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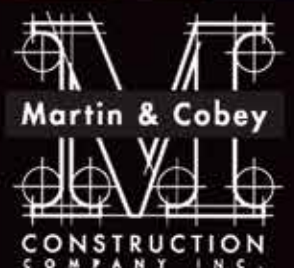


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in this issue

VOLUME 59, NUMBER 1



When the newly elected members of the Alabama Senate convene in Montgomery this year, they will find a much-improved Senate Chamber. More than 20 years ago, the room was intended to be temporary quarters while the historic Capitol was renovated. New furnishings give the Senate Chamber a stately air, on a tight budget that is a credit to Secretary of the Senate D. Patrick Harris and the carpentry skills of state inmates. (Photo: Mike Murphy, Alabama Senate)



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President's CORNER



Hon. Merceria Ludgood
President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Merceria Ludgood".

County Platform gives solid foundation

**A new year,
a new Legislature,
a new beginning**

I think it may have been Fob James, who used the phrase “It’s time for a New Beginning” during his campaign for governor back in the mid-1970s. It’s been a few years so I may be a bit cloudy on the details.

But as we look toward the start of a new legislative term with the 2015 session in March, it certainly is a time for a “New Beginning” for counties and the 140 members of the Alabama Legislature.

Over the last four months our Association has worked hard to learn from the just-ended legislative term and to focus our membership on a set of strategic goals that will guide our activities through the close of the 2018 regular session. This edition of County Commission contains our revised approach for establishing our guiding principles and setting our sights on changes that will make county government more efficient and effective at the local level.

As president, I am gratified by the many hours our members invested in a complete overhaul of our policy document. I am certainly not surprised by the enthusiasm I’ve witnessed during this process – our members have really set the standard for participation and leadership – but this year’s revision required a major investment of time and expertise.

The new 2015 Alabama County Platform is based on 11 “Foundation Principles” that establish clearly and strongly our Association’s posture on the operation of county government, its relationship with the state and federal governments and the ways our services can be improved. Everything we will do over the next 12 months

will be laser-focused under one of those principles.

The language is intentional. It is concise, but pointed. The language binds our membership and our staff to a bedrock philosophy that county government is essential to the state’s continued growth and improvement. Yet, counties are just part of the entire puzzle of government services provided citizens who both depend on and evaluate us every day.

Beyond those principles, the Association membership has identified 37 Strategic Goals that will be the focus of our legislative initiatives over the next four years. The goals are ambitious – some might even be seen as nearly unattainable – but real reform does not begin with a meager list of changes that are of little significance.

Reaching our goals will require the collective wisdom, influence and active support of all of county government – commissioners, chairs, sheriffs, tax officials, probate judges and, just as importantly, the state leaders such as engineers, administrators, 911 directors, emergency management directors, revenue officers and others. The concept of “67 Counties, ONE Voice” must be more than a motto if we are to see a real “New Beginning” for Alabama counties.

Because this platform is such a radical departure from our more traditional policy document, perhaps a closer look at one of our Foundation Principles might help put things into focus.

The relationship between counties and the state is one of both mutual interest and conflicting pressures. As

this new legislative term begins, the financial challenges of Alabama's state government are severe.

That's nothing new to counties. Without the ability to raise revenue on their own, the 67 "legislative" bodies at the county level have significant experience in navigating the budget minefield. Every elected official at the county level wants to improve his or her operation, wants to pay his or her employees a better wage and wants to initiate new programs. Each wants to deliver more effective services and each, predictably, seeks additional revenue to achieve those goals.

And, on an annual basis, it is the county commission that must make the same difficult choices that will face the legislators beginning in March. Our new Foundation Principle on Alabama's Government Structure recognizes that the decisions of the

county commissions and the decisions of the Legislature are interconnected:

*The relationship between Alabama counties and the Alabama Legislature is established in constitutional and statutory law. The preservation of a constitutional relationship between the State of Alabama and its counties as well as a workable and productive statutory allocation of responsibilities between the state and the counties is essential to the delivery of services. **Therefore, Alabama counties encourage the Alabama Legislature to fully fund state agencies and opposes the shifting of costs and administrative responsibility of state functions to the local level through the state budget process.***

This principle will be especially important as the state looks at issues such as prison reform and the full

funding of our struggling mental health services. The Legislature faces financial crisis, but so do the counties.

The funding decisions on state programs will dramatically impact the operation of county government and it is important that the legislators be aware of that impact. Clearly, counties and the state are so closely linked that these decisions – and hundreds more – cannot be made in a vacuum.

So, we begin the new legislative term with a new document that outlines our policies and our goals. Most of the content of the document really isn't "new;" this Association's positions have been consistent for decades. Perhaps the 2015 Alabama County Platform will bring our challenges and our goals into clearer focus as counties and the 140 members of the Alabama Legislature seek a "New Beginning" in a month or so. ■

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From the Cover



Strategic Goals

Members in leadership of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama selected the following as the top priorities in the Alabama Legislature this year. These 2015 Strategic Goals were chosen from ACCA's Strategic Goals for the 2015-2018 Quadrennium (or four-year term) of the state legislature. This larger list follows on page 10.

