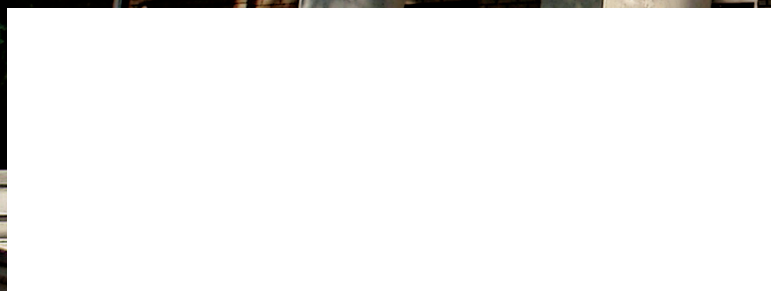


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COUNTY COMMISSION

Volume 64, Number 2
April 2020

Affiliate Groups:
PILLARS OF
ACCA





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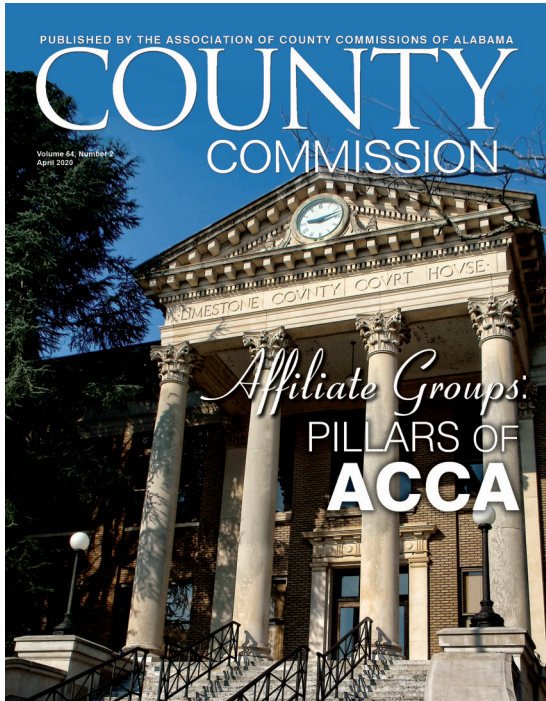


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in this issue

VOLUME 64, NUMBER 2



It is time to shine the spotlight on some of the pillars of ACCA! Year in and year out, the affiliate groups do so much behind the scenes to enhance our collective effectiveness as the "One Voice of County Government." Read on to find out more about our five affiliate groups — the Association of County Administrators of Alabama, Association of County Engineers of Alabama, Alabama Association of Emergency Managers, Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts and County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama. (©Kclarkspography | Dreamstime.com)



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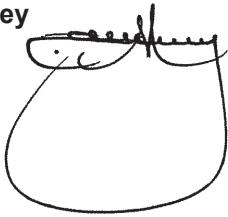
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President's PERSPECTIVE



Hon. David Money
President



Good Employees are the Key to Good Government

Affiliate Groups Essential to ACCA's Effectiveness

wish I knew the origin of the phrase “pillar of the community.” In the book of Revelation, the faithful are promised that they will be pillars of the temple, so the basic idea must extend pretty far back.

Pillars occupy a place of essential importance, and it's no stretch of the imagination to say there are pillars of the ACCA, starting with every commission member who shoulders some form of leadership responsibility within the Association — whether on the Board of Directors, Legislative Committee, insurance boards, or one of the many other committees or groups essential to our success.

However, I think you would agree with me that elected officials cannot successfully do their job alone. At the Convention this past August, I told you that “good employees are the key to good government,” and, of course, there were nods of agreement throughout the ballroom.

