



# COMMISSIONERS OF CUMBERLAND COUNTY

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May 30, 2017

## **An Open Letter to the Taxpayers of Cumberland County**

With a ballooning, multi-billion dollar structural state budget deficit, there is no doubt that our state lawmakers and our Governor are facing some tough choices in the month ahead, as they attempt to reach agreement on what will hopefully be a timely and responsible state spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

From our vantage point, we won't attempt to suggest we understand all the ins and outs of the process about to unfold. Nor do we have a crystal ball to predict the outcome, nor a magic wand to erase the state's rather dire fiscal situation.

But, we can tell you we are concerned. Concerned for the property taxpayers of Cumberland County who will pick up the tab for any additional cost shifting from state government to the counties for state mandated programs and services.

Although those who supported House passage (114-84) last month of a proposed 2017-18 state budget (HB 218) called it just a starting point in the process, the shortcomings of this initial proposal make it, in our view, a non-starter.

As passed by the House and sent to the Senate, this proposal slashes \$1.2 million in state funds to Cumberland County for a wide range of mandated services that, by and large, are also services that are saving our taxpayers from even greater costs.

Completely wiped out is any state funding for less costly and more effective intermediate punishment -- or alternative sentencing -- for non-violent and/or non-threatening offenders. Absent too is any state funding for juvenile and adult probation. The fact is, these cuts -- if not restored -- will drive a stake in the heart of everything we're doing in the area of criminal justice reform, in our use of cutting edge best evidence practices to keep the prison population in check, to reduce the rate of recidivism among offenders young and old, and to help those in the grips of addiction and the opioid epidemic via supervision, monitoring and treatment as opposed solely to incarceration.

The fact is, these cuts will only lead to higher costs as the county and state prison population explodes, and the revolving door of recidivism escalates unabated. This is neither being tough nor smart on crime.

Then too are the cuts envisioned by House Bill 218 that would further reduce funding for mental and behavioral health services, court reimbursement, and homeless assistance, among others. The estimated \$211,000 additional state funding cut for mental health

services comes on top of the 10 percent, \$830,000 annual cut in mental health funding to Cumberland County that occurred five years ago – funding that has never been restored.

In conversations, meetings and other communications with our County's six elected state representatives and three state senators, we have asked that the counterproductive -- and costly -- funding cuts to counties contained in House Bill 218 be reversed in any final state budget accord.

And we take this opportunity to respectfully ask our Cumberland County constituents and taxpayers to join the reverse-the-cuts-to-counties effort by contacting their state legislators as well.

As the commissioners of Pennsylvania's fastest growing county, together, we are working hard to balance our growth with a protection of our quality of life, to keep your county government as cost efficient as possible, to meet the growing demand for needed services without always reaching into your pockets for more, and to maintain our position of having the lowest county property tax of any county in the region.

But, the truth is, our success in holding the line on your county property taxes will be in jeopardy if the state keeps shifting its obligations onto the backs of counties.

Without a restoration of these cuts to counties, it is hard to see how any new state budget can be viewed as anything other than a property tax increase state budget. And, it is our taxpaying public that has an absolute right to know.

Sincerely,

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