Website Publication of Legal Notices

The Association will advocate legislation to shift the statutorily-required publication of legal notices from a “newspaper” to publication on a website maintained by the state or by each individual county.

Election-Related Publications

The Association will also advocate for legislation authorizing counties to satisfy election-related publication requirements by posting information on a public website and making copies available at the courthouse.

Constitutional Revision for Counties

The Association will advocate for proposed constitutional amendments to authorize local decision-making; to ensure open debate of local legislation; and to encourage local-only referenda on local constitutional amendments.

County Modernization

The Association will advocate for legislation to modernize existing law in the following ways to better provide for the operation of county government:

- To allow counties general authority to contract with municipalities;
- To clarify Alabama's law related to county commissioner conflicts of interest;
- To authorize counties to create a self-funded property insurance program;



From the Cover

- To limit use of out-of-state cooperative programs for county purchases;
- To clarify language related to use of county warrants and bonds;
- To provide for bonding when the county commission also serves as the 9-1-1 Board;
- To prevent annexing of county-maintained roads along hurricane evacuation routes.

Costs of Housing Juveniles

The Association will advocate for a legislatively-created study commission to comprehensively review the state's juvenile justice system and make recommendations for adequate municipal participation and state funding and administration of

all programs related to the care, detention, and custody of juveniles, including costs of temporary housing in county facilities.

Solid Waste Fee Use

The Association will advocate for broader use of solid waste fees collected for garbage services or as tipping fees provided the use is connected to the provision of solid waste services.

Tax for Internet Sales into Alabama

The Association will advocate for legislation to bring Alabama into compliance with federal legislation related only to collection of taxes owed on internet sales when and if such federal legislation takes effect.

efficient process for counting write-in ballots following an election.

Enforcement against Illegal Drag Racing

The Association will advocate for legislation to prevent illegal drag racing on public roads through strong enforcement and severe penalties, including impoundment of property.

Funding for Rural Roads and Bridges

The Association will advocate for legislation to provide adequate funding of road and bridge projects provided counties receive an equitable portion of funding utilizing the current gas tax formula.

State and Local Emergency Management Programs

The Association will advocate for the creation of a task force to study the need for comprehensive revision of state and local emergency management programs, operations and funding. ■

Counting of Write-in Ballots

The Association will advocate for legislation to provide a more

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Introducing the Alabama County Platform

Small plans would have no magic to stir county leaders to action

If ACCA represents 67 counties speaking with ONE voice, it is no small matter to determine what that one voice will say, whether it is speaking persuasively of ways to advance county government in Alabama or staunchly defending against changes that would bring harm.

What you hold in your hands – the 2015 Alabama County Platform -- reflects months of work by county officials, county employees and your ACCA staff to communicate those positions more crisply than ever before.

“There is no way to begin to count the number of elected county officials and county staff leaders whose time, expertise and insight are reflected in the Alabama County Platform,” said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. “Each and every county owes a debt of gratitude to these individuals who contributed to this document, and special appreciation is due to the members of policy teams, the Legislative Committee and Board of Directors for their efforts. We have a solid plan, and it’s time to get to work.”

Foundation Principles

The platform is organized into 11 Foundation Principles, which are big ideas with headings such as “County Expenditures for Compensation and Benefits” and “Election Administration.” All of ACCA’s legislative efforts are based on those Foundation Principles.

Strategic Goals

Each Foundation Principle is connected to one or more Strategic Goals. You can look at them as a four-year plan, with each one representing specific legislation to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of county government. For example, Foundation Principle I is “County Expenditures for Compensation and Benefits.” The Strategic Goal connected to it for this new term of the Alabama Legislature is about reducing medical costs for workers’ compensation claims.

Considered one by one, many of these goals will not be achieved without significant effort. Taken together, the 37 Strategic Goals are ambitious but not impossible. With all

67 counties working together, shoulder-to-shoulder, much can be accomplished in the next few years.

2015 Strategic Goals

The list of Strategic Goals includes familiar proposals from the 2014 ACCA Legislative Program and new ideas put forward by ACCA members, policy teams and legislators. The ACCA Legislative Committee and Board of Directors added proposals and then went a step further, with the board taking input from the Legislative Committee to select which Strategic Goals are immediate priorities for counties. That process narrowed the focus to 11 specific proposals for the year.

Another Layer

The complete 2015 Alabama County Platform also contains many specific Legislative Policies linked to each Foundation Principle. For the sake of brevity, these are not printed here, but are available at www.alabamacounties.org.

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2015-2018 ALABAMA COUNTY PLATFORM Foundation Principles & Strategic Goals

Adopted by vote of the members of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama on Dec. 4, 2014.

