpartisan, practical, data-driven partner for Congress, the Administration and federal agencies. We are committed to collaborating — offering technical assistance, sharing best practices and working to ensure that federal policy is grounded in local reality, responsive to community needs and effective for America's counties.

NACo policy positions are debated and voted on by 10 policy steering committees comprising more than 1,400 county officials, along with the NACo Board of Directors and full membership.

Counties own and operate **44 percent** of America's roads and **38 percent** of bridges



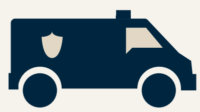
40 percent of public transit agencies are supported by counties



Counties invest **more than $146 billion** in infrastructure and maintaining and operating public works

Sixty-two percent of counties have federal public land

Counties support and operate more than **900 hospitals,** over **700 long-term care facilities, 750 behavioral health centers** and more than ***1,900*** public health departments



County governments operate **91 percent** of our nation's local jails

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Strengthen the Intergovernmental Partnership

Effective governance in the United States rests on collaboration among federal, state, local and tribal governments. County governments, led by our elected and appointed officials, are instrumental partners in our nation's intergovernmental system, which balances, divides and shares power and responsibilities between all levels of government.

While counties are uniquely positioned to implement and administer vital intergovernmental systems, county input is often missing or delayed in the federal policymaking process. This leads to policies that create unfunded mandates, regulatory burdens, or unintended consequences for local communities.

Counties call for formalized, consistent inclusion of local governments in the design, rulemaking and implementation phases of federal policies and initiatives. This means ensuring county officials are consulted before finalizing legislation or regulations that affect public infrastructure, social services, environmental policy, or public safety.

By elevating county perspectives early — the frontline implementers — the federal government can foster more effective and efficient policy outcomes to achieve our shared priorities. Strengthening intergovernmental partnership improves coordination, avoids duplication, reduces costs and ultimately delivers better results for our shared communities.

Counties invest **more than $146 billion annually** in building, maintaining and operating physical infrastructure and public works, including **transportation, water systems, ports, dams, hospitals, schools, libraries and courthouses.**

Multi-Year Surface Transportation Reauthorization with Direct County Investments

Counties own and maintain a significant portion of our nation's transportation infrastructure—including 44 percent of public road miles and 38 percent of bridges—and are integral to local transit, rural connectivity, aviation and the movement of freight. As the Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) approaches its expiration, Congress is working to pass a reauthorization bill that will determine new funding levels, make policy changes and set the new course for federal transportation policy.

Counties urge Congress to pass a bipartisan, multi-year reauthorization bill that recognizes the crucial role that counties play in our transportation system by significantly increasing local access to formula funds, maintaining and improving discretionary grant opportunities, strengthening planning and project delivery—especially for rural counties—and streamlining permitting requirements to move projects faster and cheaper. Including these priorities in the next bill will not just support counties, but improve safety, mobility and economic development nationwide.

Counties are directly involved in
34 percent
of airports

Counties own
38 percent
of the National Bridge Inventory

Counties are directly involved in
40 percent
of all public transportation systems

Counties own and operate
44 percent
of all public roads

Bipartisan Farm Bill: Supporting Rural Development, Forest and Agricultural Lands, and Food and Energy Security

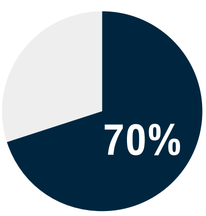
Nearly 70 percent of the nation's 3,069 counties are rural, home to 38.2 million Americans and covering over two-thirds of the country's land mass. For many of these communities, the Farm Bill remains a cornerstone of local economic development, land stewardship, infrastructure investment and nutrition access.

Farm Bill programs support 1.9 million farms across the U.S., helping to sustain agricultural production, preserve family farms and protect working lands. These investments also drive job creation and support county-led efforts to expand infrastructure, steward natural resources and boost rural economies.

The Farm Bill's nutrition title authorizes key programs that help county residents access healthy, affordable food. Counties administer the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 10 states, representing more than one-third of total participants. In nine of the ten county-administered states, counties are responsible for either partially or entirely covering the non-federal share of administrative costs, which was increased under H.R. 1. As counties work to improve payment error rates, we urge our federal partners to delay the implementation of benefit and administrative cost shifts enacted under H.R. 1 to provide counties with sufficient time to streamline and improve SNAP administration.