You know this is true at the local level, and trust me when I say it is equally true at the Association level. We have five professional organizations for county staff and their leaders, collectively known as affiliate groups, who deserve recognition as pillars of ACCA:

- Association of County Administrators of Alabama (ACAA)
- Association of County Engineers of Alabama (ACEA)
- Alabama Association of Emergency Managers (AAEM)
- Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts (AAND)
- County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama (CROAA)

All too often, these groups are unsung heroes, and that's why I'm so glad this issue of the County Commission Magazine spotlights them and their critical contributions. Certainly, the ONE Voice of county

government would be far weaker without them.

Rebuild Alabama grew out of the work of our county engineers group. The constitutional amendment protecting counties from unfunded mandates is a result of the work of our county administrators group. And as for the stable funding provided to 9-1-1 services in all 67 counties, despite the dramatic decline in landline phones — well, we have our 9-1-1 group to thank for that.

In addition, just this month, Gov. Kay Ivey signed a bill to establish a statewide emergency notification system. This new law was one of ACCA's Legislative Priorities for 2020, and its origination can be traced back to our group of emergency managers. And let's not forget that every time legislation threatens county sales taxes, we rely on information and advocacy efforts from our county revenue officers, who always make a strong case for protecting our limited revenue.

My heart truly overflows with gratitude to the affiliate group members for their invaluable contributions to their home counties, to the ONE Voice and, ultimately, to all 67 counties. I'm also grateful to the ACCA leaders through the years who saw the wisdom in organizing these affiliate groups. And I would be remiss if I did not mention the gratitude to my 350 or so county commission colleagues throughout this great state. Without a doubt, if my fellow commission members did not recognize that affiliate group participation is an essential part of county employees' daily responsibilities — not just some extracurricular activity — then county government in Alabama would not be nearly as forward-thinking, successful and respected as it is today. ■

How can commission members support affiliate groups?



Make sure more than one staff member within a department (e.g., administrator and personnel director) is actively participating in the appropriate affiliate group.



Ask affiliate members about legislation in their areas of expertise and the possible local impact.

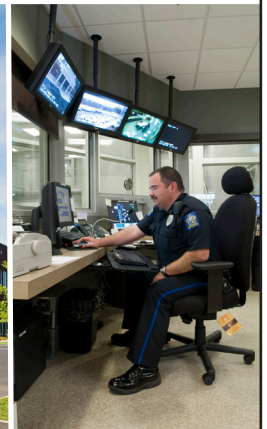


Support staff requests to attend affiliate group conferences and training.



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Sonny Brasfield

Leadership in Times Like This

Impossible Problems, Insurmountable Issues and Confused Communities

I didn't sign up for **this**. That's how the conversation began a few weeks back, during the onset of COVID-19 in our state. The voice on the other end of the line was a county commissioner — searching for answers, looking for advice, hoping to find a way to keep the courthouse open while protecting the employees and the public.

In early March, none of us were really focused on the pandemic. Today, well, it's almost impossible to talk about anything else. In my more than 30 years in county government, I've never seen anything like this. Nothing.

I've stood alongside county leaders picking up the pieces after the horrific tornadoes of 2011. I've helped bail water in Baldwin County after Hurricane Ivan. And I've walked the journey of that horrible Christmas Eve flood event in 2015. And those are just a few off the top of my head.

But there's never been anything like this in my time — not for the county government in your back yard. Nothing.

The impossible problems have come at us in waves. How do you keep the courthouse open? What do you do when an employee tests positive? How can you help the businesses in the community, the schools, the nursing homes, the hospitals? How do you find the resources you need? What will happen next month if things don't get

better? Where do you find answers?

We've tried to respond with the best available data. We've stayed in contact with leaders in Montgomery and in Washington, D.C. We've learned from other states — and they have learned from us.

At all 67 courthouses, however, there have been commissioners and county employees who have found themselves at the center of a community in desperate need of one thing more than any other. Leadership.

In times like this — when the issues are almost insurmountable — the public shouldn't expect solutions. There really is no magic potion to swallow or card trick to play. This virus has changed our world — probably not permanently but for many months to come. Maybe we can shorten the experience, flatten the curve if you will. But things aren't likely to be anywhere near “normal” anytime real soon.