I. County Expenditures for Compensation and Benefits

Foundation Principle: The County Commission is charged with making the budgeting decisions necessary to provide the most effective and efficient services to the citizens within the revenue available in each of the 67 courthouses. Legislatively-mandated adjustments in salary and benefits pose a threat to the delivery of such services. For this reason, the Association opposes any legislation which mandates any expenditure of county revenues for the payment of compensation, salary supplements, expense allowances, or benefits for current or former government officials or employees.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To reform Alabama's workers' compensation law by reasonably reducing medical costs while not subjecting employers to increased payments or expenditures.

II. Alabama Governmental Structure

Foundation Principle: The relationship between Alabama counties and the Alabama Legislature is established in constitutional and statutory law. The preservation of a constitutional relationship between the State of Alabama and its counties as well as a workable and productive statutory allocation of responsibilities between the state and the counties is essential to the delivery of services. Therefore, Alabama counties encourage the Alabama Legislature to fully fund state agencies and opposes the shifting of costs and administrative responsibility of state functions to the local level through the state budget process.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of

legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To shift the statutorily-required publication of legal notices from a "newspaper" to publication on a website maintained by the state or by each individual county.

To provide constitutional amendments to authorize local decision-making; to ensure open debate of local legislation; and to encourage local-only referenda on local constitutional amendments.

To provide for six year terms of office for county commissioners.



III. Mandated and Unfunded Legislation

Foundation Principle: Without the authority to levy taxes or even collect fees for services, Alabama counties constantly struggle to provide an adequate level of services to ensure health, safety and prosperity of local citizens. Alabama's constitution

From the Cover

provides protection from the enactment of mandated and unfunded responsibilities onto county government to ensure the financial integrity of the commission. The Association strongly supports the intent of Alabama's constitutional language prohibiting the enactment of unfunded mandates and opposes the establishment of such mandates through federal or state administrative actions.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To amend the unfunded mandate constitutional

amendment to provide that the exemption for defining crimes apply only to provisions of the law defining or amending a crime.



The budgetary, personnel and administrative functions carried out by the county commission are essential to the financial and operational health of county government in Alabama. The Association opposes any efforts that will obstruct the commission's ability to effectively govern and to maintain the administrative and financial well-being of the services delivered by the county commission.

IV. County Operations and Budget Authority

Foundation Principle: The county governing body serves as both the legislative and administrative branch of government at the local level – carrying out both budgetary duties as well as providing administrative leadership for many functions.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To modernize existing law as appropriate to better provide



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for the operation of county government.

To authorize counties to create a self-funded property insurance program.

To provide that the county commission sets the hours of operation of county offices.

To clarify statutory language related to use of county warrants and bonds.

To protect counties, officials, employees, or agents against liability for official actions provided there is no change in the statutory damage cap for awards against counties.

To require municipalities to provide animal control services within its jurisdictional limits or contribute a pro rata share of services provided by the county.

To amend the competitive bid law to allow counties to grant a local preference where the local vendor's bid is within 5% of the lowest responsible bidder

V. Election Administration

Foundation Principle: Alabama's election laws must maintain an unquestioned level of integrity and objectivity while avoiding the wasteful spending of limited local and state resources. Likewise, the reporting and disclosure requirements placed on candidates only serve to bolster such efforts to garner public confidence in the election process. The Association supports efforts to eliminate many of the unenforceable and overbroad provisions of Alabama's election law while not generating additional unnecessary costs or burdens at the local level.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of

legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To authorize counties to satisfy election-related publication requirements by posting information on a public website and making copies available at the courthouse.

To require e-filing of all campaign financial reports.

To provide a more efficient process for counting write-in ballots following an election.

To alter the current process for appointment of boards of registrars to authorize the Secretary of State to appoint the members based upon job qualifications.

To allow the county commission, in its discretion, to assume responsibility for



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the absentee election function when there is a change in the office of circuit clerk.

To eliminate the requirement that the county commission set and fund school tax elections for municipal school systems.

VI. Environment, Land Use, and Public Works

Foundation Principle: County government's role in the effective administration and enforcement of Alabama's law affecting environmental issues, land use and public works administration is often confusing. Counties lack land-use authority, but are required to grant initial approval for landfills. Counties seek to enhance the delivery of services by improving their public facilities and programs, but often are impeded by federal and state regulations, inspections, and prohibitions that do not serve the public's best interests. The exercise of extra-jurisdictional powers by municipalities further clouds the role of county government. The Association seeks legislative and administrative solutions to these conflicts and encourages all related agencies to interact with counties to ensure the proper delivery of services and the enforcement of requirements and regulations.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To more clearly define the county commission's responsibilities in granting host government approval of new or expanding landfills.

To allow broader use of solid waste fees collected for garbage services or as tipping fees provided the use is connected to the provision of solid waste services.

To limit the exercise of municipal powers or taxation outside the jurisdiction's corporate limits.



