



Mayors' Partnership for Progress 2021 Issues and Positions

AN OVERVIEW: REVIVING SOUTHEAST OHIO

The southeast Ohio region suffers from a lack of many essential services: sufficient internet access, health services, affordable transportation, and childcare. These are only a few deficits of services for the many low-income families and children in our communities, whose hardships are heightened by an increase in online jobs, services, and schooling. The effects of these inequalities are overwhelming for our families. Local municipalities and non-profits continue lacking the resources to provide criminal justice services, prevention, treatment, and other needed intervention resources. The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified many of these challenges facing our region. Yet, our communities have continued to champion shared services and other innovative approaches to dealing with the pandemic and increased needs of our communities. The fact remains however, that stable state support for essential public services, including for local governments and basic human needs is more urgent than ever to solve these serious problems.

PRIORITIES

EXPANDING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF BROADBAND

Appalachian Ohio continues to have the lowest rate of cellular and internet connectivity in the state. Without high-speed internet access that is affordable and wide-spread, rural America is met with a persistent digital gap that drives inequality. As technology expands and available jobs continually shift to increasing the use of online platforms, there must be an equal playing field for rural and nonrural communities. The Mayors' Partnership for Progress advocates for state and federal government to play an active role in policy and funding to close this gap this year and those upcoming.

PRIORITIZING COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT

Over the last decade and through the expressions of our concerns under previous state legislation, there has been a loss of Local Government Funds distributed from the state-level. Due to the reliance on shared services in our region, it is ever-so crucial that we reinvest in our communities and ensure that local government have the tools they need. We rely on volunteers to complete many tasks that would be done by paid employees in other municipalities, such as park maintenance, building repairs, cleaning services, clearing brush. It is critical, for these smaller communities to see greater prosperity, that we see community reinvestment as a priority.

EXPANDING WATER ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The Mayors' Partnership for Progress was successful in the past in obtaining funding for a limited low-income water assistance program in cooperation with Community Action Agencies. The program needs to expand the level of benefits and address the varied living arrangements low-income families face, where assistance should be based solely on financial need. Our region's water systems need an increase in federal and state support to meet EPA quality standards – we aim for funding that is targeted to improve water systems without raising rates.



PROTECTING THE HOME RULE

Self-governance is critical in our democracy. The Ohio Constitution gives dually elected local governments the right to Home Rule. The Ohio legislature is reducing these rights and local authority in areas including, by not limited to, minimum wage, parking enforcement, contracts with particular companies, collection and administration of municipal income taxes, local hiring, gun control, predatory lending, ability to tax plastic bags and red-light traffic cameras. The Mayors' Partnership for Progress aims to preserve this right.

CONFRONTING OHIO'S OPIOID EPIDEMIC

The region has been devastated by the impact of opioid and other substance abuse. It has placed a burden on our treatment capacity, as well as other community systems. The continued expansion of Medicaid service is vital as well as the additional funding provided in the recent state budget, but we will continue to advocate for the expansion of treatment and prevention programs.

TRANSPORTATION

Through decade-long challenges facing the transportation sector, the Mayors' Partnership for Progress recently engaged in a successful effort to continue Medicaid transportation, which, if eliminated, would have further damage our regional public transportation. We also supported an increase in the tax on gas, which has provided much-needed resources for road maintenance and public transportation. We continue to advocate for driver license's suspension reforms, as well as overall infrastructure, public transit, and other transportation-related support in our region.

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE ACCESS

Since our region has lost one-third of its publicly funded childcare capabilities in recent years and the increase in training and technical requirements, many childcare providers have been forced out of business. We want to reverse this trend and realize that it starts with policy. We continue to advocate for improved payment rates with specific attention to in-home childcare aides. They arguably offer the best opportunities to address our regional childcare challenge.

REDUCING THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF STATE AUDIT REQUIREMENTS

Small, rural communities lack trained staff that can manage the requirements of the State Auditor and the Unified Accounting Network (UAN) system. The issues of being "red-flagged" and assignment to a "high-risk pool" can create an additional and substantial financial burden on municipalities. The Mayors' Partnership for Progress stands by the belief that the state should provide auditing services through a line item versus fees. We support the Auditor of State efforts to obtain additional state funding for its operation, which we believe should reduce the cost of audits. We also encourage a significant expansion of training opportunities by the County Auditors for local governments.