With programs in the 2018 Farm Bill set to begin expiring on Sept. 30, 2026, counties are encouraged to connect with lawmakers now to ensure passage of a five-year, bipartisan Farm Bill that expands conservation and agriculture programs, invests in rural development, supports access to healthy and affordable foods and protects working lands for future generations.

Counties are responsible for administering the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** in ten states representing **35.7 percent** of total participants (15 million people)



Nearly **70 percent of the nation's 3,069 counties** are rural, home to 38.5 million Americans and covering over two-thirds of the nation's land mass

Disaster Mitigation, Response and Recovery: Modernizing Federal Disaster Policy

Disasters — from wildfires and floods to hurricanes and extreme weather — are increasing in frequency and severity. Counties are typically the first to respond, coordinate evacuations, provide emergency services, manage shelters, clean-up, rebuild and support long-term recovery. Yet current federal disaster systems often are slow, unpredictable and administratively burdensome — leaving counties to absorb costs and delays when local budgets and services are already stretched.

NACo urges Congress to enact legislation that would streamline disaster recovery, increase transparency and efficiency and make federal assistance more accessible to the communities we serve. Specifically, counties support a universal disaster application, transitioning from a reimbursement-based model to a grant-based model for FEMA Public Assistance, a Public Assistance dashboard to increase transparency and modernizing FEMA's mitigation programs.

Additionally, counties call on Congress to pass long-term reauthorization and reform legislation for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to improve affordability, mitigation assistance, flood risk mapping and program administration. The NFIP reduces the impact of flooding on public and private structures by providing affordable insurance and encouraging communities to adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations.

Furthermore, counties support increased funding for the Emergency Management Grant Program and other mitigation grants to strengthen local hazard mitigation and preparedness efforts.

More than **483,000 county workers** provide essential first responder services through sheriffs, police departments, constables, 911 operations, firefighters and EMT/ EMS professionals.

In 2025, **680 counties** experienced at least one federally declared disaster

588 counties had at least one major disaster declaration

345 counties had at least one emergency declaration

Source: NACo Analysis of the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Disaster Incident data as of January 2026

Note: Counties may have received both major disaster and emergency declarations and are counted only once in the total (680). Counts are based on currently available federal data and may increase as declarations and reporting are updated.

Flexible Federal Investments in Health, Human Services, Housing and Economic Development

Counties play a vital role in fostering economic growth, supporting labor market stability and building resilient communities. To continue meeting evolving needs — from aging populations to housing shortages— counties require predictable federal funding combined with local flexibility.

Federal investments in the Economic Development Administration (EDA) are critical to support local economies through infrastructure development, workforce initiatives and public-private partnerships. As new labor challenges emerge, counties are vital frontline partners to their federal and state peers in modernizing resources for job seekers and employers alike. Investment in and reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) supports local workforce capacity-building as communities face growing service demands.

Meanwhile, counties urge increased funding for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), which supports local housing and community development ecosystems and expands economic opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents. The program's strength lies in its flexibility—direct-to-county payments and a versatile list of allowable uses empower counties to identify community needs and tailor solutions to meet them.

Counties are also critical partners in delivering human services, advocating for expanded federal resources to combat poverty, strengthen families and support vulnerable populations. This includes increasing investments in child care, addressing the phase-in of the Child Tax Credit and improving child welfare programs.

Counties call for reauthorizing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to preserve flexibility while enhancing support for family self-sufficiency. We remain committed to working with Congress and federal agencies to ensure policies promote vibrant communities, economic stability for all residents and local flexibility with accountability.

Counties invest **$17.7 billion** annually in the construction, operation and support of housing and redevelopment projects

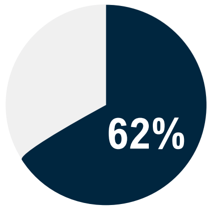
The 11 states with a county role in the child welfare system represented **33.8 percent** of the population of children served in formal foster care in 2022

Counties collectively invest more than **$121 billion** annually to support the public education system

Fully Fund the Payments in Lieu of Taxes Program & Reauthorize Secure Rural Schools

Counties with large amounts of federally owned, non-taxable lands face structural revenue challenges – we provide critical services, maintain infrastructure and support residents – but cannot tax federal lands. The **Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)** program and the **Secure Rural Schools (SRS)** program were created to compensate for this lost tax base and ensure counties can support essential services like schools, roads, emergency response and public safety.