What the public expects — and should demand — is that we provide a steady hand. County government should set the right kind of example for the other community opinion leaders. Its elected officials and affiliate members should provide an example that can lead us through these desperate times. We don't have the solution, but we do hold the key to success.

So, when that commissioner told me that he hadn't signed up for **this**, the response I gave

probably wasn't what he had expected. I've been giving advice to commissioners and county employees since a chilly November day in 1987. I've always thought I had every answer — and every now and then, I have been right.

But now, as April turns into May in the year 2020, I'm still not so sure I have any idea what to tell people. I don't know what to do or, more importantly, what not to do. So, I turned the tables on that commissioner.

If you didn't sign up for **this**, I asked, then why exactly did you run for public office in the first place?

The silence was painful. But I've known him for years, and I was sure he was thinking.

Well, he said after what seemed

What the public expects — and should demand — is that we provide a steady hand. County government should set the right kind of example for the other community opinion leaders. Its elected officials and affiliate members should provide an example that can lead us through these desperate times.

like an hour, I guess this is exactly what I **did** sign up for.

With that out of the way, we talked about his problem. We talked about his community — the confusion, the shortcomings, the fear, the unknown, the possibility that things might be better one day.

Together, we forged a plan to move forward toward tomorrow.

We agreed to talk again, and he promised to get to work. I took him at his word.

Leadership isn't flashy. It isn't always found on the cable television shows or on Facebook or Twitter. Leadership is loving your community. It's loving your neighbors. And it's being willing to answer the questions that scare off almost everyone else. ■

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Affiliate Groups: Pillars of ACCA

How the ‘One Voice’ of County Government Relies on Affiliate Groups and Affiliate Group Members

ACCA was founded in 1929, which means county commission members in Alabama have been teaming up to enhance and protect county government for more than 90 years.

Collective and collaborative problem-solving worked so well for elected officials that the approach has been extended successfully to connecting county staffers with similar responsibilities. More than 60 years ago, two of those staff groups formally organized, creating what are now known as the Association of County Administrators of Alabama and the Association of County Engineers of Alabama.

Over the past 25 years, three more affiliate groups have joined ACCA: the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers, the Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts and the County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama.

“Show me a county that delivers excellent public services, despite the many challenges at the local level, and I will show you two essentials,” said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. “You will find commissioners who demonstrate leadership on a daily basis, and you will find a dedicated and highly effective professional staff.”

It’s much the same within ACCA at the state level. “This Association would not have our

track record of success and influence without our affiliate groups,” Brasfield said.

These professional organizations for county staff members and their daily impact are so important that they are woven into the curriculum of PLAN, the Association’s leadership program for second-term commissioners.

“There were definitely some ‘a-ha’ moments,” said Russell County Commissioner Chance Corbett, a member of PLAN 2016. There was less surprise for him because Corbett came into office after years of active membership in the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers. “Some commissioners didn’t really realize how important the affiliate groups are and how closely they work with Sonny,” Corbett said.

Once you zoom in, it becomes apparent that the affiliates are

fused into virtually every aspect of ACCA — legislative advocacy and insurance, not to mention education programs for commissioners and county employees. ACCA’s major annual events — the Convention in August and Legislative Conference in December — always feature educational breakout sessions custom-tailored for the professionals of each group.

Skeptics might wonder about the wisdom of allocating limited staff time to participation in these groups, but Commissioner Joey Peavy of Butler County says it is a worthwhile investment of scarce county resources, noting that staff members learn from their counterparts in other counties just like elected officials do.

“As a commissioner, it’s always great to have your support team as involved and educated as possible,” Peavy said. “It only helps us.” ■

Association of County Commissions of Alabama’s **AFFILIATE GROUPS**

Association of County Administrators of Alabama | ACAA

Association of County Engineers of Alabama | ACEA

Alabama Association of Emergency Managers | AAEM

Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts | AAND

County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama | CROAA

ACAA: Improving Management of County Operations

Whether they count their time on the job in years or decades, members say the Association of County Administrators of Alabama is an unparalleled source of critical information and an invaluable network of colleagues.

