

2025-2027

STATE LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

TULARE COUNTY



Supervisor Larry Micari



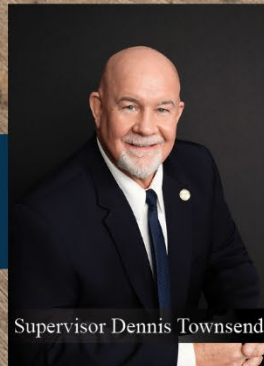
Supervisor Pete Vander Poel



Supervisor Amy Shuklian



Supervisor Eddie Valero



Supervisor Dennis Townsend

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....2
Top Priorities.....3
Agriculture, Natural Resources, & Water.....4
Health & Human Services.....10
Infrastructure.....20
General Government.....25

CONTACTS



Jason T. Britt, County Administrative Officer
County of Tulare
2800 W. Burrel Avenue
Visalia, CA 93291
(559) 636-5005



Paul Yoder, State Legislative Advocate
Shaw Yoder Antwih Schmelzer & Lange
1415 L Street, Suite 1000
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 446-4656

INTRODUCTION

The Tulare County Board of Supervisors biennially adopts a State Legislative Platform. The platform is a statement of priority issues for Tulare County and provides direction for County staff and those advocating on behalf of the County.

The Board of Supervisors recognizes unforeseen issues may arise as the legislative year proceeds. All requests for the Board of Supervisors to either endorse or oppose new legislation or policy must be submitted to the Board for approval. Supervisors may periodically provide letters of support or opposition for issues impacting their county Supervisorial Districts.

TOP PRIORITIES

Health and Public Safety: Tulare County opposes funding cuts or legislation that places financial responsibility on the county, absent a funding source from the state or federal governments in administering necessary medical care to residents in the County. Tulare County supports legislation that reduces barriers to providing care to individuals experiencing behavioral health challenges, but in cases where this does not create additional financial challenges to the County. Tulare County must oppose any funding formula that does not proportionately support the needs of its citizens. Tulare County supports additional funding for the implementation of recently passed Proposition 36.

Water: Important to Tulare County's agricultural prosperity is consistent, sustained availability of surface water and groundwater. As such, the County supports efforts that increase access to water, including expanded infrastructure and storage projects. While further regulatory streamlining is necessary, funding to break ground on new projects or restoration of existing infrastructure is of priority for the County, including funds coming from the recently passed Proposition 4 (2024) that allocates \$3.8 billion in funding for drinking water, drought, flood, and water resilience programs.

Fire Protection: It is critically important for Tulare County to have firefighting and emergency response capabilities that are state of the art and proactive as much as reactive. Tulare County supports legislation that furthers the County's ability to expand its infrastructure and response capacity, including utilizing funds from Proposition 4 (2024) which allocate \$1.95 billion for wildfire and extreme heat projects.



AGRICULTURE, NATURAL RESOURCES, & WATER

AGRICULTURE

1. Dairy Digester Program and Alternative Manure Management Program - California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)

Challenge:

Dairy digesters use livestock manure to produce methane, a renewable source of electrical energy generation and transportation fuel. California is home to the nation's largest dairy industry, and Tulare County is the largest producer of dairy products in the state. Unfortunately, investment in dairy digesters has lagged in California due to expensive, uncertain, and complex interconnection and permitting obstacles, high environmental compliance costs, lack of long-term economic energy purchase agreements, and high financing risk and costs.

The CDFA's Dairy Digester Research and Development Program provided financial assistance for the installation of dairy digesters in California, which will result in reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, funding is provided through incentives to support non-digester practices that reduce methane emissions from dairy and livestock operations through a separate program, the Alternative Manure Management Program. The goal for both programs is long-term methane emission reductions on California dairies or mitigation of adverse environmental impacts.

Solution:

- Support initiatives that provide regulatory support to dairy digester projects.
- Support increased funding for the Funding Agricultural Replacement Measures for Emission Reductions (FARMER) program to achieve the state commitment to reduce emissions from heavy-duty agricultural off-road equipment; provide for air quality and health improvement throughout the San Joaquin Valley.

2. Invasive Species

Challenge:

There are several invasive species introduced and detected in California every year that threaten agriculture and the environment. The two largest threats to the future of the California citrus industry and backyard fruit production are the Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP) and the bacterial disease that it vectors, Huanglongbing (HBL). ACP was first detected in 2008 in San Diego and quickly became established in southern California before moving north to Tulare County and other parts of the state. HBL can be catastrophic to commercial and backyard citrus. Today, 76% of the state's citrus acreage is in Fresno, Kern, and Tulare Counties. In accordance with the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers

Association, it is noted that continued funding of Pest Exclusion, Pest Detection Trapping, Rapid Response, Pest Management and Eradication, and Public Outreach Programs are critical in protecting California's resources.

Solution:

- Support continued funding of Pest Prevention Program activities at the local level, as well as cost recovery for existing, new, and/or modified programs.
- Support legislation that provides effective pest management and eradication activities.
- Support funding resources directed at researching ACP to prevent and cure HBL.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

3. Forest Management, Resiliency, Fire Prevention & Response, Forest Health

Challenge:

Years of prolonged drought, bark beetle infestation, and devastating wildfires exacerbated by years of inadequate fuels treatment have resulted in an ongoing decline in forest health that must be comprehensively addressed. The most recent Aerial Detection Survey Report released by the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, indicates 28.8 million dead or dying trees statewide.

Due to regulatory hurdles, mixed land ownership, and a decline in markets for wood products, the pace and scale of forest management projects are slow and small. During the Hazard Tree response from 2015 through 2020, regulations were streamlined, and partnerships flourished between state and federal agencies. However, markets for forest products proved to be a significant challenge. Shuttered biomass facilities, prohibitive trucking costs, and overwhelmed lumber mills have led to stockpiles of forest products, which increases fuels and insect infestation.

