SAFETY, HEALTH, AND JUSTICE

Health, safety, and justice are fundamental responsibilities shared by Florida's state and local governments, and counties carry much of that work on the front lines. County governments sustain public health and human services, coordinate emergency responses, operate emergency communication centers/dispatch and jails, and help residents recover after crises. The Florida Association of Counties (FAC) recognizes that these responsibilities differ across communities and require policies that respect local authority, account for rural and urban needs, and provide stable resources. Strong outcomes depend on genuine partnership among state, federal, and local governments. FAC firmly supports policies that give counties the flexibility, funding, and tools necessary to protect residents and opposes unfunded mandates or state and federal cost shifts that leave counties to carry out responsibilities without adequate resources.

SAFETY

A. Emergency Services and Communications: Counties plan, coordinate, and deliver countywide emergency services, including emergency medical services, fire rescue, emergency communications, and 911 systems. These systems protect residents daily and during disasters, public health threats, and other crises, and their reliability depends on unified county authority and stable funding. FAC firmly supports policies and funding that preserve county authority and provide reliable resources, modern and interoperable infrastructure, interoperable communications, and flexibility to maintain coordinated public safety systems. State policy must strengthen coordination among agencies without limiting counties' ability to respond to local conditions.

B. Emergency Management: Disasters are locally executed, state managed, and federally supported. Counties lead local preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts before, during, and after disasters. Strong state-county coordination and trained local personnel who can act quickly as conditions change are essential to preparedness, response, recovery, and long-term resilience. FAC demands robust, well-resourced local emergency management programs and supports predictable funding, timely access to resources, regulatory flexibility, and policies that strengthen county emergency management capacity.

HEALTH

A. County Health Systems and Local Authority: County health departments (CHDs) are central to Florida's public health system, particularly in communities where other providers are limited. Counties partner with CHDs to support public health services, respond to local needs, and maintain access to primary care where adequate alternatives do not exist. FAC is firmly committed to preserving and strengthening counties'

partnerships with CHDs, and supports policies and funding that maintain the ability of CHDs to provide primary care and direct patient services in communities that need them.

B. Public Health Emergencies: Public health emergencies require clear, consistent state guidance that respects local decision-making, avoids conflicting requirements, and preserves the balance established by the 2021 emergency powers reforms. Counties also need legal authority and operational capacity to identify and respond to emerging public health challenges. Because conditions vary across the state, the policies adopted in large urban counties may differ from those adopted in small rural counties, and state guidance should account for those differences. FAC supports policies that preserve county authority, provide clear state guidance, and give counties the tools needed to respond effectively to public health emergencies.

C. Behavioral Health, Diversion, and Local Flexibility: Rural and urban counties face different health and human service needs, and effective state policy must give local governments the flexibility to design programs that reflect those conditions. Counties use behavioral health services, substance use treatment, supportive housing, jail and hospital diversion, and community-based programs to serve people experiencing mental illness or substance use disorders. These investments programs improve access to treatment, reduce avoidable justice-system involvement, and are more cost-effective than treating these conditions in jails or hospitals.

FAC strongly advocates for substantially increased resources to support policies and funding that expand access to behavioral health services, strengthen diversion and treatment programs, and preserve county flexibility to address mental health, substance use, and community safety needs.

HUMAN SERVICES

A. Vulnerable Residents and Supportive Services: Counties work with state and federal partners to help vulnerable residents access essential services and pathways to stability, including people experiencing homelessness, veterans, families, and children aging out of foster care. FAC supports policies and funding that help counties coordinate supportive services, strengthen local safety-net systems and address community needs without shifting responsibilities to counties without sufficient resources.

B. Safety-Net Services: Safety-net programs help vulnerable Floridians access care and services that can reduce more costly institutional, emergency, or crisis responses. Counties support community-based services, elder care, maternal and child health programs, homeless services, veterans services, transportation disadvantaged services, and other local programs that promote stability and reduce pressure on county-funded systems. FAC supports stable, recurring policies and funding for safety-net and

community-based services and opposes policies that shift health and human service costs or responsibilities to counties.

JUSTICE

A. Article V Responsibilities and Court Infrastructure: Counties provide the physical and operational foundation for Florida's trial courts, including facilities, maintenance, utilities, security, communications, and other locally assigned responsibilities. These responsibilities affect access to justice, public safety, and county budgets, and counties must be able to plan, finance, and manage them in a manner that reflects local conditions and fiscal capacity. Maintaining the functions and geographic boundaries of Florida's current judicial circuits is critical to this work and to the stability of the court-related services counties fund. FAC is firmly committed to preserving counties' ability to plan, finance and manage these responsibilities in a manner that reflects local conditions and fiscal capacity and supports policies that must maintain clear state and county funding responsibilities, preserve county authority over court-related infrastructure, preserve the functions and geographic boundaries of the current judicial circuits, and provide predictable and reliable state resources for new or expanded court-related obligations.

B. Detention and County Justice Services: Counties operate and fund detention services that protect communities and provide appropriate care and supervision for individuals in county custody. State policy decisions on housing, medical care, facility standards, detention practices, and justice-system operations can significantly affect county costs, jail capacity, and local service delivery. FAC supports policies that clearly assign state and local responsibilities, strengthen detention standards and outcomes, preserve appropriate–county and judicial discretion and justice-system costs to local taxpayers, while preserving counties' flexibility to address local needs efficiently and responsibly.

C. Diversion, Pretrial Services, and Justice-System Outcomes: Counties support local justice-system programs that can improve public safety, reduce unnecessary detention, address behavioral health and substance use needs, and promote more effective outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. These programs can reduce pressure on county jails and courts when state policy gives counties sufficient flexibility, funding, and judicial discretion. FAC supports policies and funding that strengthen diversion, pretrial services, juvenile justice, and community-based alternatives while preserving local discretion and avoiding state cost shifts to counties.

FEDERAL

A. Disaster Preparedness, Recovery, and Resilience: Florida's counties rely on strong federal partnerships to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and rebuild after disasters.

Delays in reimbursement, uncertain cost shares, complex FEMA processes, insufficient emergency management funding, and unstable property insurance markets can slow recovery and force counties to carry major costs for extended periods. FAC supports strong federal disaster, emergency management, homeland security, and resilience policies, including timely reimbursement of eligible disaster costs, the Stafford Act's local cost share, full funding for the Emergency Management Performance Grant and Urban Area Security Initiative, streamlined FEMA processes, interoperable public safety communications, long term resilience investments, and improved availability and affordability of property insurance.

B. Federal Health Benefits and Continuity of Care: Federal benefit restrictions should not leave counties responsible for the full cost of medical and behavioral health care for people who remain legally presumed innocent or otherwise eligible for coverage. FAC calls for restoring or preserving applicable federal health and veterans' benefits; addressing coverage limitations affecting inpatient mental health and substance use disorder facilities with more than 16 beds; and improving Medicaid reimbursement for behavioral health and psychiatric care. FAC also advocates for federal grants that help counties provide continuity of care, including medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder, as individuals enter and leave county jail custody. These investments reduce treatment disruptions and the heightened risk of overdose following release.

C. Immigration and Local Fiscal Responsibility: Immigration is a federal responsibility that requires clear policy, secure borders, and a workable legal process for individuals seeking to live and work in the United States, including in industries that depend heavily on immigrant labor. FAC calls for federal agencies to lead immigration administration and enforcement and for local participation to occur only with clear guidance, training, and dedicated funding. Counties should receive full federal reimbursement for costs incurred when detaining, processing, or transporting individuals at the request of federal immigration authorities. Federal enforcement should not become an unfunded local mandate.

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