“Most of the time, administrators are alone in their county in dealing with very complex issues, and it is very important to talk with peers around the state who have dealt with the same or similar problems,” said the group’s current president, Matt Sharp of DeKalb County. “In my career, I have found it to be extremely helpful.”

As vitally important to members as ACAA is, it is just as important to its parent organization, the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. The president of the administrators’ group occupies an ex officio seat on the ACCA’s Board of Directors to ensure that an administrator’s expertise about day-to-day county operations is part of deliberations.

Most administrators come to the job with a background in accounting or finance, and ACAA offers a wealth of professional development to help them operate in county government’s one-of-a-kind legal environment and stay abreast of changes.

When the Legislature is in session, ACCA provides each affiliate group with tracking lists of pending legislation pertaining to their responsibilities — and due to administrators’ broad responsibilities, their group usually receives the



The ACAA Regional Meetings bring members together for roundtable discussions on topical concerns. Cleburne County held one in February this year that brought together, from left, Travis Heard (Randolph), Melissia Wood (Calhoun), Regina Chambers (Chambers), Lisa Holmes (Randolph), Donna Wood and Tina Morgan (St. Clair), Kim Brown (Cleburne), and Sandra Wolfe and Corey Phillips (St. Clair).

longest list.

ACCA’s most recent research publication, “Alabama’s Unresolved Inmate Crisis: A Report on the Unintended Impact of the 2015 Prison Reform Act” would not have been possible without a 67-county effort from administrators to show the true magnitude of the financial hardship borne by counties.

Administrators also played a vital role in advocating for the Simplified Sellers Use Tax Act of 2015, the innovative legislation that has made Alabama a leader in the collection of taxes on online transactions. Over the years, the Legislature has passed a series of County Modernization Acts to reform and update laws governing many of counties’ most basic functions. In the late 1990s, a successful statewide referendum

added language to the Alabama Constitution to shield counties from unfunded mandates, and yet again, administrators were crucial to that effort.

These days, after a slew of retirements, about half of Alabama’s county administrators have been on the job 5 years or less.

Heather Dyar of Lawrence County is one of those relative newcomers, and she has worked hard to take advantage of all the benefits her affiliate group offers. In fact, Dyar has already completed the education program and earned the Certified County Administrator designation, which requires prior coursework and three years of experience to become eligible.

“The ACAA has provided me with knowledge and expertise that I

would not have been able to receive elsewhere,” Dyar said.

Looking at registration numbers and agendas for the annual ACAA conference, it is easy to see how administrators tap the group’s resources to enhance the effectiveness and professionalism of employees throughout the administrative ranks.

During his years as deputy administrator, Glenn Hodge of Mobile County was a fixture at ACAA’s conferences and in breakout sessions for larger ACCA events. Since his promotion to administrator, Hodge has stayed active, always networking with colleagues to identify new solutions to implement.

“I encourage all employees in Mobile County administration to obtain the Certificate in County Administration through the County Government Education Institute,” Hodge said. “By attending these classes, employees learn all the concepts of how county government operates.”

The county clerks who founded ACAA’s predecessor more than 60 years ago would likely be surprised by some of the more recent innovations, such as monthly webinars with ACCA staff, but they would certainly recognize the enduring importance of professional relationships.

Certainly, just like the conferences, the CGEI courses are a win-win — and the formal curriculum is just the beginning. “The classes also give you the opportunity to meet people and establish contacts with others that do the same job and face many of the same problems,” said Bob Manning of Jackson County. ■

ACAA on Twitter

Administrators play an important role in legislative advocacy.



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ACEA: Leading the Way in Local Transportation

Calling the affiliate groups “pillars of the Association” seems to be a good fit for the way county engineers see their group’s supporting role within ACCA.

