



## **BACKGROUND**

Arapahoe County is committed to fulfilling its mission of enhancing quality of life through exceptional delivery of services and efficient use of public funds.

As a constitutional subdivision of Colorado state government, Arapahoe County can only exercise those powers specifically expressed in statute or in the constitution, and those reasonably implied as necessary to carry out such express powers. Generally, counties are responsible for law enforcement, including the court system, district attorney, and jail facilities; the provision of social services on behalf of the state; the construction, maintenance, and repair of roads and bridges; health departments; and general control of land use in unincorporated areas.

The Board of County Commissioners is the primary policy-making body for the County and is responsible for the County's administrative and budgetary functions. Other County elected officers include the Clerk and Recorder, Assessor, District Attorney, Treasurer, Sheriff, and Coroner, all whom are elected to four-year terms under the state constitution. These officials have specific powers and duties prescribed by law, and they function independently from each other and from the Board of County Commissioners. However, the Board of County Commissioners approves the budgets for all County departments and offices.

In addition to property tax, counties rely on state and federal funding sources to provide required services.

## **FEDERAL & STATE POLICY PRINCIPLES**

The Board of County Commissioners evaluates policy positions through the lens of potential impacts to County programs and operations, considering fiscal, service, and equity impacts to Arapahoe County, consistent with its stated strategic plan and legal requirements.

The legislative principles below describe the County's underlying interest on specific issues. These principles serve as a consistent guide for the County in developing positions on federal and state legislation, rulemaking, and proactive issue advocacy.

The document also serves as a reference for elected representatives when considering legislation that may impact Arapahoe County. The Board of County Commissioners may revisit the County's legislative priorities throughout the year. Strategic, targeted, and/or abbreviated versions of the information contained in this document also will be created throughout the year for use in further legislative communications.

## **REPRESENTATION**

Arapahoe County contracts with Bowditch & Cassell Public Affairs, a professional lobbyist, for state advocacy activities. The Director of the Commissioners' Office coordinates federal and state intergovernmental relations, in partnership with the Director of Human Services, the County Attorney, the Director of Community Resources, Director of Public Health, and the Director of Public Works & Development.



As members of Colorado Counties, Inc., Counties and Commissioners Acting Together, and the National Association of Counties, Arapahoe County relies on those organizations' advocacy teams to provide reliable information on legislative issues and their impact on Colorado's counties and their residents. The County also depends on regional associations and other national organizations to advocate for specific issues of shared local interest.

The Board of County Commissioners relies on independently elected offices to monitor and advocate for legislation germane to their business operations, flagging items that may have an impact on the County's budget. The Board may engage in issues as requested by the elected official or if there is a significant budgetary impact to the organization.

### **SPECIFIC 2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Arapahoe County has identified several specific policy priorities:

#### ***Federal Items***

- Eliminate the federal Medicaid inmate exclusion policy and support policy tools that provide greater flexibility in using Medicaid funding for reentry services and other alternate uses.
- Maintain adequate funding levels of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to ensure workforce center sustainability.
- Champion policies that continue federal research of air and noise pollution caused by civilian and military aircraft, mitigate air and noise pollution, and enforce existing standards, rules and regulations, including enhancing opportunities for local control.
- Secure adequate funding for the implementation of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act and ensure the passage of the Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act.
- Ensure adequate funding for implementation of the Older Americans Act.
- Advocate for multiyear infrastructure reauthorization bills to secure funding to improve the County's transportation network, regional airport, stormwater, and wastewater facilities.

#### ***State Items***

- Ensure the transition of domestic violence cases from the City of Aurora to the 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District is adequately resourced to effectively manage the increase in case load.
- Support the creation of a comprehensive, state-wide System of Care that serves children, youth, and young adults.
- Support the overhaul of the Colorado Benefits Management System to ensure benefits and resources are administered in a timely manner.



- Advance and refine access to funding programs that increase affordable housing and support programs for people experiencing homelessness.
- Participate with local community correction programs to ensure state funding can adequately support alternative sentencing.
- Increase services and treatment placements for the highest acuity children in partnership with the General Assembly; the Colorado Department of Human Services, Office of Behavioral Health; and the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing.
- Promote the full funding of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Colorado Childcare Assistance program which have been negatively impacted by state and federal legislation.

## **GUIDING LEGISLATIVE PRINCIPLES**

### ***UNFUNDED MANDATES***

To effectively serve the needs of our community, Arapahoe County officials must have the resources and authority commensurate with the responsibilities placed on them by state and federal laws, regulations, and court decisions.

Arapahoe County supports adequate funding for any future state or federally imposed mandates upon local government, including the need for technology improvements necessary to fulfill these mandates.

Arapahoe County strongly opposes cost shifting from the state and federal government to local governments. The state and federal government must exercise fiscal restraint and responsibility, refraining from solving budget shortfalls with county government resources.