Solution:

- Continue the partnership between the state of California and the US Forest Service for shared stewardship.
- Support legislation and funding for local assistance, regulatory relief, and outreach efforts to effectively reduce safety risks to the public, while increasing the pace and scale of forest health projects.
- Support legislation and funding for fire prevention, mitigation, and planning efforts, including forest management through fuel reduction projects, prescribed burn fire crews, and grants for forest health projects. Support additional funding to enhance aviation resources, expand firefighting surge capacity, expand firefighting capacity, and fire response. Support the California Conservation Corps' utilization of the Porterville Development Center as a training center for forest management activities.
- Support the creation of a sustainable wood-products market in California.

WATER

4. Private Well Assistance*Challenge:*

Due to almost a decade of prolonged drought, Tulare County had more than 2,000 private domestic wells go dry. In many cases, the property was not near an alternative domestic water supply, such as a community or municipal public water system. Existing funding programs are geared toward community systems and do not address problems with private wells. The County has had limited success in accessing drought funds on behalf of private well owners to connect them to existing systems, and State budget shortfalls may reduce funding interim solutions for failing private wells. Obstacles include identifying an entity that can apply on behalf of the well owners, incentivizing existing systems to make service available, and convincing enough homes to connect. Tulare County recognizes that coordination with GSA's and Management Zones is important for continuity of services and supports sustainable solutions that eradicate dependence on replacement of individual domestic wells wherever possible.

Solution:

- Provide local assistance through Technical Assistance Requests to identify long-term, regional solutions for those with continued outages.
- Support legislation that provides authority for mandatory consolidation for private well communities, like SB 88 (Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, 2015).
- Address funding criteria that do not reflect the state's priority to decrease reliance on individual private wells.

5. Sustainable Operation and Maintenance Revenue Streams*Challenge:*

Communities throughout Tulare County face rising expenses and limited revenue streams to operate drinking water and wastewater systems. AB 401 (Dodd, 2016) required the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to deliver and implement the Low-Income Water Rate Assistance Program. The Program is past due. The SWRCB's *Safe and Affordable Fund for Equity and Resiliency* (SAFER) expenditure plan does not include a plan to directly fund operation and maintenance costs for disadvantaged communities. The SAFER Program will sunset on June 30, 2030 at which time the annual 5% allocation (up to \$130 million) from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund will cease.

Solution:

- Support funding for drinking-water and wastewater solutions which address needs and/or reduce costs; including alternative power grids, assistance to private domestic well users, direct assistance to rate payers, operation and maintenance funding directly to disadvantaged community water systems (such as the SAFER program), and direct allocation of state funds for drinking water projects in Tulare County.

6. Streamline Funding Processes

Challenge:

In July 2022, the State Auditor issued report 2021-118 regarding the SWRCB's lack of urgency in providing critical assistance for failing water system needs. The 2024 Drinking Water Needs Assessment stated that more than 385 water systems in California are failing, which impacts more than 740,000 residents. Less than 2% of water bond revenue managed by entities like the SWRCB reach disadvantaged communities due to prolonged project approval timelines and the communities' incapacity to prepare complicated application packets.

Tulare County currently has 33 failing water systems, serving nearly 50,000 community members. Several state supervised water systems have submitted applications that are under review, while others have received a notice of award but have not received a funding agreement. While the SWRCB delays review, award, and issuing agreements, costs continue to rise and our most vulnerable population continues to be left without safe drinking water. While the SWRCB has introduced the Expedited Drinking Water Grant program, the program only changes the time at which a funding agreement is executed but does not appear to reduce timelines.

Solution:

- Work with local agencies to identify willing applicants (such as a county) to receive the funding on behalf of the community to move projects forward, provide competent project management, and increase the effectiveness of disadvantaged community water and wastewater funding.
- Support any effort to streamline the process to execute funding, consolidation agreements and project implementation, to improve construction timelines.

7. Requirements to Provide Farm Labor Housing and Safe Drinking Water

Challenge:

The Department of Housing and Community Development analyzes special housing needs for farmworkers. If the County's Housing Element demonstrates a need for farm labor housing the County is required, under statute, to permit the development of said housing. However, the identified water supply often does not meet state and federal drinking water standards. In this scenario, the County is forced to violate state policy either by denying the housing development based on inadequate water supply or by approving the housing without adequate, safe drinking water.

Solution:

- Support coordination between the Division and Drinking Water and the Department of Housing and Community Development to resolve the conflict by requiring proof of safe drinking water availability prior to approving farm labor housing development.

8. Sustainable Groundwater Management Act

Challenge:

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) was signed into law in 2014. SGMA required Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) to adopt Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSPs) by January 31, 2020. The GSPs identify the sustainable yields of the three high-priority groundwater sub-basins in Tulare County. Over the next 20 years, GSAs will bring groundwater extraction into balance with the sustainable yield. Estimates on land fallowing are upwards of 60% in some areas. This threatens the health of Tulare County's residents and economy. Additionally, two of the County's three subbasins are facing Probationary Status. The process by which a subbasin is released from probation is undefined as is the level of local input and control through the probationary period.

Solution:

- Support flexibility in funding that minimizes land fallowing, such as Regional Conservation Investment Strategies multi-benefit land repurposing projects, and groundwater recharge projects.
- Support initiatives that provide technical support for water markets with rules that safeguard small farmers and disadvantaged communities.
- Support minimizing unsustainable practices that impact beneficial water users in Tulare County.

9. Water Supply South of the Delta

Challenge:

Existing interpretation of regulations and guidelines imposes limitations on water supply through the Central Valley Project water system. With the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, surface water supplies are even more important to Tulare County's residents and growers as Groundwater Sustainability Agencies work to implement Groundwater Sustainability Plans. Additionally, water deliveries are threatened by many factors, including damaged or missing infrastructure and environmental controls. To reach sustainability and foster resilience, surface water supplies and conveyance must be improved. Surface water provides flexibility in water supply for municipal users, increasing opportunities for recharge amongst other benefits.