“The relationship between staff and our elected officials is the key to providing quality services,” said Richie Beyer, Elmore County’s Chief Engineer and Operations Officer. “Similarly, our efforts in Montgomery with the administration, Legislature and state agencies require a team effort to provide the insight and innovation to ensure county government is in a position to provide the best services possible.”

The Association of County Engineers of Alabama, founded in 1952, has its own annual conference and monthly webinars with ACCA staff. Engineers also participate actively in ACCA’s major events — the Convention and Legislative Conference — which always feature educational breakout sessions specific to their work.

“Many times, we are the eyes and ears for the commission out in the field,” said Engineer Justin Barfield of Geneva County. As ACEA’s current president, he serves on ACCA’s board in an ex officio capacity. “When issues — good and bad — arise, we do as much legwork as we can to help benefit ACCA.”

The engineers’ group has definitely made its mark on ACCA’s legislative priorities. Passage of 2019’s



Engineers and many other members of the County Family were all smiles after 111 legislators voted for the Rebuild Alabama Act during a five-day special session.

Rebuild Alabama Act demanded a united effort from the County Family, along with a broad coalition, to secure the first increase to recurring funding for Alabama roads and bridges since 1992. Revenue comes primarily from a phased-in, 10-cents-per-gallon tax on gasoline and diesel fuels.

But county engineers prepared the way, spearheading the DRIVE Alabama campaign to highlight both the tremendous benefits of the original ATRIP road and bridge projects, as well as the vast remaining needs. In support of Rebuild Alabama, engineers undertook a massive data collection and analysis project to show, on a county-by-county basis and statewide, the existing needs and anticipated impact of them continuing unmet.

“The years of work that went into the passage of Rebuild Alabama show one of our group’s greatest assets: the

tenacity to work toward solutions to serve the public interest,” said Beyer.

Another noteworthy accomplishment that originated with ACEA is the Alabama County Joint Bid Program, which received legislative authorization exactly 20 years ago. The cooperative purchasing program is best known for securing highly competitive prices on heavy equipment and road department supplies, but it has had other applications, such as voting machines and disaster debris removal services.

Emphasizing the impact of ACCA and ACEA, Sumter County Engineer Anthony Crear said, “I believe we’ve saved money on equipment purchases, replaced more bridges and resurfaced more roads due to the effectiveness of this group. Rebuild Alabama is the third ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ program we’ve seen.”

ACEA members are also active at the national level, advocating

on federal issues and taking part in activities of the National Association of County Engineers. In fact, four Alabamians have served as NACE president.

Due to their specialized area of work, ACEA members place a great deal of emphasis on education programs. "An engineering degree prepares you for the technical side of road work but not the management side," said Engineer Chris Champion of Henry County, saying that the Certificate in County Engineering Administration, offered through the County Government Education Institute, bridges the gaps. The group has also created training for key road department staff members, such as road supervisors and motorgrader operators.

Members of the organization are tightly networked, with family trees of engineers who have worked together. Certainly, the group is intentional about mentoring younger professionals. For example, while working as the assistant engineer in Butler County, John Mark Davis was chosen to represent his peers on the ACEA board.

"Being involved with ACEA provides a look into all the different ways county engineers manage their own unique county. It allows you to pick up on things that go right and maybe not so right," said Davis, now engineer in Autauga County. "On-the-job training is a good way to learn, but it really helps to get some guidance from some of the more seasoned veterans." ■

ACEA on Twitter

*Engineers have
an important
role in building
relationships
with legislators
and advocating
for priority
bills, whether
specific to their
department
or not.*

Joshua McDougald
@JBM0027

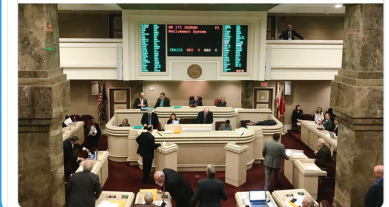
SB140 by @bsingle362 will be considered by the Senate Governmental Affairs Committee TODAY. Members -- please vote YES on this bill to create a Statewide Emergency Notification System & better prepare Alabamians for natural disasters. #ALpolitics #Butler



