

October 31, 2024

MEMO TO: David M. Raatz, Jr., Director of Council Services

F R O M: Clarissa MacDonald, Legislative Analyst *CLM*  
Jarret Pascual, Legislative Analyst *JPP*

SUBJECT: **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES 2024 ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND EXPOSITION** (PAF 23-021(35))

The National Association of Counties (“NACo”) held its annual conference in Tampa, Florida, from July 12 through 15, 2024. Councilmembers Rawlins-Fernandez and Sinenci attended, along with Office of Council Services staff Clarissa MacDonald and Jarret Pascual.

Some of the content of interest is summarized below.

### **Day 1 | Community, Economic and Workforce Development Policy Steering Committee Meeting**

#### *Advancing Housing Affordability Through Innovation*

Representatives from the public and private sector of the housing industry discussed the rising popularity of factory-built housing, including manufactured homes.

#### *Skilled Immigrant Integration Program Overview*

Representatives from World Education Services (“WES”) promoted the program that advances the inclusion of internationally-trained and experienced immigrants and refugees. WES provides technical assistance, training, and coaching to improve inclusion efforts.

### **Day 1 | Health Steering Committee Subcommittee Meeting**

#### *Harnessing the Power of Food: County-Level Food as Medicine Initiatives*

County governments, healthcare providers, and community organizations discussed how to enhance public health through food-based interventions. Examples include community gardens, data mapping of food deserts, and partnerships to combine food pantries with medical check-ups.

*Federal Partner Spotlight U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness*

Jeff Olivet, Executive Director for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, spoke on improving the health outcome for individuals experiencing homelessness, encouraging data sharing amongst counties, and pushing back on criminalizing homelessness.

*Panel: Innovative County Approaches to Combat Youth Substance Use Disorder*

The panel spoke about programs focused on prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery support for youth. Researchers found higher substance use was often associated to an underlying mental health condition.

**Day 1 | Human Services and Education Policy Steering Committee Meeting**

*Human Services Delivery During Disaster Response: Lessons from the Local Level*

Panelists from the federal, state, and local level discussed challenges and strategies for coordinating access to human services during disaster response and recovery. Panelists proposed designing a common language framework for disaster response; creating a master list of early learning centers to keep track of closures following a disaster; and implementing trauma-informed practices.

**Day 2 | Western Interstate Region (“WIR”) Board of Directors Meeting**

The Wildland Fire Leadership Council (“WFLC”) provided a brief presentation on its key operations and outlook. WIR asked WFLC to consider data tracking on wildfires to determine how far smoke can travel and any corresponding health impacts. Members also asked WIR to investigate the increased cost of fire insurance and its impacts.

**Day 2 | Counties Preparing for and Recovering from Natural Disasters**

Representatives from Jefferson Parish County, Louisiana, and Boulder County, Colorado, provided leadership tips and lessons learned in disaster preparedness. Key tips included training personnel, coordinating volunteer opportunities, and setting up communication channels.

A Tidal Basin Group representative was also present. This firm provides consulting services for pre-disaster mitigation, resilience strategies, and program technical assistance for counties.

## **Day 2 | State Policy Trends: Navigating County Impacts**

This workshop provided a brief overview of policymaking trends in state government, including housing, fiscal trends, and election laws. State-level legislation has focused on strategies to catalyze housing supply and to lower costs. State fiscal trends have negatively impacted local governments through reduced state aid, increased local cost-shares, and unfunded mandates. Common election policies seen at the state level are voter ID and absentee voting; and regulations on artificial intelligence, deepfakes, and ranked-choice voting.

## **Day 2 | Introducing the County Toolkit on Artificial Intelligence (“AI”), Hosted by the AI Exploratory Committee**

NACo AI Exploratory Committee members presented on their AI County Compass Report. They focused on data governance and encouraged counties to ensure mechanisms are in place for employees to clean and govern data appropriately. Counties may want to consider creating an AI task force to determine AI implementation in their county.

