



Washington State Association of Counties

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Derek Anderson

(360) 489-3020

danderson@wacounties.org

PRESS CONFERENCE: WASHINGTON COUNTIES ASK LEGISLATURE FOR LONG-TERM FUNDING FIX

Counties are facing a financial crisis, putting the public safety of 7 million at risk

Olympia, WA (April 16, 2015) – Today, a broad-based coalition of county elected officials, public safety officers and criminal justice system employees held a press conference on the capital steps, asking the legislature to replace the arbitrary 1% property tax cap that is preventing counties from keeping up with rising public safety costs.

Counties' cost of providing essential public services rises 3-5% every year, while revenue collection remains flat, due to the 1% cap on property tax revenue growth that took effect in 2002. Since that time, the problem has compounded annually leaving counties that are facing fiscal crises.

To keep up with this crisis, counties have taken extreme measures to cut costs—reducing workforce, tapping cash reserves, implementing furloughs, cutting programs and services—but these actions have not and cannot address the underlying problem of the 1% property tax cap, which makes up the majority of a county's general fund revenue.

“Over the last decade, keeping Washingtonians safe has become a nearly insurmountable challenge,” said Dave Sauter, Klickitat County Commissioner and President of the Washington State Association of Counties. “Under the current 1% property tax cap, counties simply do not have the resources needed to fund essential public safety and criminal justice services.”

“After a decade of revenues falling behind population growth and inflation, we are well past the point where innovation, efficiency, and rainy-day funds can balance our general fund,” added King County Executive Dow Constantine. “The arbitrary cap on revenue now threatens our ability to maintain the health and safety of our communities.”

Due to a lack of funding, counties across the state have experienced:

- Delayed criminal justice proceedings
- Delayed public safety response times
- Elimination of safety and security enhancements for jails and courthouses
- Reduction in the number of deputies on the road
- Arbitrary caps on the number of inmates booked into county jails
- Cuts to law enforcement training

This is why the coalition has asked legislature to make changes, this session, to the way county government is funded.

“A long-term funding fix is necessary and will give counties greater local control to adequately fund the essential services and programs, like public safety and criminal justice, needed to keep Washingtonians safe,” said Sauter.

For additional information or for questions, please contact Derek Anderson, Director of Communications and Member Services for the Washington State Association of Counties, at (360) 489-3020 or danderson@wacounties.org.

###