Richie Boyer
@wrbspearpoint

We in @ElmoreComm know what an asset Rep Reed Ingram is; this is just another opportunity for the rest of the counties to see his leadership at work #thankyouisr #ALPolitics #Elmore #ACAA #ACEA

Alabama Counties @AlabamaCounties · Feb 20
ACCA priority bill HB172 by Rep. Reed Ingram — which provides local government employees participating in the Employees' Retirement System with a stronger voice on the ERS Board — passed unanimously through the House today. Thank you for your leadership, Rep. Ingram! #alpolitics



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AAEM: Connecting the Emergency Management Community

Among ACCA's affiliate groups, the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers has a particularly diverse membership. It is common for affiliates to work closely with one or more state agencies, but AAEM goes a step further, boasting a healthy membership of state EMA staff members.

"The role of county government is getting increasingly complex — this is in part due to technology, social media and new challenges that are faced daily," said AAEM President Jim Coker from Jefferson County. "Building the relationships needed for success is a top priority for emergency managers as we chart a path into the future."

State partners appreciate excellence at the local level. "Maintaining strong relationships with the officers of AAEM has helped us with a number of key initiatives, as well as provided an open pathway for communications on routine issues that help us keep Alabama's emergency management program on track," said Jonathan Gaddy, AEMA Assistant Director and former EMA director for Calhoun County.

Of course, counties are well represented on AAEM's membership roster, along with representatives of nonprofits and municipal, tribal and federal government. Just in the past few years, AAEM has also added caucuses specific to the higher education community and healthcare, expansions that seem fortuitous amid the current COVID-19 pandemic.

That's just what emergency managers do — gaze into the future to see what could go wrong. The

ancestors of our modern, "all-hazards" EMA leaders recruited plane spotters during World War II and promoted backyard fallout shelters during the Cold War, but by the 1980s, civil defense was rebranding as emergency management.

Eventually, the independent Alabama Emergency Management Council evolved into AAEM, opting to move under the ACCA umbrella. The big selling point was gaining ACCA staff support for membership and conferences, said Chance Corbett, an emergency manager and member of the Russell County Commission.

AAEM's major events of the year are a summer conference and a winter workshop, and members take an active role in ACCA's big statewide events. Both the ACCA Annual Convention and Legislative Conference always include educational breakout sessions specific to the emergency management community.

As is the case with all of ACCA's affiliate groups, AAEM puts a priority on its education program, a four-tier professional certification culminating in the master's level, which requires a minimum of 1,350 hours of training.

Sumter County is like many rural counties in that the EMA director wears more than one hat. "If I didn't have an organization like ACCA available to offer me training, understanding, and ways to get and become certified as both an EMA and a 9-1-1 Director, I would have been a lost soul," said Margaret Bishop-Gulley. "Knowing the lay of the land is alright if you work in the county where you live; but knowing how to get things done according to the guidelines of both AEMA and FEMA is a whole different ball game."

In the tradition of the County Family, AAEM has a track record of



AAEM's annual summer conference has grown into the Statewide Disaster Preparedness Conference, a three-day event cosponsored with the Alabama Emergency Management Agency.

AAEM on Twitter

Emergency managers play an important role in legislative advocacy.



Alabama Association of Emergency Managers
@ALEmergencyMgrs

Significant flooding in Alabama, and yet another tornado warning in the southern part of the state earlier this evening. Why do we need to support SB140, a Statewide Notification System? We see examples all too often. #AAEM #alpolitics @AlabamaCounties



Colbert EMA
@colbertema

We fully support SB140 (Statewide Notification System) & SB145 (Safer Places guidelines) to help ensure our citizens are notified appropriately and knowing they have identified a "safer place" to be during severe weather. #alpolitics #colbert #aaem

successful advocacy.