In FY 2026 and beyond, NACo calls for **full, mandatory funding for PILT.** Without predictable mandatory funding, PILT will remain a discretionary program subject to the annual appropriations process, which results in reduced budget certainty for these counties. Beyond mandatory funding, counties also support modifying the program to ensure those with smaller population receive adequate PILT payments to meet community needs.



Sixty-two percent of counties have federal land within their boundaries, and unlike other local property owners, the federal government does not pay traditional property taxes

Counties also support a **long-term reauthorization of SRS,** ensuring predictable, stable support for timber-dependent counties for timber-dependent counties that rely on these funds to maintain essential services and transition towards long-term fiscal stability. This stability allows counties to budget, plan infrastructure, support schools, maintain roads and ensure public services are delivered reliably to both residents and visitors alike.

Long-term commitment for both PILT and SRS is not just fiscal support — it recognizes the ongoing burden and responsibility counties assume in managing federal lands' impacts on local communities.

Governor Mark Gordon (Wyo.) speaks at NACo's PILT Fly-in

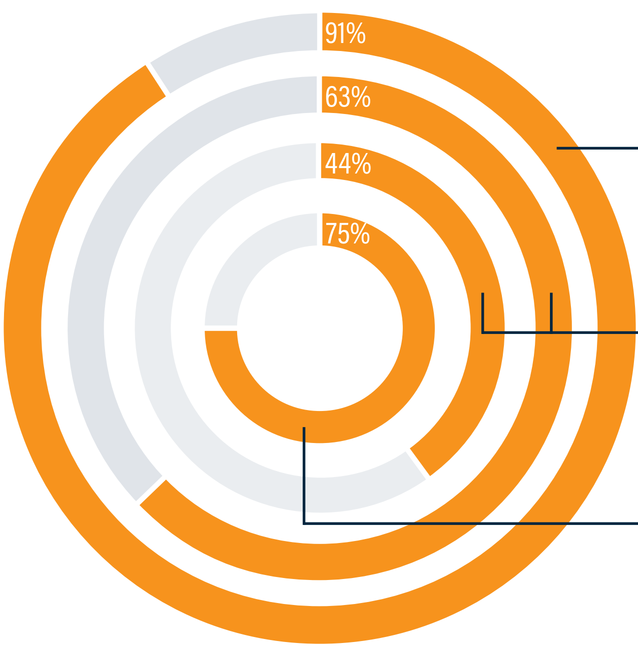
Behavioral Health, Homelessness and Criminal Justice Reform

Counties invest billions annually to improve health outcomes for residents, leveraging key federal programs such as the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant and the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment and Recovery Block Grant. These programs fund essential services, including housing assistance, case management, school-based supports and peer services, helping counties address the ongoing mental health crisis. To sustain our impact, Congress must fully fund these programs.

The federal–state–local Medicaid partnership is essential to strengthening care systems nationwide. As states implement provisions under H.R. 1, NACo urges our federal partners to work closely with county leaders to ensure new federal requirements are incorporated into state and county systems that can reliably support beneficiaries and uphold program integrity.

Counties must be empowered to design behavioral health and reentry services tailored to local needs, with adequate federal resources to support prevention, early intervention and reduced recidivism without to burden of unfunded mandates. Federal policies should remove barriers to local innovation by providing flexible funding, reducing unnecessary compliance burdens, promoting integrated, community-based approaches and advancing affordability measures that help residents maintain coverage and reduce strain on local health systems.

Counties call for federal policies that remove barriers to local innovation and cross-sector collaboration by offering flexible funding, eliminating overly rigid compliance requirements and promoting integrated, community-based approaches. Federal support should provide adequate resources, encourage prevention and early intervention and help reduce recidivism and unmet health needs — all without burdening counties with unfunded mandates.



Counties operate **91 percent** of all the nation's local jails

Approximately **63 percent** of jail inmates are people with substance use disorder and **44 percent** of jail inmates suffer from a mental illness

Counties invest more than **$130 billion annually** in community health systems that serve approximately **75 percent of the U.S. population**

Preserve and Strengthen Local Authority in Land Use, Environmental Stewardship and Infrastructure Development

Local control over land use, zoning, environmental stewardship and infrastructure planning is a bedrock principle of local governance and accountability. Counties support federal policies that balance environmental protection, public health, safety and local economic needs. As both regulators and regulated entities, counties are responsible for protecting local air, water and land resources under delegated authority from state and federal laws. Federal regulations and guidelines are most effective when they are clear, understandable and easily administered at the local level.

