



BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

2020

This guide summarizes the Kent County Board of Commissioners' 2020 state legislative priorities.

Revenue Sharing

Position: Kent County advocates for a continued restoration of the state revenue sharing commitments to the County in order to fully fund existing and new service mandates from the State.

As a local unit of government, Kent County currently receives revenue that is mandated by the state Constitution, state statute and through the state appropriations process in which funds covering the cost of certain state mandated services are allocated to the County. However, the state revenue sharing commitments to local units of government, such as Kent County, have not kept pace with the increasing costs of these services. The County has pursued innovative ways of remaining fiscally sound but it is critical that the State also continue to fulfill its historical commitments to share state revenue with the County to cover the costs of many of these services.

Community Mental Health Funding

Position: Kent County urges the Michigan Legislature to remedy the systemic and inequitable under-funding of the public mental health system in this region and to promote an efficient and effective administration of the system used to dispense the funds needed to assure that the local services are of the highest quality possible.

Over the past few years, the Lakeshore Region, in which Kent County's community mental health agency (Network 180) functions, has experienced significant operating losses in large part due to the fact that the State has provided inadequate revenues to cover the costs of the services they mandate. While the State did identify that the region should receive a 12 percent increase in revenue to cover these costs starting in Fiscal Year 2020, it has since taken half of this increase away so as to soften the impact on other regions. Consequently, Network 180 and the rest of this region is again forced to provide services at a loss. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has also recently proposed a complete restructuring of the funding system for public mental health services. Kent County urges that any such restructuring continue to be responsive to local needs and governance and promote efficient and effective systems of service.

Homestead Tax Credit for Disabled Veterans

Position: Kent County supports retaining a homestead tax exemption for disabled veterans but urges this be funded through a state Homestead Property Tax Credit on the individuals state income tax filing.

Since the State granted a property tax exemption to all disabled veterans, local units of government, such as Kent County, have forgone millions of dollars of property tax revenue annually. This has put a particular strain on local government budgets that rely heavily on property tax revenue. Shifting the cost of this program to the State by way of an income tax credit instead of a local property tax exemption will more equitably distribute the cost of this service to veterans and their families and preserve the integrity of local tax revenues.

FUNDING

Environmental Contamination Challenges

Position: Kent County advocates for increased state funding to address the significant public health risks presented by environmental contaminants such as lead and PFAS. Additional state revenues are needed to effectively address the high rates of lead poisoning in the County and the contamination of private and public drinking sources from PFAS. The County also urges the adoption of safe and practical standards to protect these water sources.

Kent County is home to some zip codes with the greatest number of children with elevated blood lead levels in the state from the legacy of extensive use of lead in building paint. Elevated levels of this contaminate have been shown to result in poor performance in school, work and other activities. Educating residents and implementing abatement programs are critical but very expensive. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that PFAS as a chemical that has been widely used throughout manufacturing, food preservation and clothing and textiles, has become a prevalent contaminator of residents' drinking water supplies. To effectively address this environmental challenge, more study is required and clear standards need to be established.

Stable Funding & Reforms for County Courts

Position: Kent County advocates for criminal justice reforms that promote fundamental fairness and community safety, preserve judicial discretion, and minimize costs to the local units of government.

A number of significant judicial/criminal justice reform proposals are currently being considered in Michigan, including several bi-partisan bills in the Legislature and the recommendations of the Michigan Joint Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration. These proposals include limiting the ability to assess court costs on criminal defendants and expanding opportunities for expungement of public criminal records. They also include proposed changes to the pretrial bail bond process, which the County endorses, that help assure pretrial release decisions are based on protecting public safety, and not the financial ability to pay.

In deliberating these reforms, the Michigan Legislature is urged to use data driven processes that promote the safety of the public, preserve essential judicial discretion, and are fundamentally fair. Any modifications to these systems should also assure that the State is the primary funding source for the costs associated with these changes. Finally, Kent County urges that county courts retain the ability to assess criminal defendants with the costs of court proceedings related to their cases where it is equitable and appropriate to do so.