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VII. Revenue Protection

Foundation Principle: Counties are partners with the State of Alabama in the collection of revenue and the delivery of services funded by the collection of such revenue. Many taxes collected by the counties as well as the state are earmarked for distribution between the two levels of government to ensure the provision of services. Likewise, the Legislature considers the



abatement or exemption of many taxes levied by or on behalf of the county commission. County services cannot be funded during either the short- or long-term if the necessary revenue is interrupted. The Association opposes mandated abatement or exemption of the local proceeds of any taxes as well as the alteration of the allocation formula used to distribute tax proceeds between the state and its counties.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To create a more fair and equitable ad valorem tax system provided it does not eliminate annual reappraisal,

reduce tax revenues or increase current exemptions.

To remove any defects in state tax laws resulting in a discriminatory tax structure provided it eliminates discrimination without creating new or expanding exemptions or tax credits.

To ensure there is no cost to local government for use of the ONE SPOT sales tax remittance system.

To bring Alabama into compliance with federal legislation related only to the collection of taxes owed on internet sales when and if such federal legislation takes effect.

To collect unpaid debts due the county by other governmental entities by intercepting the entity's portion of ad valorem taxes.

VIII. Economic Development and the Alabama Trust Fund

Foundation Principle: Alabama counties play an ever-growing and vital role in the state's economic development efforts; providing services, financial support and community leadership necessary to attract and retain important employers. Counties must be able to access the revenue necessary to carry out this function and must be included in any reforms and initiatives that alter Alabama's law regarding economic incentives and requirements. Revenue from the Alabama Trust Fund is essential

to meeting these goals and must be protected from unnecessary raids and expenditures. The Association will actively oppose any removal of revenue from the Alabama Trust Fund and seeks to be a partner in those economic development efforts that emphasize a partnership between the state and its counties.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To shift 20 percent of the corpus and future oil lease and royalty payments of the Alabama Trust Fund into the County and Municipal Government Trust Fund which would thereafter operate as a separately-maintained Trust Fund for counties and municipalities.

To require local government consent for any exemption or abatement of any local sales or use tax.

To prohibit municipalities and industrial development authorities from abating county taxes without consent of the county commission.

IX. Alabama's Prisons and County Jails

Foundation Principle: Alabama's prison system faces a crisis not unlike the crisis duplicated on a daily basis in each of the 67 county jails. The watchful eye of the federal courts, the

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never-ending expense of providing jail services, the growing costs of health care and the training and compensation for officers presents a challenge well beyond the reach of a county commission devoid of revenue-generating powers. On the other hand, an efficient local law enforcement agency and jail is necessary to maintain order and to ensure the safety of all Alabamians. The Association is gravely concerned that all reform efforts, statutory changes or administrative rules be considered only in light of direct, indirect and unintended consequences generated at the county level.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To advocate for a legislatively-created study commission to comprehensively review the state's juvenile justice system and make recommendations for adequate municipal participation and state funding and administration of all programs related to the care, detention, and custody of juveniles, including costs of temporary housing in county facilities.

X. Justice and Public Safety

Foundation Principle: The State of Alabama is responsible for administration of state courts and public safety agencies and for providing public health and mental health services for the citizens of this state. The Association believes the Alabama Legislature should adequately fund each state agency responsible for delivery of these critical government services and opposes any legislative or administrative efforts that mandate counties to assume any responsibility for these state functions or that force county government to assume state functions due to the state's failure to adequately meet its financial or administrative responsibilities. Additionally, since local government plays an important role in providing emergency services at the local level, the Association urges the Legislature to ensure there is adequate funding for local programs and that

state and local agencies work in partnership for the safety and well-being of all citizens of this state.

Strategic Goals

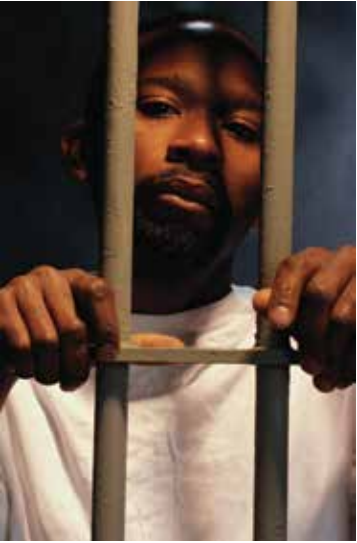
In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:

To amend the law requiring 911 directors and board members to post bond to more adequately set bonding amounts in line with the services provided.

To provide adequate funding to ensure that

ambulance services are available throughout the county.

To improve and expand spay-neuter services throughout the state, provided there is no requirement that counties fund such services.



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To prevent illegal drag racing on public roads through strong enforcement and severe penalties, including impoundment of property.

Support for creation of a task force to study the need

for comprehensive revision of state and local emergency management programs, operations and funding.

XI. Rural Transportation

Foundation Principle: The county commission is responsible for proper

construction, maintenance, and repair of all roads and bridges in the county road system. The Association believes it is essential that the county commission have adequate federal, state, and/or local funding to meet the many needs of its rural transportation system. Additionally, the Association believes that, in order to keep roads and bridges properly maintained for the safety and well-being of the traveling public, the county commission must have broad regulatory authority related to the use of county-maintained roads and bridges, including the ability to collect reimbursement from persons or entities causing damage to those roads and bridges.

