

Principles of the Urban Counties Policy Platform

1. Urban Counties value responsive and accountable government.
2. Urban Counties believe that local government is more responsive and accountable to the citizens and communities and should be utilized for service delivery whenever practical.
3. Urban county citizens hold commissioners court responsible for all county business even though commissioners courts lack authority over many aspects and segments of county business. There is a disconnect between responsibility and authority. This weakens accountability.
4. Urban Counties need greater authority and tools to deal with the problems of contemporary urban society.
5. Urban Counties believe that permissive authority is always good. Restrictions, proscriptions, and mandates are almost always harmful.
6. Urban counties believe that State funds for specific programs should be allocated to counties, regions, or other local areas based upon population, number of clients, or some other appropriate measure of the need for that program or service.
7. Urban Counties believes that funds collected for a purpose should be used for that purpose and supports ending the reliance and utilization of dedicated revenues to balance the State budget.

1 Taxation

1. Support the significant reduction of property tax rates by measures to reduce the cost of government and by replacing property tax revenue with revenue from other sources.
2. Require sales price disclosure on transfer of real property.
3. Oppose any expansion of the pollution control property tax exemption that would include property used to produce goods or services.
4. Oppose expansion of tax exemptions for property owned by a taxpayer to include leased property other than property leased to a charter school for one or more grades from kindergarten through grade 12.
5. Support allowing local taxing units to set a residence homestead exemption as a percentage, a flat-dollar level, or a percentage with a minimum or maximum individual value.
6. Support reforms to process for equity appeals of appraisals.
7. Oppose the repeal of the penalty when land that was previously appraised as agricultural property is converted to another use.
8. Oppose all new property tax exemptions, expansion of existing exemptions, or any other narrowing of tax base unless approved by the Urban Counties.
9. Support a significant increase in the school homestead exemption and ensure adjustments are made in state funding to schools to account for the exemption.

10. Support property tax transparency and information proposals from SB 669 85(R), as passed by the House during the regular session, including:
 - a. Removing projected tax assessment information from the central appraisal district (CAD) notice of assessed value;
 - b. Requiring proposed tax rates and hearing information be provided to the CAD where they would be made available to taxpayers online; and
 - c. Renaming the “effective” tax rate as the “no-new-taxes” tax rate.
11. Support allowing school districts to increase their tax rate to a previously approved level after a decrease rather than having to hold a second increase ratification election;
12. Support using a portion of the Economic Stabilization Fund to lower school tax rates;
13. Support protections for innocent and unwitting taxpayers that acquire property subject to governmental errors in previous tax years from having to pay back taxes due to those errors; and
14. Support mandatory price disclosure of real property sales.

2 Crime and Courts

1. Support full state funding for all mandatory JJAEP placements in an amount adequate for year-round programs.
2. Support an increase in state funding for indigent defense purposes.
3. Support additional state funding for juvenile probation departments if the age of criminal responsibility is raised to 18.
4. Support sufficient State funding for local juvenile probation departments to pay for the full costs of keeping in local programs, or in regional detention facilities, all children diverted from State facilities through a restructuring of the State Juvenile Justice Department.
5. Support state payment to counties for costs of detaining in county jails technical parole violators and new-offense violators held solely for parole revocation purposes.
6. Oppose changes in court costs in criminal cases that are expected to have a negative fiscal impact to counties.
7. Support changes to pre-trial release to require the use of locally verified evaluation tools to determine a criminal defendant’s risk of flight or danger to the community. Promote: (1) establishing pretrial risk assessments; (2) the elimination of bond schedules; (3) greater discretion for magistrates regarding pre-trial release; and (4) rebuttable presumptions in favor of personal bond.
8. Maintain current fee structure for the district court records and archives fee, the county court records management and preservation fee, and the records archive fee through 2029.
9. Support granting counties authority to judicially designate as uncollectible certain fees and costs of court.