Counties advocate for federal policies that formally include counties as cooperating agencies in land-use decisions, environmental reviews and permitting processes, such as under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Meaningful consultation, partnership and deference to local input ensure that infrastructure investments and environmental protections reflect community values, priorities and long-term local planning goals.

As the U.S. Departments of Interior, Transportation and Energy, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies develop future regulations, Counties support meaningful consultation with county governments early in the rulemaking process, and federal investments should be implemented more quickly by reforming the permitting process. Early engagement helps prevent unfunded mandates and other unintended consequences that could arise from implementing federal policies. Additionally, Counties support increased federal funding and flexibility to counties to ensure the successful implementation of future regulations.

Counties invest more than **$146 billion annually** to build and maintain America's water and wastewater infrastructure

Counties invest more than **$26 billion** in sewage and solid waste management annually

Counties play an important role in supporting and maintaining public infrastructure, owning and maintaining roughly **45 percent of public road miles** and **38 percent of bridges,** and in some communities supporting drinking water and wastewater systems, often alongside state, municipal and special district partners

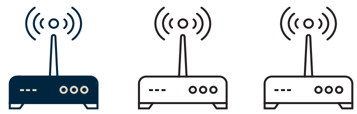
Scan to view
NACo's PFAS Hub

County leaders gather for NACo's 90th Annual Conference & Expo in the city and county of Philadelphia, Pa.

County Technology, AI, Broadband, Cybersecurity, Energy and Infrastructure Readiness

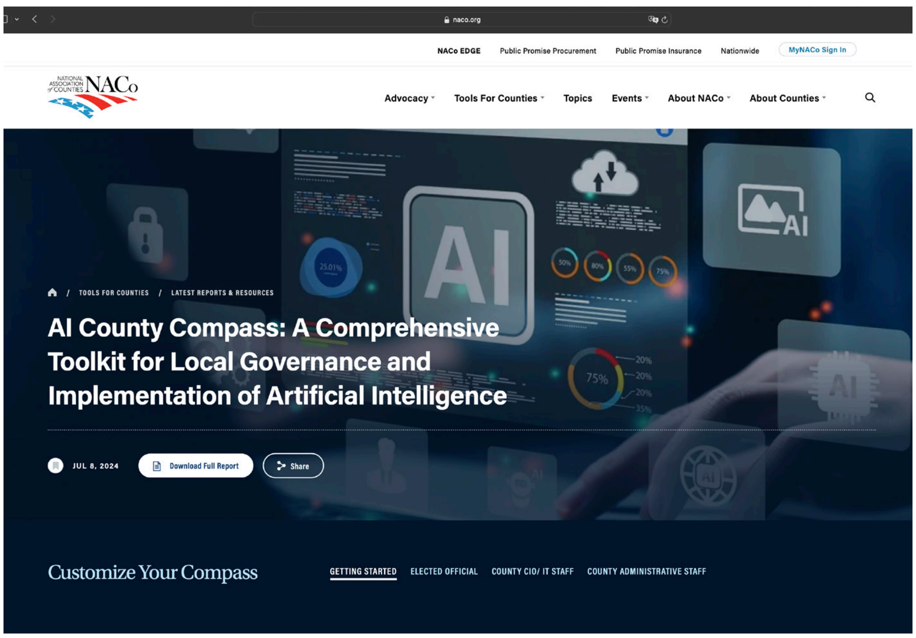
In a rapidly evolving technological landscape, counties must be prepared — not just to deliver traditional public services, but to lead on broadband deployment, cybersecurity, AI governance, energy infrastructure and digital equity. Counties are critical to ensuring that remote, rural and underserved communities have access to modern infrastructure and services.

NACo supports federal investment and partnerships that help counties build technology capacity — from expanding broadband, strengthening cybersecurity of local government systems, supporting energy resilience and providing AI governance frameworks, to workforce development in high-tech and infrastructure sectors. These investments will preserve local decision-making while positioning communities for competitiveness, resilience and innovation.



More than **a third of U.S. households** have access to only one internet service provider or lack access altogether

Approximately **53 percent of U.S. households** subscribe to broadband at or above the FCC's accepted minimum definition of high-speed internet, 100 Mbps download and 20 Mbps upload



Scan the QR code to read **NACo's AI County Compass,** a comprehensive guide to artificial intelligence for counties.