Strategic Goals

In furtherance of this Foundation Principle, the Association will actively pursue the passage of legislation to accomplish the following strategic goals:



To provide adequate funding of road and bridge projects provided counties receive an equitable portion of funding utilizing the current gas tax formula.

To prevent annexation of county-maintained roads or bridges designated as hurricane evacuation routes within the state. ■

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State leaders need to turn attention to juvenile justice

There's been a lot of discussion around the state – and wherever ACCA members are gathered – about the overwhelming need to reform Alabama's adult prison system. Changes at the state level, county officials concede, are sure to produce both intended and unintended consequences in every county in Alabama.

County officials, especially those who have a historical perspective, know that adult offenders are only part of the “consequences” story, because there are similar issues with young people who come through the complex juvenile justice system.

When the 2015 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature begins in March, ACCA will be advocating for lawmakers to create a study commission to do a comprehensive review of the state's juvenile justice system, with special attention focused on funding, how the costs should be allocated between various levels of government and possible ways to achieve some efficiency.

“The care, detention and custody of juveniles is a long-running and

tremendous challenge to county government in Alabama,” said Sonny Brasfield, executive director of ACCA. “The Association believes that the best way to move forward with reforms to improve this intricate system is to

During the ACCA Legislative Conference, counties voted to make the establishment of a study commission one of the Association's Strategic Goals for this four-year term. Recognizing the importance of this issue in every county of the state, the Association's Board of Directors selected it as an immediate priority for 2015.

Aspects of juvenile justice to be considered include:

- Who should bear the financial cost of housing juveniles detained by municipal law enforcement when a county facility is used?
- How can funding for state-level services be stabilized?
- How can the state ensure that it will adequately meet its financial and administrative responsibilities so that duties are not shifted to local government?
- Does Alabama have adequate bed capacity for the current needs – on both temporary and long-term basis?
- Can the delivery of services – and the necessary court

Strategic spotlight: Juvenile justice

Strategic Goal 2015 Regular Session of the Alabama Legislature

Costs of Housing Juveniles

The Association will advocate for a legislatively-created study commission to comprehensively review the state's juvenile justice system and make recommendations for adequate municipal participation and state funding and administration of all programs related to the care, detention, and custody of juveniles, including costs of temporary housing in county facilities.

Alabama County Foundation Principal IX: Alabama's Prisons and County Jails

Alabama's prison system faces a crisis not unlike the crisis duplicated on a daily basis in each of the 67 county jails. The watchful eye of the federal courts, the never-ending expense of providing jail services, the growing costs of health care and the training and compensation for officers presents a challenge well beyond the reach of a county commission devoid of revenue-generating powers. On the other hand, an efficient local law enforcement agency and jail is necessary to maintain order and to ensure the safety of all Alabamians. The Association is gravely concerned that all reform efforts, statutory changes or administrative rules be considered only in light of direct, indirect and unintended consequences generated at the county level.

bring the interested parties together so that everyone can better understand the crisis that is just around the corner and work toward solutions with broad-based support.”

From the Cover

appearances – be enhanced by technology?

- What is the proper role of community-based services?

Alabama relies on a network of residential facilities – owned by the state, counties and private interests – to house juveniles. Another key part of the system is the dozens of diversion programs, which are present in two-thirds of Alabama counties.

Smaller counties that lack their own beds for juvenile offenders face an additional burden, because juveniles must be transported back and forth for court appearances.

This issue is a particular concern in Etowah County, where the county

spends nearly \$400,000 a year for limited space in a regional juvenile detention center located in a neighboring county.

Etowah County Commissioner Tim Choate said, in his county, more than 90 percent of the juveniles enter the system through interaction with the Gadsden Police Department. When municipal law enforcement brings an adult offender to the county jail, the city covers the cost of that person's stay. But with juvenile offenders, the county foots the bill.


"What is fair is for each municipality to pick up the bill on their juveniles," said Choate, a past president of ACCA.

The cost of holding the juvenile in

the detention center is just part of the problem. When a juvenile offender needs to appear in court, a county deputy drives to Anniston so that the individual can go before the judge. "We're paying for the car, the gas, the time – it's all falling on the county," Choate said.

The state- and county-level elements of this system are closely intertwined, so any threat to state funding causes concern for county officials. The Department of Youth Services is primarily supported by annual legislative appropriations from the state General Fund, Education Trust Fund and Children First Trust Fund.

So, when state dollars are scarce, as is often the case, the department has to fight for every dollar. ■



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From the Cover

Former commissioners aim to 'make a difference'

In 2015 there are two new Alabama legislators who have gone from the county courthouse to the State House, bringing the membership of the unofficial "County Caucus" to 13.