Solution:

- Request that the State Water Resources Control Board interpret its duties with maximum flexibility to allow for larger water deliveries south of the Delta.
- Oppose efforts to restrict water flows to the Delta.
- Support surface water storage, storage-enhancement, and conveyance projects.
- Support ongoing and direct funding to repair the Friant Kern Canal, along with other critical infrastructure.

10. Wastewater

Challenge:

Disadvantaged communities face challenges in treating wastewater effectively, which degrades the health and safety of residents in these communities. Wastewater projects are expensive and time-consuming to implement. SB 1215 (Hertzberg, 2018) tasked the SWRCB to develop a voluntary sewer consolidation program and provide funding for such projects. Failing septic and wastewater collection infrastructure plagues many communities while the SWRCB develops its program. AB 805 (Arambula, 2024) authorizes the appointment of an administrator for a failing sewer system. Ongoing funding for Administrators is essential to make this work.

Solution:

- Support legislation for emergency funding for sewer emergencies.
- Support adequate funding for disadvantaged communities to consolidate wastewater infrastructure.
- Support funding for wastewater facilities and wastewater administrators.



HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

1. Office of Emergency Services (OES)

Challenge:

County Emergency Management Programs are often severely underfunded and under-staffed, receiving only Federal pass-through funding from the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services. Meanwhile, the Legislature continues to impose new planning requirements on local governments, including those around Emergency Operations Plans, Hazard Mitigation Plans, Access & Functional Needs populations, Cultural Competency, Alert & Warning, Evacuation, Sheltering, and other topics. The Legislature continues to increase funding for corresponding programs and oversight within the Governor’s Office of Emergency Services; however, no consideration has been given to building the additional capabilities at the local level necessary to meet these new mandates. Given that all disasters are local, and local capabilities will ultimately drive the success or failure of disaster responses, this situation is untenable and counterproductive to both the public interest and meeting the Legislature’s intent.

Solution:

- Support the creation of additional, sustained funding sources for emergency management programs.
- Support and advocate for bills similar to the failed AB 291 (Chu, 2019) or provisions ultimately removed from AB 1721 (Rodriguez, 2022).
- Support funding for emergency disaster planning, public health emergency management, preparedness, response, and recovery from natural and man-made disasters.

Challenge:

The ongoing drought conditions in Tulare County have exposed interrelated issues that limit an effective, streamlined, and fully funded drought response. For example:

1. “All disasters are local,” and the State expects counties to respond despite not providing a flexible or all-encompassing funding source via the California Disaster Assistance Act {CDAA}. This limits the ability to undertake solutions such as mobile showers, toilets, laundry, assistance centers, receiving and distributing donated goods, providing non-potable water-fill stations, and other actions not specifically anticipated under other programs.
2. Funding and programs provided, such as those through the (SWRCB), are narrowly written for specific response actions, such as providing bottled or hauled water, with inflexible criteria (e.g., gallons per day not including water for evaporative coolers and hard limits on bottled water,

regardless of household size) and ignore other needs (e.g., non-potable water, animals, and other livestock).

3. SWRCB programs are not streamlined in a manner conducive to meeting emergency response needs, at least in part due to requirements imposed on the funding streams.
4. Some programs are narrowly written so that only nonprofits can apply, thereby eliminating a county's ability to leverage these programs.

Solution:

- Support legislation to streamline disaster relief funding under CDAA and broaden program-eligible activities to include those identified as necessary by the applicant.
- Support legislation to broaden SWRCB and other program parameters, and eliminate time-consuming requirements, to streamline and expedite application and implementation timelines.
- Support legislation to expand eligibility for grants that are currently restricted to nonprofits to include government agencies.

2. CalWORKs

Challenge: Eliminate the Asset Test

To qualify for public assistance under CalWORKs, impoverished families must demonstrate that they are both income and asset poor. Asset limits were intended to ensure that public assistance programs provide benefits only to those with too few resources to support themselves. But years of research and practitioner experience have proven that personal savings and assets are precisely the kinds of resources that allow people to move off public benefits programs. Without being able to maintain or build up a small savings cushion, these families are highly vulnerable to falling into debt in the event of an emergency or other unexpected expense. The asset test has been removed from both CalFresh and Medi-Cal.

Solution:

- Support the elimination of considering assets as a condition of eligibility for CalWORKs.

Challenge: Repeal the 100-hour standard

To qualify for public assistance under CalWORKs, a family with a related child under 18 years of age who has been deprived of parental support or care due to the unemployment of their parent, must have worked less than 100 hours in the preceding four (4) weeks and meet specified requirements. Once qualified, existing law authorizes a family receiving CalWORKs benefits to continue to receive assistance regardless of the number of hours their parent works, if the family does not exceed the application gross or net income limits and is otherwise eligible for assistance.

Solution:

- Support the elimination of the 100-hour standard for purposes of determining a child's deprivation of parental support or care due to the unemployment of their parent.

3. Public Guardian Support

Challenge:

In light of SB 1338 (Umberg, 2022 (CARE Court))the Public Guardian’s Office and County Counsel may see a significant increase in additional workload, resulting in a need for additional resources to adequately address the needs of vulnerable elderly and disabled members of our community.

Solution:

- Support additional funding to augment Public Guardian’s Office, and County Counsel staffing.

4. In-Home Support Services (IHSS)

Challenge:

The Governor’s enacted proposal for the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) restructure resulted in the IHSS Administration and IHSS Public Authority Administration being removed from the MOE. These two areas have continued to be funded through allocations. IHSS advocacy groups continue to ask for additional provisions related to collective bargaining, such as increasing the Realignment withholding amount. The escalating share of county costs with IHSS is a growing concern. The costs for the IHSS administration and provider wages increase each year due to growing caseloads and the cost of doing business.