One of the few general bills Gov. Kay Ivey has signed since the Alabama Legislature began its extended coronavirus-related recess was an ACCA legislative priority initiated by emergency managers. The bill, now officially known as Act 2020-85, authorizes creation of a Statewide Emergency Notification System, available to counties and municipalities for warning and updating citizens.

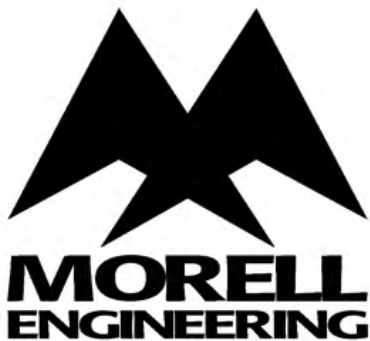
AAEM members have also helped

sustain and expand the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) program. "There have been two occasions where the EMPG funding was increased at a time that other grants were being cut back or even eliminated," said Eddie Hicks, Morgan County EMA Director.

It is interesting to remember the time when emergency managers were reluctant to become part of ACCA. At the local level, EMA was and is a county agency, answerable to the county governing body. Still, they

didn't want to lose their distinct identity or become overshadowed by other affiliates.

But today, AAEM is going strong. And, as Bishop-Gulley noted, participating in ACCA events — conventions, conferences, district meetings and legislative days — alongside members of the Sumter County Commission has been "very beneficial," creating opportunities for relationship building and important conversations that otherwise would not exist. ■



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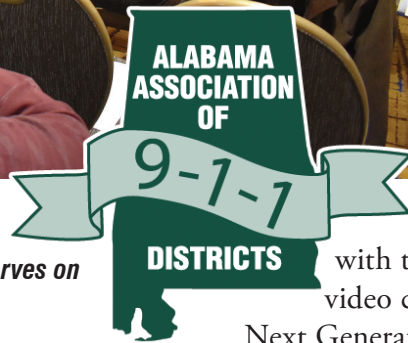
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AAND: Applying Innovation to 9-1-1 Funding and Technology



At ACCA's 2019 Legislative Conference, Marvin McIlwain of Coffee County spoke to his AAND colleagues about building and maintaining relationships with legislators. McIlwain, a past president of AAND, serves on the organization's legislative committee.



communication districts once again at risk. And again, AAND and ACCA sounded the alarm, working two years for legislative passage of a new funding model in 2012.

But rapidly evolving technology drives more than just 9-1-1 funding. AAND works aggressively to help members stay on technology's cutting edge operationally

with text-to-911, photo and video capability, the Alabama

Next Generation Emergency Network and geographic information systems. The group is also heavily involved in developing new training for dispatchers.

In the beginning, some members of the 9-1-1 community expressed reservations about coming under the ACCA umbrella, but they are firmly anchored today. "It's been very beneficial," said Marvin McIlwain, coordinator of Coffee County 9-1-1. "I think we are a complement to the ACCA."

In many cases, the county governing body appoints 9-1-1 boards, and 9-1-1 directors say their communication and relationships with their county commissioners have improved. Likewise, ACCA gets the advantage of having a large number of 9-1-1 directors, board

Americans count on being able to dial – or increasingly, to text – 9-1-1 for help at any hour of the day or night, wherever they are. That's a big promise, a promise that is faithfully fulfilled by local governments.

In the early 2000s, leaders in Alabama's 9-1-1 community were looking for a way to work together to shore up funding. The first-ever 9-1-1 call in the United States was made right here in Haleyville, but the outlook was not rosy for smaller emergency communication districts, struggling financially under the then-current funding system supported by dwindling landlines.

"We were trying to come up

with a solution where we could all survive," said Bill Brodeur of Etowah County 9-1-1. Alabama had an active chapter of the National Emergency Number Association, but it was not equipped for legislative advocacy in Montgomery.

So leaders in the 9-1-1 community discussed options with ACCA, and in 2006, the Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts was formed as an affiliate group. The following year, legislation passed to provide another \$6 million annually to critical 9-1-1 services.

