

The membership of the Washington Association of County Officials (WACO) includes elected county assessors, auditors, clerks, coroners and medical examiners, prosecuting attorneys, sheriffs, treasurers and comparable appointed officials in charter counties. WACO is a non-profit, nonpartisan organization. WACO works closely with the affiliate organizations for every executive level county official in Washington's 39 counties and provides legislative advocacy, education and training opportunities, and day-to-day support on a wide variety of issues of importance to counties and to each of our over 270 members.

AUTONOMY OF ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OFFICES

WACO members are aware that the Washington State Constitution and RCW intend our roles are as independently elected officials to best ensure direct accountability to citizens. WACO supports maintaining the independent role of county elected officials. We are committed to operating in a non-partisan manner, collaborating across party lines and serving all with equal respect and courtesy.

ADEQUATE FUNDING AND RESOURCES

WACO members believe that capacity to provide good service is key to citizen confidence in government. Proposed legislation affecting local elected officials and their offices must adequately and accurately consider the cost and administrative burden required to implement them well. WACO urges legislators to partner with us as legislative proposals are developed so we can assist in identifying what's needed for their successful implementation. WACO advocates for strengthening the state's system for producing local government fiscal notes and reducing the passage of bills with indeterminate cost. WACO advocates for adequate funding and resources for all new and existing services expected of us by the state. WACO supports establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with county legislative bodies, ensuring they are equipped with clear understanding of county elected official resource needs and join us in advocating for and securing them.

OPERATIONAL INTEGRITY & MAINTAINING THE VALUE OF INTERNAL CONTROLS

County elected officials believe in the value of maintaining internal controls throughout our departments using necessary policies and procedures to hold ourselves accountable to the public trust. Greater demand on our county elected official offices without commensurate funding, increases in remote workforce, and demand for increased remote access to services by citizens greatly challenges this. WACO opposes legislation and policy that compromises the integrity of the service we provide and diminishes our ability to maintain internal controls.

COURTHOUSE SECURITY AND SAFETY

County elected officials agree that safety and security of their offices and staff is at increased risk. They respect the fact that counties vary in what they feel are appropriate responses to this increased risk and reject a "one size fits all" approach to this issue. All agree that additional resources are necessary to adequately ensure safety and security, regardless of approach.

WACO supports the establishment of model standards for counties to determine need for, and guide implementation of, appropriate security measures to ensure the safety of county elected official offices and staff. WACO advocates for adequate guidance and resources for counties to develop policies responsive to their differing needs and preferred approach, including rules related to the presence of firearms in and around county elected official offices and in field-based work. WACO further supports strong accountability for threats made against the safety of elected officials.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology has moved from a want to a need. But the reality is 68% of county elected officials reported in March 2020 that they lack adequate technology, particularly given the rising need for remote provision/access to services. County elected officials need up-to-date, secure technology to be able to carry out the responsibilities of their offices.

WACO urges state and local legislative authorities to provide adequate technology resources for county elected official offices. County elected officials further support legislation and initiatives to provide affordable broadband and internet access provided equitably to citizens statewide to enable them to access services.

SAFE AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES

County elected officials place a high value on excellence in customer service and believe that all citizens have the right to easily access local government services. COVID, technology limitations, geographic distance all necessitate expansion of traditional in-person courthouse services to include more online remote access.

WACO advocates for legislation and collaboration among public entities aimed at ensuring state and local funds provide adequate, equitable citizen access to internet-based services as well as resources to safe and conveniently provide necessary in-person services.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING A SKILLED AND EFFECTIVE WORKFORCE FOR COUNTY ELECTED OFFICIALS

County elected officials have seen their job applicant pools shrink as wages have failed to keep pace with the private sector. In addition, with overall less longevity and more turnover in the workforce, training and retraining for specialized positions has become a greater expense and more difficult to access. In addition, as the demographics of our communities continue to diversify, county officials are committed to recruitment and hiring of staff that reflect the communities in which we live and serve.

County elected officials advocate for competitive wages for their staff and collaboration and funding support for adequate and accessible training programs. WACO further advocates for consideration of the workforce needs of our county elected officials' offices in state-level workforce development initiatives and policies. This includes further development and incentives tied to diversifying the workforce and to specialized training in our postsecondary system.