Solution:

- Support policy that prioritizes the fiscal sustainability of the IHSS program.

5. Foster Youth

Challenge: Licensure for Specialized Foster Youth Residential Facilities

AB 808 (Stone, 2021) would have required the State Department of Social Services to license specialized foster homes as residential facilities providing board, care, and supervision by a resource parent pursuant to standards developed in consultation with specified entities and persons. It would have also required specialized foster homes to meet prescribed standards that apply to resource families, and to complete training as a condition of obtaining and maintaining licensure. Finally, it would have established rates standards and would have required the department to adopt regulations and determine appropriate provider rates. Although the bill failed to pass, the above measures are positive and should be enacted by the Legislature in future legislation.

Solution:

- Support the initiation and regulation of rate standards for providers.

Challenge: Foster Youth Housing

The Department of Housing and Community Development provides funding to counties for allocation to CWS agencies to help young adults 18–24 years of age secure and maintain housing, with priority given to young adults formerly in the state’s foster care or probation systems. Current law suspended certain provisions of this program on December 31, 2021. AB 413 (Arambula, 2021) would have deleted the provisions that conditionally suspend elements of the program and subject the requirements of the program to an annual appropriation in the Budget Act so that the elements could continue.

Solution:

- Support a finding by the Department of Finance to continue the Foster Youth Housing program.
- Support legislation like AB 413 (Arambula, 2021).

6. Continuum of Care Reform (CCR)*Challenge:*

CCR implementation consists of comprehensive initial child assessments, increasing the use of home-based family care, and the provision of services and support to home-based family care to improve California’s child welfare system. Funding for Continuum of Care True Up costs is critical and without it, there will be a significant reduction in services for Resource Family Approval, Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool, and the Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention, and Support (FPRRS) allocations, causing an anticipated \$1.34 million negative impact to Child Welfare Services provided to youth and families.

Solution:

- Support additional funding for Continuum of Care True Up costs.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & INTEGRATED SERVICES**7. Homelessness***Challenge:*

Communities in Tulare County have experienced increases in the number of homeless persons in recent years. As of the January 2024 Point in Time (PIT) survey, Tulare County is estimated to have 1,260 homeless persons, with over 80% unsheltered, a 10% increase since 2022. Of the 1,260 individuals, several self-reported barriers to housing including, 36% who cited mental illness, 37% who cited substance use, and 41% who cited a disabling condition. Self-reported reasons for homelessness include 15% who cited no affordable housing, and 14% who cited unemployment.

Jurisdictions vary in their system capacity and readiness to implement activities that improve the condition of the homeless. Consequently, flexibility in eligible activities for new homeless programs would help jurisdictions implement activities that fit the local need. Moreover, it would be ideal to streamline redundant,

administrative reporting requirements for complementary county programs, so that counties can have a single agreement that aligns cross-departmental funding streams.

Despite historic investments by the State, funding streams have been complex, application requirements burdensome and inefficient, and gaps between the announcement and awarding of funding have been substantial. The funding provided by the State has been a one-time investment. This leaves local communities with no moderate or long-term funding to sustain these investments building a potential fiscal cliff that will drive unparalleled increases in homelessness. It is crucial for the State to provide and protect long-term funding.

The development of shelters, navigation centers, interim housing, and permanent housing should be well planned and not compressed into the short development timelines under existing Homekey requirements. This funding must be adequate to develop and sustain a project as well as provide supportive services. It should also ideally not be required to find matching funds or braid together funding from other complex funding streams, as communities already contribute local resources to address homelessness, and braided funding creates an excessive administrative burden.

A major challenge to local communities is the lack of adequate subsidies. We need a combination of strong advocacy from the State to the Federal government to secure more housing vouchers as well as funding from the State to provide deep housing subsidies for residents.

Encampment Resolution Funding Grants need to be flexible and allow for a community-wide approach to resolving encampments rather than an approach which only targets specific areas. The recent Executive Order encouraging jurisdictions to break up encampments is counter-productive to establishing rapport and efficient service delivery. Rather than eliminating encampments, jurisdictions need more funding and support to establish safe encampment and parking sites, funding to stabilize and support these areas, and robust funding to develop, operate, serve, and maintain an array of housing options.

Solution:

- Support legislation that reduces artificial system barriers related to privacy and information sharing.
- Recommend that state agencies promoting services to the homeless convene and negotiate initiatives, then package them for counties to keep streamlined communication and reporting.
- Support flexible and ongoing funding for efforts related to any and all of the following: case management; brick and mortar and/or acquisition; development of low-income housing, shelters, and other housing options needs identified; outreach and engagement; operation sustainability of existing housing, shelters, and other housing projects; and direct services and payments to remove barriers of entry into housing.

8. Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court

Challenge:

A new court process called CARE Court proposes to deliver community-based behavioral health services and supports, including substance use disorder services, to individuals suffering from untreated schizophrenia spectrum and psychotic disorders. This new diversion tool intends to combat homelessness,

incarceration and conservatorship. A petition may be filed with the court by various types of people (ie. family, behavioral health professionals, first responders, etc.) to create a CARE agreement/court-ordered plan to provide behavioral health care (stabilization medication, housing, and services).

Dedicated, sustained, and full funding is needed to support the programming and services mandated by the CARE Court statute (SB 1338 (Umberg, 2022)). Funding must be flexible to support the housing spectrum and a holistic system with clear responsibilities, flexible tools, and sustainable funding to alleviate the multiple system issues of homelessness and behavioral health.

Solution:

- Support dedicated, sustained, flexible and full funding for programs and services mandated by the CARE Court statute.
- Encourage the administration to ensure that CARE Court individuals are prioritized through the housing Continuum of Care to expedite placement.