Election Integrity and Strengthening County Election Administration Capacity

Counties administer the vast majority of U.S. elections, including voter registration, poll operations, mail-balloting systems, ballot tabulation and certification of results. The integrity of American democracy depends substantially on county election administrators' capacity.

In 2026, Counties urge federal investment in county election infrastructure, support the recruitment and training of election workers and encourage the modernization of systems — including equipment, cybersecurity and accessibility for voters. By strengthening county election administration capacity, Congress can help ensure secure, efficient and accessible elections, preserve public confidence and uphold democratic values.

More than **200 million people** typically register and are eligible to vote in jurisdictions where counties play a significant role in election administration

Counties administer elections through the funding and management of over **100,000 polling places staffed with over 630,000 poll workers** each election cycle

Election oversight is primarily the responsibility of county governments in **36 states**

The Maricopa County Recorder's Office explains to federal partners about the county role in the election administration process and how the county runs safe and secure elections.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION of COUNTIES NACo

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TSG ADVOCATES

From: TSG Advocates
To: Nicki Hatch, Leon County
Re: Federal PFAS Drinking Water Regulatory Update
Date: September 14, 2026

Overview

On May 18, 2026, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced two related proposed rules affecting the 2024 PFAS National Primary Drinking Water Regulation (NPDWR). The first would rescind the regulatory determinations and enforceable limits for four PFAS substances. The second would keep the existing PFOA and PFOS limits while allowing eligible water systems additional time to comply. These proposals indicate that EPA's near-term compliance focus will center on PFOA and PFOS. At the same time, EPA deferred regulation of the other four substances for possible future action rather than restricting it entirely.

EPA has since held a public webinar/hearing on both proposed rules, releasing additional background materials, the cost-benefit analysis underlying the rescission rule, and details on complementary funding and technical assistance programs.

Key Provisions

Proposed PFAS Rescission Rule

The proposed rule would rescind the 2024 regulatory determinations and Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCLs) for:

- PFHxS (perfluorohexane sulfonic acid)
- PFNA (perfluorononanoic acid)
- HFPO-DA, commonly known as GenX chemicals
- The Hazard Index mixture of these three PFAS plus perfluorobutane sulfonic acid (PFBS)

EPA frames the rule as a procedural correction, asserting that the prior administration finalized these determinations and standards without following the ordered notice-and-comment process required under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Notably, EPA has indicated it intends to evaluate these same substances for future regulation once the rescission is finalized and has not ruled out stricter standards as a possible outcome.

EPA Cost-Benefit Estimates for the Rescission Rule

- Quantified Total Expected Annualized Cost Savings: $11.6M (3% discount rate) / $11.4M (7% discount rate), in millions of 2022 dollars.
- Quantified Total Expected Annualized Forgone Benefits: $6.1M (3% discount rate) / $4.1M (7% discount rate).
- Cost savings reflect reduced compliance costs from relieving regulated entities of monitoring, treatment, and reporting obligations specific to the rescinded regulations, with potential for an additional $82.4 million per year in savings under a sensitivity analysis addressing further treatment of PFNA, HFPO-DA, and PFBS.
- Forgone benefits represent benefits that would be lost from reduced co-removal of PFOA and PFOS at systems also required to treat for PFHxS.

Proposed PFOA/PFOS Compliance Extension Rule

The companion proposal would maintain the existing PFOA and PFOS MCLs at 4.0 parts per trillion (ppt) while creating a federal exemption framework that allows eligible water systems to request up to two additional years (through April 2031) to reach compliance. Key parts include:

- Eligibility requires demonstrated implementation of barriers, such as insufficient treatment capacity, financing, or infrastructure.
- Systems with PFOA or PFOS levels at or above 12 ppt must implement interim mitigation measures during any extension period.
- Monitoring, reporting, and Consumer Confidence Report obligations remain on the original 2024

NPDWR schedule regardless of any extension granted.

- Systems receiving an extension must notify the communities they serve of the exemption and their progress toward compliance.
- Affected systems need additional time to assess contamination levels, design and construct treatment infrastructure, and secure financing before full compliance is achievable.