### ***LOCAL CONTROL & FLEXIBILITY***

County officials are elected officials closest and most responsive to our residents. Arapahoe County supports the concept of local control and authority to ensure programs and services reflect the unique needs of our community.

The County opposes any administrative effort to promulgate rules and regulations that interpret the law in a manner negatively impacting counties. County commissioners are important and necessary stakeholders in any rule-making process to ensure mandates are appropriately delivered to local constituents.

### ***REVENUE PREDICTABILITY***

Arapahoe County believes any tax policy reform should ensure that the powers granted to counties and the funding mechanisms available are sufficient to address county responsibilities. Tax policy reform should create a fair and equitable distribution of the property tax burden among all property, reduce uncertainty, and ensure local



governments have adequate authority and funding to meet their statutory responsibilities and the expectations of residents. The County supports more flexibility and options to secure and enhance fiscal sustainability. Arapahoe County strongly supports prior county approval of programs that must be funded with county property taxes but are not controlled or generated at the county level.

The County supports requiring the state to reimburse local governments and districts for any loss in property tax revenues caused by constitutional or statutory changes in order to preserve its ability to fulfill statutory duties.

Arapahoe County supports county authority to approve the use and the amount of the county portion of revenues designated in a proposed urban renewal plan for tax increment financing and to establish mechanisms to ensure that counties have greater influence to ensure proposed urban renewal projects meet the current statutory requirement of ameliorating blight.

#### ***OUTCOME-BASED DECISION MAKING***

Arapahoe County strongly believes the most effective governance results from local, state, and federal officials working in true partnership toward the development and implementation of programs and services. Proactively working together to understand the nexus between policy and implementation will help ensure shared goals, an understanding of the fiscal impacts, and outcomes can be collectively achieved.

State and federal governments should base decisions about laws and regulations affecting county governments on comprehensive data and measurable outcomes. Relying on these two standards to scrutinize existing and proposed laws and regulations will help reduce unnecessary, unfunded or underfunded mandates, streamline government, and utilize limited resources more efficiently. State and federal officials should also consider programmatic models that might exist as well as the possible limitations on local control that might result from new legislation, rules, or regulations.

#### ***WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

Home to some of the nation's largest companies and innovative small businesses, Arapahoe County is committed to maintaining a strong economic and business climate. Arapahoe County supports a strong partnership among counties, the state, municipalities, and private industry to design and implement economic development incentives and programs.

The County also operates Arapahoe/Douglas Works!, a publicly-funded workforce center that provides free services for businesses and job seekers, consistent with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Wagner-Peyser, and various other state and federal grants. Arapahoe County supports continuing a local delivery model to implement WIOA requirements, ensuring decisions can be made at the local level.



***HUMAN SERVICES***

Arapahoe County supports local administration of the human services system to maximize the flexibility and responsiveness of the system to local needs. Arapahoe County’s human services department has consistently achieved high rankings for service delivery, consistent with state and federal standards. The County supports a state supervised, county administered, human services system. The County also supports increased funding to provide these mandated services with the flexibility to best meet local needs without shifting costs locally, negatively impacting county government.

Arapahoe County supports policies that advance a two-generation (2Gen) approach, which simultaneously serves the whole family. The 2Gen approach helps children and families get education and workforce training, social supports like parenting skills, and health care needed to create a legacy of economic stability and overall well-being.

Arapahoe County supports local input into the state’s budget management process to avoid supplemental appropriations requests for foreseeable circumstances. Arapahoe County supports maintenance of effort (MOE) requirements that allow flexible funding for social services programs to minimize, avoid increasing, or provide equitable distribution of fiscal responsibility of counties.

Arapahoe County continues to advocate for 100 percent reimbursement from the state to administer the food stamp, Medicaid, and other adult assistance programs.

***SUSTAINABLE AND CONSISTENT FEDERAL FUNDING***

The County relies on federal block and competitive grant programs from the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Infrastructure, Human Services, Public Health, and Veteran’s Affairs to provide critical programs that enhance the safety net for vulnerable populations. The County supports maintaining these funding programs to support the community, distributing direct allocations to the County or through the state as appropriate.

***JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY***

Arapahoe County supports strong and efficient relationships between all levels of government with respect to the criminal justice system and public safety systems.

Arapahoe County supports a continuum of approaches to prevent violence, ranging from increased efforts to hold accountable criminal activities to designing effective prevention and early intervention programs for youth and families at risk. The County recognizes that focusing on and funding these preventative services saves money. The role of the Sheriff’s Office is to enforce the law, recognizing both the statutory and judicial limitations of police authority and the constitutional rights of all persons. Where possible, the County supports legislation that enables local decision-making on public safety services to permit development of locally appropriate solutions.