Challenge:

Recent legislation, such as SB 1400 (Stern, 2024), has created new requirements for CARE Courts. This legislation has added increased tracking and reporting of all active and former CARE participants for an unspecified period; created a requirement for counties to gather and report on data and information regarding individuals who are “potentially eligible CARE Act participants,” or “potentially eligible for the CARE process,” while not clearly defining these terms; and added additional requirements to track outreach and engagement services for those voluntarily engaged.

Such broad and poorly defined mandates will result in a significant administrative burden on counties, which can divert resources away from service-delivery and addressing the needs of homeless individuals, as well those suffering from mental illness or substance use disorder.

Solution:

- Support efforts to better define terms with regards to newly mandated CARE Court tracking and reporting requirements, as well as efforts to reduce the administrative burden imposed by them.

9. Medi-Cal Transformation (formerly known as CalAIM)

Challenge:

Medi-Cal Transformation is a long-term commitment to transform and strengthen Medi-Cal, offering Californians a more equitable, coordinated, and person-centered approach to maximizing their health and life trajectory.

Medi-Cal Transformation is shifting the entirety of the health care delivery system by combining medical, behavioral and social services in ways that have historically remained separate, both financially and operationally. This will allow the promotion of wellness and engagement of those individuals that are at a higher risk whether that risk is due to complex health conditions, homelessness, mental health,

complications due to age, the complexities of re-entering the community after a period of incarceration, or many other conditions. Outreach and engagement efforts for these populations tend to require more than one contact, intense coordination across multiple disciplines and providers, and all of these activities and interventions require funding to support the efforts.

One of the initiatives of Medi-Cal Transformation involves criminal justice in which all incarcerated persons are screened for and provided access to Medi-Cal while incarcerated, have access to re-entry services in the last 90 days of incarceration, and receive robust linkages to health/behavioral health services upon release. This provides an incarcerated person the opportunity to receive expanded services, case management and supports that will continue after their incarceration period. The services are funded by their Medi-Cal benefits. This initiative has been a challenging endeavor to implement within correctional facilities as Medi-Cal benefits have not historically been allowed within a correctional setting. The infrastructure needed to allow for Medi-Cal billing includes strict certification processes, secure data exchange requirements, complicated coordination amongst many stakeholders, and increased presence of staff within facilities. The staffing resources at times have competing objectives with limited funds. In addition, there are new stakeholders that need to collect and share various data points such as Managed Care Plans, case management providers, and Department of Health Care Services in addition to those that have historically been involved in the correctional facilities like the court system and embedded clinical staff. These additional demands of data, coordination, and operations increase the need for staff and infrastructure across multiple county departments. However, the proposed revenue through Medi-Cal billing do not fully fund anticipated costs.

Low-income housing options are minimal compared to the needs of Tulare County and are a primary concern within the high-risk populations served. For large numbers of individuals that live under the poverty limit and numerous working families who can barely make ends meet, low-income housing inventory is key to getting people started on the path to health and wellness.

Dedicated funding is essential for the sustainability of these programs as they continue past initial implementation. Funding administered by the Managed Care Plans to provide enhanced care management and community supports must be fully funded and passed on to the provider. The burden of coordinating and avoiding duplication of services should reside with Managed Care Plans and utilization data should be accurate, timely, and easily utilized to direct resources where they make the most impact.

Solution:

- Support full funding for all behavioral health, SUD, physical health, social services, and enhanced care management activities throughout the Medi-Cal Transformation reform process.
- Support legislation that supports development and sustainability of low- to no-income housing such as subsidized housing, increasing existing voucher programs, or introducing new housing program options.
- Modernize technology systems and reduce barriers for data sharing between organizations to support whole person care efforts and establish uniformity across the whole provider network to increase care coordination and decrease duplication of services.

10. Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Funding

Challenge:

The Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) previously funded the enhancement and/or expansion of mental health services via a voter-approved initiative which ensured that funds are available to, and under the control of, locally constituted boards. These boards prioritize funds to address the mental health needs of local residents based on stakeholder input. Frequently, the State Legislature uses MHSA funds as a way of either funding mandates that they are unable to pay for through other funding sources, or by allowing a portion of MHSA funds to be diverted to specific initiatives or projects. With the passing of Proposition 1, MHSA is being re-envisioned to become the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA).

The funding is being restructured to assign a larger portion of the local allocation of funds to be dedicated to housing-specific resources, which would certainly be welcomed. However, to meet this new mandate, other established programs will be reduced or eliminated, particularly services supported by prevention and early intervention (PEI) funds. By mandating a funding shift from the current structure to the new structure, BHSA is not only depriving Tulare County residents who depend on PEI-funded services, it also embodies a strategy that risks making temporary gains in reducing the homeless population, only to lose those gains in the long term. By eliminating services designed to prevent severe mental illness, BHSA results in fewer individuals with early symptoms of mental illness receiving needed supports and interventions, which not only requires more expensive interventions when symptoms become more severe, it also seems likely to add to the population whose mental illness and substance use disorder issues lead them to homelessness, an outcome which would be completely counter-productive in the long term to the purported aims of the BHSA restructuring in the first place.

Funding additional mandates at the local level or reducing MHSA/BHSA funds at the State level reduces available funds in Tulare County, and results in reduced levels of service as well as diminishing control over funding choices by the local MHSA/BHSA board.

Solution:

- Support efforts to protect MHSA/BHSA funding and allow counties flexibility to identify and decide how these funds would best serve the local community.
- Support efforts to replace PEI funds which are being eliminated under Proposition 1/BHSA to preserve programs that rely on PEI funds and are unable to bill Medi-Cal and have no other funding source.