Support from Water Utilities and Industry

- Water utilities and municipal associations are likely to welcome the PFOA/PFOS compliance extension, which provides additional time and flexibility without altering the underlying 4.0 ppt standard.
- Affected manufacturers and chemical industry groups may support the rescission rule, viewing the 2024 determinations for the four additional PFAS as having been adopted without adequate procedural review.
- State and local governments facing significant infrastructure and financing constraints may view the exemption framework as practical accommodation, particularly for small and rural systems.

Additional EPA Actions on PFAS

- Funding: $1 billion for the Emerging Contaminants in Small and Disadvantaged Communities Grant program ($5 billion committed over the last five years); $4 billion dedicated to emerging contaminants and PFAS through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF); $6.5 billion available through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA).
- Technical assistance: PFAS OUT program (EPA proactively reaching out to water systems with known PFOA/PFOS challenges); RealWaterTA (direct technical assistance, including identifying infrastructure solutions and funding); updated PFAS Interim Destruction and Disposal Guidance.
- EPA is proposing to list PFAS as a chemical group under the Draft Sixth Contaminant Candidate List (CCL 6).
- EPA is advancing technology-based effluent limitations and pretreatment standards for industrial categories (e.g., chemical manufacturers) that discharge PFAS, to keep PFAS out of waterways before they reach drinking water sources.
- EPA is using its Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) authority to subject new and existing chemicals to more robust scientific review before they enter commerce.

Roadblocks to Implementation

Litigation Risk

The rescission rule is the more legally exposed of the two proposals, as it would remove elements of the EPA's own 2024 final rule. Environmental organizations are likely to challenge the rule on substantive and procedural grounds, which could delay or complicate finalization and implementation of timelines.

Federal-State Inconsistency

Because the proposed rescission would lower the federal floor rather than preempt state action, states with independent PFAS standards are expected to maintain or enforce their own limits. This creates the potential for an inconsistent compliance framework, in which water systems face different obligations depending on the jurisdiction, regardless of the federal rule's outcome.

Public Comment and Process Timing

The comment period for both proposed rules closed on July 20, 2026 (Docket ID: EPA-HQ-OW-2025-0654 for the rescission rule; EPA-HQ-OW-2025-1742 for the compliance extension rule). As of early September 2026, neither rule has been finalized; EPA has indicated it intends to take final action on the rescission rule sometime in 2026.

- The existing legal challenge to the 2024 PFAS NPDWR, *American Water Works Association v.*

EPA (D.C. Circuit, No. 24-1188), has oral argument scheduled for September 18, 2026.

- In that case, EPA has formally moved for partial vacatur of the Hazard Index PFAS provisions (PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA, and the PFBS mixture) — pursuing removal of those standards through litigation in parallel with the rescission rulemaking.
- On August 18, 2026, a separate D.C. Circuit panel (*Chamber of Commerce v. EPA*) upheld EPA's CERCLA hazardous-substance designation for PFOA/PFOS. Respondent-intervenors defending the 2024 drinking water rule have cited that ruling as supplemental authority on notice-and-comment and cost-benefit questions, though its relevance to the SDWA-specific claims in the AWWA case is contested.

Outlook & Conclusion

The July 7, 2026 public hearing has concluded, and the comment period for both proposed rules closed July 20, 2026. EPA intends to act on the rescission rule sometime in 2026, though no timeline is confirmed.

In the existing challenge to the 2024 PFAS NPDWR, *American Water Works Association v. EPA* (D.C. Circuit, No. 24-1188), EPA has moved for partial vacatur of the Hazard Index PFAS provisions (PFHxS, PFNA, HFPO-DA, and the PFBS mixture), pursuing their removal through litigation alongside the rulemaking. The court denied summary vacatur and will address all challenged provisions at oral argument on September 18, 2026, regardless of the rulemaking's status. Intervenors defending the 2024 rule have cited a related August 18th ruling upholding EPA's CERCLA hazardous-substance designation for PFOA/PFOS, though its relevance here is contested. EPA's reservation of authority to revisit these PFAS later, potentially with stricter standards, still suggests this is a recalibration rather than a permanent rollback.

In the near term, all provisions of the 2024 NPDWR remain legally in effect. Systems with PFOA or PFOS at or above 12 ppt must continue interim mitigation and notification, and all systems remain on the original monitoring and reporting timelines. September 18th is the oral argument and the next concrete milestone to watch. TSG Advocates will continue monitoring and provide updates as developments occur.