## **Day 3 | Enhancing County Mental Health Crisis Response**

This workshop included resources from Nevada, New York, and Minnesota who discussed their jurisdictions’ mental health crisis response work. These include:

- Clark County – Following the 2017 Las Vegas mass shooting, a database of impacted persons was created. Instead of requiring survivors to speak to multiple organizations and risk re-traumatization, a single point-of-contact will call survivors to collect all relevant information.
- Tompkins County – The representative’s family faced difficulties in receiving proper care for their son and in dealing with family violence. Tompkins County is working on a peer support program

to provide better mental health support to employees and first responders.

- Ramsey County – Minnesota established a mobile mental health crisis program. People calling 9-1-1 may be referred to the mental health crisis unit. This unit will travel to the individual in distress and offer follow-up services.

### **Day 3 | Home for All: Equity Considerations and State Legislative Trends in County Housing Affordability**

This session included a presentation and discussion panel on innovative ways to address the nationwide housing affordability crisis. Speakers noted several housing proposals:

- Enabling accessory dwelling units;
- Legalizing multifamily housing in commercial areas;
- Streamlining permit approval processes; and
- Building code reforms to allow manufactured homes.

Some county highlights include:

- Hennepin County, Minnesota – The county purchased five motels and converted them into permanent affordable housing for low-income residents.
- King County, Washington – A 120-studio apartment, Sacred Medicine House, offers housing for adults and Native American adults experiencing homelessness and who struggle to find stable housing.
- Franklin County, Ohio – The Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority developed Harriet’s Hope, a 52-unit project to house human-trafficking survivors.

### **Day 3 | Turning the Tide of the Opioid Epidemic**

Resources from the Indiana Commission to Combat Substance Use Disorder, Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority, and North Carolina Association of County Commissioners described their states' opioid settlement models and discussed the spending of opioid settlement funds.

Indiana has implemented harm reduction strategies, street outreach, and created a pilot program in rural counties to determine who is in need and how to identify them. Virginia employs an overdose response unit which provides support and follow-up services to vulnerable individuals. North Carolina has been conducting evidence-based treatments which can be found on their website "NCopioidsettlement.org".

### **Day 3 | Planning for Prosperity: Start Your County's Strategy for Economic Mobility Today**

This workshop focused on economic diversification strategies and tools to strengthen economic development. Representatives from Boone County, Missouri, presented their Mobility Action Plan, which is aimed to improve upward mobility and reduce racial inequities. Through their partnership with the Urban Institute, Boone County's plan focused on early grade literacy, fair and inclusive housing, and job and workforce development.

Local leaders from Routt County, Colorado, experienced economic downturn as the coal industry declined, leading to Northwest Colorado counties mobilizing to form an economic diversification strategy.

### **Day 4 | Listening Sessions with Hawai'i Officials and Department of Defense**

The U.S. Department of Defense presented their Readiness and Environmental Protection Program's Sentinel Landscapes Partnership initiative to the Hawai'i delegation. The goals of this initiative include:

- Promoting land use to support agriculture, conservation, recreation, and military activities;
- Providing management tools to support threatened and endangered species populations;
- Increasing climate change resilience; and

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- Conserving natural and cultural resources.

The Hawai'i Sentinel Landscape includes parts of Hawai'i County, Kaua'i County, and the City and County of Honolulu. Maui County does not yet contain any sentinel landscapes.

#### **Day 4 | Exploring Generative Artificial Intelligence in County Governance**

A representative from Microsoft introduced Copilot, a generative AI that will be available to the U.S. government in October 2024. It is part of Microsoft's 365 products, such as Word, Outlook, and Teams. More features will continue to roll out in Spring 2025. Panelists spoke about continued privacy concerns with using AI in a governmental capacity. However, Commissioners from King and Cook County said they were already using AI to determine reductions for property taxes and translation services, respectively.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this educational conference. If you have any questions or would like more information on these topics, please contact Jarret at ext. 7141, or Clarissa at ext. 7135.

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cc: Deputy Director of Council Services