11. Crisis Services: Children/Youth & Schools

Challenge:

Prior to the pandemic, increased incidents of mental health and substance use disorders among children and adolescents had been reported. Post-pandemic our community continues to be impacted by the long-term social and emotional effects of that experience. Both locally and nationally, the number of youth and adults experiencing a mental health crisis continues to increase drastically. Nationally, suicide continues to be the second leading cause of death for adolescents and young adults.

There continues to be an elevated need for children and adult crisis services. Both law enforcement and our local hospital emergency rooms have stepped in to ensure safety and care for individuals in need. We have local mobile crisis teams that respond in the field to youth and adults experiencing a crisis, in collaboration with law enforcement officers and hospital staff. There is a need to further build out a crisis continuum of care with supportive infrastructure.

Challenge:

AB 988 (Bauer-Kahan, 2022) seeks to streamline crisis call centers. The administration proposed amendments to AB 988 in July of 2022 and added new requirements for private insurance to reimburse for mobile crisis services. Their initial approach amended the definition of emergency medical condition to include mobile crisis services. In the final version, private plans are only required to reimburse for medically necessary mobile crisis services, which does not apply to EMS services. The change establishes a high standard for field-based mobile crisis teams addressing emergency behavioral health crisis need. While the original language was clear, the amendments will have detrimental consequences on the viability of county efforts to stand up 24/7 mobile crisis services under Medi-Cal and 988 and will require a level of clinician participation in mobile crisis that is untenable in the current workforce crisis environment.

Solution:

- Support amendments to current legislation to ensure that all services under AB 988 are fully compensated and that mobile crisis service reimbursement is based on a practical standard for teams in the field.

12. Criminal Justice

Challenge:

Providing suitable physical and behavioral health services for incarcerated individuals, while in jail and upon release, continues to be difficult. Many individuals experiencing serious mental illness are jailed for charges related to their mental health, and then their mental health deteriorates while incarcerated. For those who are found incompetent to stand trial (IST) due to their mental illness, individuals often wait many months for a bed at a state hospital for restoration to competency. Upon release, they often face lack of housing and barriers to treatment leading to a vicious cycle of further incarcerations or psychiatric hospitalizations.

Challenge: IST Growth Cap

Statutory requirements established an IST Growth Cap for all counties for individuals found to be incompetent to stand trial (IST) due to a mental illness on felony charges. The Department of State Hospitals (DSH) created a baseline for each county regarding the number of IST determinations they could make. When the IST determinations exceed the baseline, the county will be charged a penalty rate. The penalty payments will be issued back to the county to be used to support local initiatives designed to prevent the arrest of individuals with serious mental illness such as pre-booking mental health diversion, post-booking mental health diversion, and/or re-entry services and support.

Solution:

- Support legislation that would reduce the waitlist for IST individuals by focusing on Early Stabilization, Community Care Coordination and Expanding Diversion and for this population.
- Support fully funding all aspects of criminal justice reforms including implementation and sustainability.



INFRASTRUCTURE

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Four-Year Public University Campus

Challenge:

California State University, Fresno has a satellite campus in Visalia, California. The four-classroom building at the College of the Sequoias currently offers non-credit professional development courses and expanding higher-degree programs.

Of the 24,000 students enrolled in Fresno State, at least 4,600 are from Tulare County. As South Valley students consider whether to pursue a higher-education degree, the decision is made more difficult due to access issues such as cost, commute, and housing.

At the November 8, 2022, General Election, local voters approved Measure C, a \$95 million bond measure for the College of the Sequoias to expand its University Center program and provide local, affordable university degrees and career training, including nursing, public safety, education, agriculture/water technology, and business. Funds will also be used to acquire, construct, and repair classrooms, facilities, sites, and equipment for the new and expanded programs. Additional resources and support will be needed to help meet anticipated demand.

Solution:

- Support efforts to secure four-year higher education degree programs in Tulare County.
- Support funding to stimulate growth at the Fresno State satellite campus.

2. Libraries and Literacy for Adults and Families

Challenge:

The state provides support for county Adult and Family Literacy programs. These programs primarily help adults gaining basic literacy skills and families acquiring the necessary skills to incorporate literacy education into their daily lives. The State has also provided support for Career Online High School program and English as a Second Language support. The state funding for the Library for FY 2024/25 is estimated to be almost \$166,000, not including any local funds for staff support of the Career Online High School program. These funds are critical to the continued needs for our literacy program. In FY 2021/22, the state

began to support a new English as a Second Language grant that we hope continues to be funded beyond FY 2025/26.

Additionally, the state provides support of the California Library Services Act (CLSA), California Teleconnect Fund, and High-Speed Broadband. Services like these ensure that the County Library can continue to provide shared access to materials statewide and internet service connections through the California Research and Education Network (CalREN). These services open the world of information and learning to our users within and beyond the county's borders. Funds received for these services, including systemwide delivery, discounted connectivity, and broadband assistance and maintenance are managed by the San Joaquin Valley Library System.

In the FY 23/24 Budget, the state provided funding for grants such as including ZipBooks, infrastructure, programming, and outreach support, especially Lunch at the Library and Park Pass programs, the library applied and/or received. The State has eliminated support this year, so without continued support of grants like these, the library will not be able to repair and update branches to ensure they are safer and more accessible and provide more services to rural and underserved communities.

Over the last few years, the State provided access to eBooks, career resources, online homework help, and a few other statewide resources, many that will no longer be funded. The Library is grateful statewide eBooks continued, but SB321 now requires public libraries to issue a student success card by 3rd grade by January 1, 2026. In addition, the bill states that students need access to online tutoring which is no longer funded by the state

Solution:

- Support continued, ongoing, and increased funding for the Adult and Family Literacy programs, including Career Online High School, ESL, CLSA, the student success card program, High-Speed Broadband, and online tutoring and other online resources to ensure continued and updated services.
- Support continued funding for infrastructure, programming, and outreach to ensure safe and accessible buildings and services.