Arapahoe County seeks the timely administration of justice and supports adequate state



investments to achieve this outcome within the new single county judicial district. The County embraces the concept of specialty courts to divert mentally ill and drug using offenders away from the traditional court system.

Arapahoe County recognizes that our jail population is changing, with the number of individuals with mental and behavioral health issues as well as crime severity increasing. The County supports programs that deliver mental health and substance abuse programs for individuals within the criminal justice system, providing alternative sentencing and pre-trial programs to help keep nonviolent and first-time offenders out of jail, and expanding programs that reduce the likelihood of reoffending once inmates are released in the community.

Arapahoe County supports timely and accurate reimbursement for housing state inmates in county facilities as well as efforts to alleviate the existing backlog of state inmates in county facilities.

### ***ELECTIONS***

Arapahoe County is committed to implementing and coordinating elections in a nonpartisan manner, with utmost integrity. The County supports increasing voter access and education, while protecting voter privacy consistent with state statute.

### ***LAND USE***

Arapahoe County believes in sustainable and responsible growth. It supports local control over the various uses of land and their impacts; recognizing that activities relative to growth, development, agricultural and farming interests, natural resources, and environmental management are unique within each community. The County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan identifies six principles to help create a sustainable, resilient, and healthy community, including growth management, public facilities and services, economic health, transportation and mobility, natural and cultural resources, and environmental quality. The County also supports actions that ensure adequate water availability for future land use development.

The County supports maintaining mechanisms that facilitates reasonable costs of growth and redevelopment, such as impact fees, real estate transfer taxes, and other growth-financing tools. The County opposes any efforts to supersede, override, or preempt local land use authority.

### ***HOUSING***

Arapahoe County believes housing is a human right and the availability of attainable and affordable housing is of utmost concern. Arapahoe County supports developing an adequate supply of diverse housing options across income brackets, with a focus on mitigating displacement and those most vulnerable.

Counties are uniquely positioned to help address the housing crisis because we



understand our communities' needs, implementing effective land use planning and associated infrastructure. The County supports advancing programs and services that augment local government's ability to facilitate access to affordable and attainable housing, including state programs that promote regional cooperation and provide technical assistance.

The County supports deepening existing public and private sector strategies as well as funding to ensure efficacy of existing programs, such as Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, Proposition 123, administration of voucher programs, and land banking. The County also supports additional legislation that promotes increased construction of entry-level home ownership.

### ***TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE***

Arapahoe County believes the movement of goods and people are vital to the continued economic success of the state and Coloradans' quality of life. With several major highways, transit lines, 30% of Colorado's growing economy along the I-25 Corridor, and one of the nation's busiest regional airports, effective multimodal transportation is equally important to the success of the County's economy.

Arapahoe County has historically partnered on large-scale, regionally significant infrastructure projects, but is against efforts to pass along additional state roadway construction or maintenance responsibilities to local governments without increased and adequate funds to meet these additional responsibilities. The County also supports additional funding to meet multimodal infrastructure demands. The County is supportive of opportunities to provide safe and reliable transit service for residents, facilitating regional and local connections through the regional transportation district. The County is not supportive of divesting service to local governments without additional financial resources. Arapahoe County continues to support an equitable Highway User Trust Fund (HUTF) allocation formula and restrictions on the use of "off the top" diversions. The County opposes funding mechanisms which eliminate or reduce local shareback for transportation projects. Arapahoe County believes county commissioners should continue to have an enhanced role in prioritizing regional and statewide projects. The County also supports opportunities for counties to design their own transportation finance mechanisms to respond to local and regional transportation needs.

### ***HOMELESSNESS***

Arapahoe County recognizes that homelessness is a complex, interconnected issue and that people experience homelessness for a multitude of reasons. The County supports a multi-disciplinary Housing First approach to addressing homelessness by alleviating generational poverty, providing accessible workforce development opportunities for its most vulnerable populations, providing resource navigation, opportunities for transitional housing, and ensuring additional funding for safety net services, such as mental health and



substance use treatment.

***PUBLIC HEALTH***

Arapahoe County is committed to providing public health services that are data-informed and based on best practices and community input. Core public health programs such as immunizations, food safety, water quality, family planning, access to healthy and affordable foods, and community health education are crucial for creating healthy environments where all residents can thrive. The County supports increased state and federal funding for public health services that can be flexibly used to meet the unique needs of Arapahoe County. The County supports policy efforts that protect public health funding, provide funding flexibility to address emergent issues, and safeguard the work force. The County also supports the ability of counties to set fees for services, licenses, and permits.

***ENVIRONMENT***

Arapahoe County supports advancing policies and programs that conserve resources, protect the environment, and safeguard our climate in order to build a sustainable, just, and resilient community. The County supports programs that help communities adapt to the impacts of climate change. The County also supports collaboration between state and federal government agencies and local governments to advance local climate action.