Reed Ingram of Montgomery County joins 11 other county government veterans in the Alabama House of Representatives, and Clyde Chambliss of Autauga County is the only former county commissioner currently serving in the Alabama Senate. They agree that their backgrounds in county government will be an asset, and from the perspective of the Association of County Commissions of Alabama, their presence in the State House could be beneficial.

"While we never want to see a strong, effective leader leave the county commission, everyone in county government benefits when legislators have a deep understanding of our issues," said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. "And there's no better way to understand county government than to have lived it and breathed it and wrestled with the challenges that face all 67 counties."

Ingram's county service is recent. The longtime small business owner

was first elected to the Montgomery County Commission in 2004, and



Reed Ingram

he served 10 years representing a largely rural district that encompasses three-fourths of the county by area.

"The most rewarding and important thing



Clyde Chambliss



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From the Cover

to me was being able to make a difference in the unincorporated areas,” Ingram said, citing accomplishments such as installing more than a dozen tornado sirens, top rankings from the state for maintenance of county roads and clean audits.

Montgomery County has only two incorporated municipalities – Montgomery and fast-growing Pike Road. Ingram said the working relationships among county and municipal governments improved dramatically in recent years. He is also proud of the way Montgomery County weathered the recent economic downturn.

“We were able to overcome the challenges that were on us financially,” he said, noting that the county workforce was managed through attrition and a hiring freeze.

In the last 10 years, economic development efforts have brought 30,000 new jobs to Montgomery, and Ingram said he plans to focus on that issue as a legislator. He’s also counting on his background with governmental financial matters.

While acknowledging that as a freshman legislator there will be much to learn, he is energetic.

“We can make a difference,” Ingram said. “We’re going to have a good House. A lot of good people got elected, a lot of them with business sense.”

He now represents portions of Montgomery and Elmore

counties, and other legislative priorities include securing a seat on the County and Municipal Government Committee, reducing unemployment fraud, getting revenue from Internet purchases and improving enforcement of

existing taxes. “We can run a lot more efficiently,” he said.

For Chambliss, his 12 years on the Autauga County Commission are a bit more distant but still seem fresh in the mind of the new state senator.

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From the Cover

He was elected to the commission in 1996 and then wielded the chairman's gavel from 2000 to 2008. Last year, this consulting civil engineer won a hard-fought campaign to represent all of Autauga and Coosa counties, plus portions of Chilton, Elmore and Tallapoosa counties.

As a county commissioner, Chambliss forged alliances with city government as well as neighboring counties to help the whole area grow.

Autauga County contributed to the construction of the Retirement Systems of Alabama's Robert Trent Jones golf course in Prattville,

though the course and conference center are situated in Elmore County.

With two aging jails only three blocks apart, Autauga County and the City of Prattville collaborated on a shared metro jail that has reduced overhead expenses. "That's money saved from then on," Chambliss said, noting similar cooperative efforts on ambulance service and an animal shelter.

As a legislator, Chambliss says he will be watchful about state actions that can have big ripple effects for counties. "Things occur at the state level that need a solution or some type of change in the law, and those

changes affect us at the local level," he said. "I want to try to make sure unintended consequences are mitigated as much as possible."

Chambliss has made the always-ailing state General Fund budget a top priority because he sees it as Alabama's biggest problem and because so many other problems, such as the overcrowded state prison system, are rooted in that budget.

"I want to try to solve our General Fund problems long term," he said, noting that some have called him crazy for wanting to dive into this issue. "I didn't go there just to sit in a chair; I'm going there to make a difference." ■

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Stricklend keeps eye on details, big picture

It has been a whirlwind for Marshall County Commissioner Bill Stricklend since August, when he was elected to be an officer in the Association of County Commissions of Alabama.

With an eye for both small details and the big picture, he had already made an impact in the Association that he says is the “nucleus” of county government in our state by serving two years on the ACCA Board of Directors and four years on the ACCA Liability Self-Insurance Fund Inc.’s board.

He is in a one-year term as vice-president, and if the traditional

officer rotation is followed, Stricklend will become ACCA’s president in 2016.

The current whirlwind of activity can really be traced back to the summer of 2007, when then-Gov. Bob Riley appointed Stricklend to a partial term on the Marshall County Commission representing District 1.

That was the same year that the Alabama Legislature passed the County Modernization Act, which made numerous updates and improvements to the statutes governing the basic operation of county government.

That kind of forethought impressed Stricklend, now 57, who through his career in law enforcement had been involved with legislative advocacy in the past.

“One of the things I marvel at with ACCA is the ability to get bills passed,” he said. “As long as we speak with one voice, we get a lot of attention. When we splinter, not so much. I see ACCA as the nucleus for the counties.”

As someone who wants to “bring the local story to Montgomery,” Stricklend has taken on two new responsibilities where he serves as an important county voice at the state level. He has been appointed to the Alabama First Responder Wireless Commission, which is charged with increasing “interoperability” or the



ability for different law enforcement agencies to communicate with each other, and the Alabama Prison Reform Task Force, which is taking a systemic look at how to reform the state’s overcrowded, underfunded corrections system.