HARD INFRASTRUCTURE

3. Broadband for all

Challenge:

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), broadband is unavailable to approximately 24 million Americans or 7% percent of the population. Twenty-eight percent of Americans living in rural communities, lack access. Over time, various forms of legislation have been proposed to bring all federal and state broadband programs to the current definition of what the FCC defines as high-speed internet. The goal is to ensure that all communities receiving broadband support have access to internet services that are at current broadband speeds.

Solution:

- Support legislation and/or state budget appropriation to finance local community technology advancements.
- Support enhancing broadband services in rural communities.

4. SR 99 Widening*Challenge:*

The need for congestion mitigation allowing for the expeditious movement of goods and supplies through the SR 99 corridor is integral to our state and nation's economy. The increase in capacity will increase safety, reduce congestion, increase connectivity, improve travel-time reliability of time-sensitive goods, and preserve acceptable facility operation on SR-99. The 2018 annual daily truck traffic was 27.6% and the number of truck trips is expected to nearly double within 20 years. Traffic projections indicate current capacity will be exceeded within 10 years, resulting in greater delay and congestion. Additionally, inhibiting the proliferation of greenhouse gases produced by idling traffic on our highways is in line with the state's air quality priorities.

Solution:

- Support full funding for the completion of the SR-99 widening project to a minimum of six lanes through all of Tulare County.

5. Rural Road Funding Formulas*Challenge:*

Rural counties have a higher ratio of road miles to population than urban areas and are fundamentally disadvantaged by road funding formulas disbursed on the basis of relative population and/or vehicle registration. Tulare County is responsible for maintaining roughly 3,000 miles of road each year; enough to pave the way from California to Connecticut. Additionally, our roads are the main arteries for the transportation of agricultural goods enjoyed across the nation and throughout the world. A fully loaded dairy truck can weigh up to 80,000 pounds and exerts the equivalent wear and tear on a road surface as 10,000 passenger cars with each delivery. Any new and existing funding sources for road maintenance should implement an allocation method that considers the number of road miles in a given area and/or the type of traffic utilizing those roads.

Solution:

- Support legislation that implements road funding formulas weighted towards the number of maintained road miles in a given area and/or takes into account the impact daily traffic has on those roads.

SOLID WASTE

6. SB 1383 (Lara, 2016) Short-Lived Climate Pollutants Regulations

Challenge:

SB 1383 requires a 50% reduction in statewide disposal of organic waste by 2020 and a 75% reduction by 2025. There are several barriers to achieving such high diversion levels in rural counties. Lack of infrastructure to compost this material, regulatory barriers to permit new facilities, and difficulty enforcing mandatory recycling are just a few hurdles rural counties face. Furthermore, organics recycling is costly and, with much of Tulare County designated as an economically distressed area, it makes the implementation of an effective diversion program cost prohibitive.

Solution:

- Support the creation of a state clearinghouse for organics recycling resources and services.
- Support standardization of collection practices and rates.
- Support legislation for the development and implementation of product recycling programs.
- Oppose the application of organic waste products on agricultural land that pose a threat to the environment and food supply.

7. Workforce Development

Challenge:

Tulare County faces a mismatch of excess unemployment in our labor force and a business community that faces shortfalls of qualified and trained workers. The economy of Tulare County is facing rapid change due to several factors, both regulatory and natural, and our resources to support workers and businesses through this transition are limited.

Most Workforce Development funding is received through Federal WIOA appropriations. These funds are not able to address many of the challenges that are faced by undocumented Tulare County residents that are disproportionately affected by current and upcoming shocks to our agriculture-based economy from climate change and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

Solution:

- Support additional workforce development resources from the state directed towards counties and workforce development areas negatively affected by SGMA policies.
- Support additional state appropriated unrestricted funding to Workforce Development Boards so that local boards can address the needs of undocumented residents.

8. Advanced Clean Fleets

Challenge:

Tulare County faces significant barriers in transitioning to zero-emission vehicles (ZEVs) under the Advanced Clean Fleets (ACF) regulation due to its vast rural geography and limited EV charging infrastructure. Current ZEV technology for medium- and heavy-duty vehicles does not meet the operational range required for essential services such as emergency response, road maintenance, and agriculture. Additionally, Tulare County's exclusion from the ACF rural county classification restricts access to critical exemptions and funding opportunities, further hindering compliance efforts.

Solution:

- Advocate for increased state funding to develop EV charging infrastructure in underserved rural areas, with a focus on critical service routes.
- Support legislation to reclassify Tulare County as a rural county under ACF regulations, enabling access to exemptions and targeted funding.
- Promote flexibility in ACF compliance timelines and exemptions for rural counties until ZEV technology and infrastructure adequately support operational needs.
- Advocate for utility rebate programs that allow rural counties to maintain energy management autonomy during peak demand.
- Seek modifications to rebate and grant requirements to prioritize infrastructure development for county fleet operations without mandating public access.



GENERAL GOVERNMENT

CEQA REFORM

1. Elimination of the “Fair Argument” Test

Challenge:

Many projects are delayed or stopped because of the very low threshold set by the “fair argument” test. The “fair argument” test provides that if there is a fair argument that the proposed project will significantly affect the environment, then an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) shall be prepared, even if there is substantial evidence to the contrary. (See the leading case of *Friends of “B” Street v. City of Hayward* [1980] 106 Cal.App.3d 988.)

Non-exempt projects under CEQA should be subject to the “substantial evidence” test. According to the “substantial evidence” test, an environmental document will be upheld by the court if there is substantial evidence to conclude that the project will not cause a significant environmental effect, even if there is substantial evidence to the contrary.