3 Transportation

1. Oppose eliminating tolling options unless state funding for highways is increased sufficiently to replace lost toll revenue.
2. Support enhanced funding for freight transportation infrastructure projects to address economic growth and an ever-increasing population.
3. Support current weight requirements for vehicles operating on county roads, except for localized proposals supported by the local commissioners court.
4. Support changes to the administrative fees retained by counties to register vehicles only if the new fees are reasonably expected to recoup county costs for providing those services.
5. Oppose the establishment of uniform limits on the fees charged by authorized private deputies for title services.

4 Health and Human Services

1. Support increased funding for mental health and substance abuse services state-wide.
2. Expand capacity of both forensic and civil beds in the state hospital system.
3. Support the continuation of the 1115 Medicaid Transformation Waiver.
4. Support state action related to state participation in the funding of indigent health care to maximize access to available federal funds.
5. Not oppose the repeal of the Drivers Responsibility Program. If repealed, seek replacement funding for trauma care.
6. Support continued federal funding to local communities for refugee healthcare.

5 Environment

1. Support full funding for the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan, LIRAP, and LIP programs and maintain the integrity of the TERP, LIRAP, and LIP programs.
2. Support local administration of the LIRAP and LIP programs to ensure funds collected in the county are used in the county.
3. Use the TERP funds only for programs that will assist nonattainment and near nonattainment areas in meeting EPA Ozone standards.

6 Development and Infrastructure

1. In the absence of market value transparency, oppose efforts to require local governments to pay an opposing party's attorney fees and court costs in eminent domain proceedings.
2. Oppose changes to the criteria governments must meet to show "actual progress" on projects to prevent real property acquired through eminent domain to be subject to repurchase if the changes would require significant expenditures for development labor and materials to show actual progress.

7 Public Safety and Emergency Management

1. Support giving all counties the option to adopt a fire code and rules necessary to administer and enforce the fire code.
2. Oppose creation of a new fireworks season unless commissioners courts are granted discretion over the sale of fireworks in that county for the new season.
3. Protect county authority to restrict or ban the sale and use of fireworks during drought conditions and when included in a local disaster declaration.
4. Support the current role of local emergency management authorities and the county judge in responding to potential and actual emergencies and disasters.
5. Support efforts to maintain the long-established prohibition of guns in any portion of a building used by court participants.
6. Support additional funding for DPS crime labs provided it does not negatively impact existing local crime labs.

8 Elections

1. Support the creation of an online voter registration system.

9 Governance and Finance

1. Confirm commissioners court authority over the county budget and contracting.
2. No unfunded mandates.
3. Oppose arbitrary limits on local government that are more restrictive than limits on state government, so long as:
 - a. Commissioners Courts remain limited in their ability to manage county business and control county budgets; and
 - b. There is no constitutional protection against unfunded mandates.
4. Support local control over compensation and benefits paid by the county.
5. Establish that any increase in the fees to be paid to attorneys appointed to represent indigent criminal defendants may not take effect until the adoption of the next county budget and require at least 90-day notice of the proposed increase to be provided to the commissioners court.
6. Support full state funding for representation of indigent parties in child welfare cases.
7. Support financial transparency requirements that permit the use of existing reports and other documents and that minimize the need to express the same information in different manners or formats.
8. Oppose mandates to produce financial reports that are duplicative of reports already required of counties.
9. Oppose collective bargaining for peace officers unless supported by the commissioners court of the counties affected by the legislation.

10. Support legislation that permits counties to post public notices electronically in lieu of print publication.
11. Oppose requirements to include on bond propositions information other than the total amount of bonds to be issued if approved and the proposed uses of the bonds.
12. Establish that the earliest effective date for any increase in salary budgets outside the control of commissioners court shall be the first day of the next county fiscal year following 90 days notice of the proposed increase to be provided to the commissioners court.
13. Support continued federal funding for local communities to help cover operational costs for holding undocumented criminal aliens in the criminal justice system and the costs to house them.
14. Oppose restrictions on the ability of local governments to effectively and efficiently communicate with the legislature and other state and federal entities.
15. Support proposals to permit public access to public information on the personal devices of public officers and employees that include reasonable provisions to guard against frivolous and abusive lawsuits against public officers and employees.

Other Issues

Items in this list are legislative positions regarding initiatives of member counties or other groups or organizations.