In both cases, the work “is going to impact this state for years to come, and the counties need a voice,” Stricklend said. “It’s important to me and the Association that I represent the counties so the counties don’t end up toting the burden.”

It’s just another way he sees the small details (including 13 years of different state and federal mandates to achieve interoperability and the relevant technological changes that have happened in those years) and the big picture.

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He is firmly grounded in Marshall County, his home and birthplace some 57 years ago. His commission district numbers about 25,000 people today in the city of Arab and surrounding areas along the county's western border.

Retired from law enforcement now, Stricklend spent 22 years in the profession, and his last position was chief investigator for the local district attorney. A graduate of Arab High School, the commissioner earned an associate's degree in law enforcement from Wallace State Community College Hanceville.

He and his wife, Kaye, reside in Arab. They have a daughter, Katlyn,

who is a first-year law student at the University of Alabama. For recreation, Stricklend enjoys hunting and fishing as well as riding and raising horses.

“*It's important to me and the Association that I represent the counties so the counties don't end up toting the burden.*”

— Bill Stricklend,
ACCA vice president

As is his habit, he looks to the future with two different levels of focus. Stricklend knows the challenges of his district, where there are 350

miles of county roads. And he sees how counties all across the state struggle to maintain their infrastructure as costs continue to rise and funding is level at best.

From his perspective, ACCA's challenges are two-fold, starting with building connections with new commissioners who have never been engaged in government before. And he has another idea in mind that will involve all 351 elected commissioners in Alabama.

“Ronald Reagan said, ‘You shall never talk bad about another Republican,’” Stricklend said. “I feel that about commissioners. We need to be cohesive throughout the state.” ■



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Thursday, January 22, 2015
Marriott Legends at Capitol
Hill, Prattville, AL
(Elmore County)

Monday, January 26, 2015
Top of the Town inside the
Cullman Savings Bank
Building, Cullman, AL
(Cullman County)

Tuesday, January 27, 2015
Talladega International
Speedway Library,
Lincoln, AL
(Talladega County)

Tuesday, February 3, 2015
Marengo County Business
Development Center,
Linden, AL
(Marengo County)

Thursday, February 5, 2015
Bolden Cardwell Building,
Evergreen, AL
(Conecuh County)

Monday, February 9, 2015
Hoppergrass Restaurant,
Ozark, AL
(Dale County)

The 2015 Legislative Session will begin on March 3 and an important part of our preparation for the session is the District Meetings.

The District Meetings are vitally important to the life of our Association and help us prepare to play offense by advocating for legislation that would be positive for counties and play defense by working against legislation that would hurt county government.

During the meetings ACCA staff will report to you on the expectations for the 2015 Legislative Session and a number of other matters important to your county. As you all know, the success of the Association is directly linked to the level of participation by the membership. If you take an active role and work to support the Association, we can continue to provide excellent service to your counties. Because the Association is the only voice for county government in Alabama, it is important that counties work together.

All meetings will begin at 6 p.m. and the cost for ALL meetings will be \$20 per person. We encourage you attend the meeting that best fits your schedule. Register online at www.alabamacounties.org. Directions to each location will be emailed about a week before the meeting. If you have any questions regarding the district meetings please call the ACCA office or email Jennifer Datcher at jdatcher@alabamacounties.org.

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New training program for jail officers

What started with a shared passion for helping law enforcement employees who have the most contact with jail inmates is coming into focus with a collaborative program that will be unique in the United States.

The Alabama Jail Training Academy, a new optional basic training program for county jail officers, will offer its first class, "Officer Responsibilities and Offender Supervision," in February.

The academy is a joint effort that came about after strong encouragement from the Alabama Sheriffs' Association, Calhoun County Sheriff Larry Amerson, Monroe County Sheriff Tom Tate and Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones. In the end, the project involves national leaders and county commission encouragement as well as support from ACCA's liability and workers' compensation insurance funds.

"Jail officers put their lives on the line every day, and it is very important that they have the best training possible," said Bobby Timmons, executive director of the Alabama Sheriffs' Association. "Alabama has long been a national leader in training and professionalism in the sheriffs' offices, and this new program is another example of working together to provide the very best resources to our officers. We are very proud to be a part of this program."

This program will consist of four two-day courses spaced throughout the year that can be taken in any order.

Jail officers could finish the program – and earn a certificate of completion from the National Institute for Jail Operations – by September. Tuition reimbursement is available for counties in ACCA's self-insurance funds.

SPEED READ

» *Alabama sheriffs and county commissions are launching a training program for county jail officers in 2015.*

» *Reimbursement available for members of ACCA Self-Insurance Funds*

» *Learn more at www.alabamacounties.org/?p=7544*

"We have talked about this program for a long, long time," said Sonny Brasfield, ACCA executive director. "It is a great testimony to what can happen when sheriffs and county commissions pull in a unified effort. Certainly this program will provide needed training and educational opportunities for employees who face life-changing decisions on a daily

basis. But I hope it is also another step in working with our friends at the Alabama Sheriffs Association."