Solution:

- Support legislation to amend both CEQA and the applicable state CEQA Guidelines to eliminate the “fair argument” test applicable to negative declarations and mitigated negative declarations. Public Resources Code Section 21080, subs. (c), (d); 14 Cal. Code Regs. Section 15064) and state CEQA Guidelines should be amended to read as follows:

Proposed Language: “‘The ‘substantial evidence’ test shall apply to a challenge to a negative declaration or mitigated negative declaration in that this environmental document may be upheld if there is any substantial evidence to conclude that the project will not cause a significant environmental effect, even if there is substantial evidence to the contrary.’”

GOVERNMENT FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

2. Civil Fines and Penalties: Amend Government Code Section 54988

Challenge:

Pursuant to Government Code Section 54988, code enforcement fees and costs may not be placed on the tax rolls as a lien for collection. Since fines and penalties are a customary part of the code enforcement assessment, they should be allowed to be placed on the tax rolls as a lien to ensure collection as a

deterrent against activities that are harmful to public health, safety, and general welfare. In doing so, Section 54988 should be amended as follows.

Proposed Language:

- 54988. (a) (1) *In addition to any other remedy provided by law, including the current powers of charter cities, the legislative body of a city, county, or city and county may collect any fee, cost, fine or penalty, or charge incurred in any of the following:*
 - (A) *The abatement of public nuisances.*

3. Criminal Justice System

Challenge:

The state of California has seen an increase in rehabilitation services. These increased rehabilitation services have been implemented without fully considering the impact on county incarceration operations. Many decisions at the state level, such as the early release of inmates and zero-bail initiatives, have negatively affected local jurisdictions. The County of Tulare takes particular interest in the well-being of our residents and places emphasis on evidence-based programs and services that support and prepare incarcerated individuals to transition back to the community successfully.

Solution:

- Support efforts and resources to improve and enhance the criminal justice system overall.
- Oppose zero-bail legislation and initiatives.

4. Public Noticing Process

Challenge:

California law requires notices to be published in newspapers of general circulation. It automatically recognizes newspapers currently adjudicated to accept such notices. This can prove to be costly for local government agencies to fulfill this unfunded state mandate.

Solution:

- Support legislation to allow for online posting of public notices and/or an alternate solution to newspaper publishing and the associated costs.

5. Public Records Act

Challenge:

The California Public Records Act of 1968 (Act), requires that governmental records be made accessible to the public upon request, unless otherwise exempted by law. Use of the Act has skyrocketed over the past

decade. Unfortunately, the Act created a cluster of rules that have caused financial and administrative difficulties for counties and other local jurisdictions.

Solution:

- Support legislation to alter the system in a way that retains the law's features without exposing government entities to unnecessary liability, frivolous litigation, or burdensome workloads.

6. Proposition 13 & Property Tax

Challenge:

Before 1978, there was no limit to how high an assessor could increase a property's value in any given year. Many taxpayers could not afford the variable property tax rates. Proposition 13 resolved those issues by limiting total taxes to 1% of the property's value and limited the annual automatic increase in unassessed property values to a maximum of 2%. Proposition 13 required that all categories of real property on the local assessment roll be assessed at the same basic tax rate and under the same valuation standard.

The California Schools and Local Community Funding Act of 2018, an initiative proposal for a split roll property tax, is a constitutional amendment that was on the November 2020 ballot. "Split roll" means applying a different tax formula, either tax rate, reassessment frequency, or vote requirement, to commercial and industrial properties from that applied to residential properties. This would remove some of the protections of Proposition 13 from nonresidential properties, to raise taxes.

Solution:

- Oppose efforts to amend and/or repeal Proposition 13.

7. Full Funding for State Mandates & Local Control

Challenge:

The State of California frequently passes laws that mandate counties to provide certain services or perform specific tasks, with state law requiring that these mandates must be funded by the legislature. However, state funding is often does not cover the full cost these mandates impose on counties and their agencies. This shortfall highlights the importance of maintaining local control, which allows counties to develop policies and allocate resources in ways that directly respond to their unique geography, demographics, economy, and cultural values, rather than being constrained by one-size-fits-all mandates from the state. In recent years, the state has increasingly eroded local control through legislation and regulations that impose statewide standards on issues like housing, land use, public safety, and environmental policies. While these measures aim to address broader concerns, they often undermine the ability of counties to make decisions that reflect their communities' specific needs. Retaining authority over critical local issues ensures that counties can innovate and adapt to unique and emerging challenges.

Solution:

- Oppose unfunded mandates and realignment initiatives that fail to fully fund services that have been cost-shifted to the County.
- Oppose legislation and rule making that infringes upon local control.

8. Addressing Regional Structural Inequities*Challenge:*

Statewide resources are distributed in ways that inadequately address known and long-standing issues of structural poverty and regional inequality. In some cases, the way the state handles resource distribution intensifies structural inequities for communities struggling with concentrated levels of poverty. Counties with wealthy tax bases have more resources to use in providing health and social services to their residents and are consistently awarded larger proportions of state and federal funding, particularly with competitive grants and grants that are awarded solely based on population distribution.

The State of California should mitigate the negative impact of unequal resource distribution that results in significant economic, health, and social distress for California families. Local jurisdictions should not be financially punished or burdened for having high poverty rates and lower than average property values. The State should consider these factors when distributing resources and, thereby, mitigate regional and structural inequities.

Solution:

- Support efforts to address statewide structural inequities and mitigate the impact of concentrated poverty in areas like the Central Valley.

ELECTIONS**9. Elections Code***Challenge:*

Existing law stipulates that a candidate for a nonpartisan office who, at a primary election, receives votes on a majority of all the ballots cast for candidates for that office is to be elected to that office. Additionally, existing law prescribes that a plurality of the votes given at any election constitutes a choice. AB 1696 (Lee, 2022) would treat County offices like typical partisan offices, and may cause voter and candidate confusion as to when a specific contest will appear on the ballot and increase the cost of elections.

Solution:

- Oppose legislation that treats County offices similarly to typical partisan offices.