

## **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. 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, treasurer, sheriff, and coroner, 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 county commissioners approve the budgets for all county departments.

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 fiscal and operational impacts to Arapahoe County, consistent with its stated mission, values and statutory requirements.

The following legislative principles 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 Romberg & Associates for state advocacy activities and the director of human services, the county attorney, the director of community resources, director of public works and the director of communication and administrative services serve as staff liaisons for federal and state government relations.

As a member of Colorado Counties, Inc. and the National Association of Counties, Arapahoe County relies on those organization's advocacy team to provide reliable information on legislative issues and their impact on Colorado's counties and their residents. The county also relies on regional associations and other national organizations to advocate for specific issues of local interest.

## **SPECIFIC 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

Arapahoe County has identified several specific priorities important to the community:

### ***Federal Items***

- Securing additional funding to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and support economic recovery
- Eliminate the federal Medicaid inmate exclusion policy.
- Continue needed community funding through federal block and competitive grant programs from the departments of housing and urban development, justice, transportation and veteran's affairs.
- Ensure reauthorization of the Older Americans Act and adequate funding for implementation.
- Secure additional federal funding for comprehensive veteran services and programs.
- Secure federal infrastructure funding to improve the county's multimodal transportation network, regional airport, stormwater and wastewater facilities.
- Monitor potential residential impacts associated with Metroplex implementation and Centennial Airport operations.

### ***State Items***

- Secure funding and outline implementation approach for a new judicial district.
- Clarify state's regulatory scope with former landfill areas.
- Ensure funding is maintained or expanded to implement mandated human services.
- Protect funding formulas for community corrections programs, including alternative sentencing and pre-trial programs.
- Secure funding for increased mental health and substance use disorders treatment throughout the county.
- Advance solutions that increase vital human service resources to vulnerable populations to address issues such as reliable access to healthy food, homelessness, mental health, opioids, and substance use.
- Secure state infrastructure funding to improve the county's multimodal transportation network, regional airport, stormwater and wastewater facilities.
- Encourage statewide/state-funded solutions to the affordable housing issues in the state including homelessness.

## **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.

### ***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.

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.

### ***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. Any and all legislative alternatives should ensure local governments have adequate authority and funding to meet its statutory responsibilities and the expectations of residents. 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 our 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 meets the current statutory requirement of ameliorating blight or slum conditions.

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

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

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.

### ***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 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 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.

### ***HUMAN SERVICES***

Arapahoe County supports local administration of the social services system in order to maximize the flexibility and responsiveness of the system to local needs, while ensuring efficient management and local control. Arapahoe County has consistently achieved high rankings for service delivery, consistent with state and federal standards. The County supports a state run, county administered human services system. The County also supports flexibility in providing benefits and services that best meet local needs without shifting costs locally and 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 more 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.

### ***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 supports local control over the various uses of land and their impacts, recognizing that activities relative to growth, development, 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. Arapahoe County advocates for policies that help advance these principles over the next 20 years. The County also supports actions that ensure adequate water availability for future land use development.

The County supports maintaining mechanisms that lessens the 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.

### ***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. Federal and state officials must be willing to make significant investment to maintain and improve Colorado's multimodal transportation network to preserve these benefits.

With several major highways, transit lines, and one of the nation's busiest regional airport, effective transportation is equally important to the success of the county's economy. Arapahoe County has demonstrated a willingness to partner on large-scale infrastructure projects, such as the Interstate 25/Arapahoe Road interchange and Parker/Arapahoe Road interchange, 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.

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 have an enhanced role in prioritizing regional and statewide projects within their area. The County also supports opportunities for counties to design their own transportation finance mechanisms to respond to local and regional transportation needs.

### ***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 business and industry to design and implement economic development incentives and programs. The County supports local organizations that specialize in growing our economy, particularly the high tech, communication, military, government, service, and retail industries.

The County also operates Arapahoe/Douglas Works!, a publicly-funded workforce center consistent with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). With locations in Centennial, Aurora and Castle Rock, Arapahoe/Douglas Works! provides free services to both small and large businesses as well as job seekers to ensure Arapahoe and Douglas county's workforce and economy remain strong. Arapahoe County supports continuing a local delivery model to implement WIOA requirements, ensuring decisions can be made at the local level.