Brasfield also said the program hopes to attract participation from those counties that simply cannot send officers to the two-week program offered by the Alabama Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission. "The Alabama Jail Training Academy is not a substitute for the tried-and-true program that has paid dividends all over this state," he said. But the new educational effort should benefit all counties, especially those who need to provide basic training that will be more convenient.

The National Institute for Jail Operations is responsible for the academy's curriculum, which is custom-tailored for Alabama. Instructors will be veteran county jail officers themselves who completed a "train-the-trainer" seminar in December.

These instructors will be the voices of long experience, steeped in best practices that align with the Alabama legal environment. Teaching their colleagues from around the state is

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an adjustment, but one they seem eager to make. “If we are going to be instructors, we need to step out of our comfort zone,” said Mike Petrey from the Chambers County Sheriff’s Office, as he explained appropriate attitudes and behaviors for dealing with people with abnormal behavior problems.

This level of training, based on what the courts require, is quite different from the old routines where in some cases inmate trustees showed new jail officers the ropes.

It is unique to see a statewide effort where sheriffs, the sheriffs’ association and the county commission association are working together to protect counties, said Tate McCotter of the National Institute for Jail Operations, a partner division of the National Sheriffs’ Association.

“This is very targeted training that is geared toward proactively defending counties and sheriffs from frivolous, inmate-filed lawsuits and teaching officers their everyday responsibilities and duties to run constitutionally safe jails,” McCotter said. “We are excited to be a part of it.” ■



During a December “train the trainer” session, Mike Petrey, standing, instructs his colleagues on how to manage inmates with abnormal behavior problems, which is a priority given the high rate of mental illness among those detained in county facilities. Petrey works for the Chambers County Sheriff’s Office, and the listeners are, from left, Justin Powell, Morgan County; and John Harville, Baldwin County.

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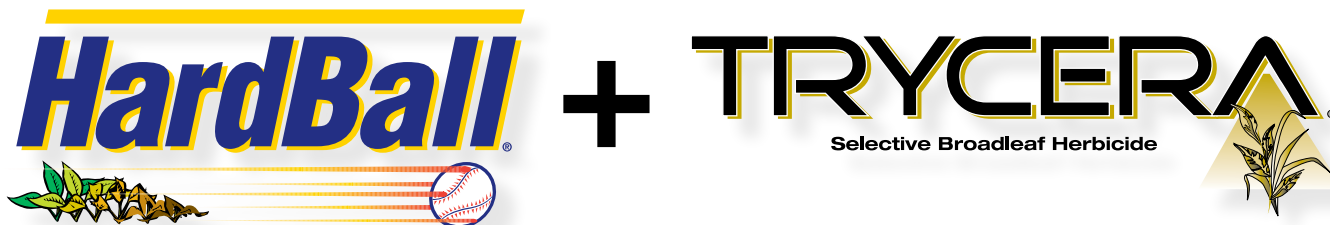
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ACCA COUNTY DAYS

■ As an important part of our effort to ensure the Alabama Legislature is constantly hearing “67 Counties, One Voice”, we will once again be hosting County Days during the 2015 Legislative Session. Each county has been assigned one day to come to Montgomery and “walk the halls” to help make sure all your legislators are aware of – and supporting – the interests of county government when considering legislation. The schedule has been designed to provide for all regions of the state to be represented on each of the six designated days. Representation from each county on its day will be key to the success of this effort. All county commissioners and all key staff are encouraged to participate and join us at the Statehouse on your day.

■ The schedule for each County Day is set out below -- and should not require an overnight stay. More details will be distributed as each County Day draws near, but please get this date on your calendar and make plans now to participate in this important event.

SCHEDULE

10:00 a.m.

Briefing at the Alabama State House and Lobbying

12:30 p.m.

Lunch at the ACCA Office Building

1:30 p.m.

Lobbying at the Alabama State House



■ Tuesday, March 17, 2015

Butler, Elmore, Geneva, Marengo, Mobile, Monroe, Morgan, Perry, Pickens, Pike, St. Clair, Walker

■ Tuesday, March 31, 2015

Baldwin, Cherokee, Calhoun, Chilton, Crenshaw, Etowah, Limestone, Tallapoosa, Tuscaloosa, Wilcox, Winston

■ Tuesday, April 7, 2015

Bibb, Blount, Clay, Conecuh, Cullman, Franklin, Henry, Houston, Lowndes, Macon, Randolph, Sumter

■ Tuesday, April 14, 2015

Cleburne, Coffee, Escambia, Hale, Jefferson, Lauderdale, Marion, Marshall, Russell

■ Tuesday, April 28, 2015

Autauga, Bullock, Colbert, Covington, Fayette, Greene, Jackson, Lee, Talladega, Washington

■ Tuesday, May 19, 2015

Barbour, Chambers, Choctaw, Clarke, Coosa, Dale, Dallas, DeKalb, Lamar, Lawrence, Madison, Montgomery, Shelby

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