As time went on, changes in the telecommunications marketplace accelerated as more and more consumers disconnected their landlines, putting rural emergency

members, dispatchers and others in the County Family.

Through the years, AAND has expanded its focus beyond legislative advocacy. The Certificate in Emergency Communication District Administration, offered by the County Government Education Institute, is an invaluable education program.

“Obtaining, and since maintaining, this certification was a big help in understanding all aspects of county government, and it’s a valuable program we try to keep at the forefront of members’ minds,” said AAND President Charlie McNichol of Mobile County. He began working in both the 9-1-1 field and county government in 2013. His previous professional experience was in law enforcement for the City of Daphne and the U.S. Attorney’s Office.

AAND’s educational offerings extend further, with specialized breakout sessions at ACCA’s Annual Convention and Legislative Conference. The group’s biggest solo event of the year started out as a one-day workshop but has grown into a three-day summit in recent years.

At the end of the day, a core public service has not only survived but been enhanced. AAND leaders, who want to keep the group’s membership growing, are looking ahead to navigating the next wave of technological changes. Marshall County 9-1-1 Director Johnny Hart summed it up nicely. “We’ve come a long way over the years — but there is still much we hope to achieve.” ■

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CROAA: The Key to Protecting County Budgets



CROAA's education program, which is part of the County Government Education Institute, is central to the group's work to enhance the professionalism and effectiveness of county revenue officers and license inspectors. In a meeting this past fall, the CROAA Board of Directors voted to adjust the program's educational requirements in an effort to make obtaining the "Certified County Revenue Officer" designation more appealing.

The County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama may have the most interesting beginning of ACCA's five affiliate groups.

For one thing, the members are somewhat of a rarity in county government nationwide. It is to be expected that counties will have an engineer or an emergency management director, but most states do not let counties collect their own sales tax levies, so CROAA member counterparts are scarce. For states without that authority, there is no need for a county revenue officer.

Back in the mid-1990s, Alabama's general law lined up with most of the country, with the

CROAA

County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama

majority of counties relying on the Alabama Department of Revenue to collect their sales tax and send money periodically. However, the Legislature had previously passed local laws for a couple of counties, permitting them to self-collect. Once collections were under a watchful local eye, these jurisdictions saw their revenue increase.

County commissioners recognized an opportunity, and

in 1996, lawmakers passed ACCA priority legislation allowing all counties the option to self-collect or contract with a private company to collect on their behalf. The following year, CROAA was organized under the umbrella of ACCA.

"Without oversight from CROAA members, local revenues would certainly decline," said Terri Henderson of Montgomery County.

All counties are encouraged

to have at least one staff member participating in CROAA, if for no other reason than to keep a close eye on legislation affecting county revenues. Participation can also equip county staff members to more actively and knowledgeably supervise those responsible for collecting on the county's behalf, whether the state or a private contractor.

The group's dues are a modest \$10 a year, and membership has expanded to include county administrators and license inspectors. Additional information is available at AlabamaCounties.org/affiliates/CROAA.

"Especially during the legislative sessions, CROAA members are monitoring the various revenue bills that are drafted to evaluate the long-term effects of those proposals and take action when needed," said Betty Peterson, one of the group's founding members who recently retired from

Madison County.

With CROAA's legislative advocacy since 1997, every county has benefitted financially from the group's work, whether or not the county is represented in the group's membership.

The group's legislative impact was evident soon after CROAA's inception when two significant bills became law in 1998. The first regulated private tax auditing firms, and the second — known as the Local Tax Simplification Act — made numerous improvements. It changed the state's frequency of tax disbursements to local jurisdictions to a biweekly schedule, and it reduced the state's fee for local tax administration to a maximum of 2 percent.

More recently, the group helped advocate for the Simplified Sellers Use Tax program. "Alabama earned well-deserved national attention for this innovative way to

collect revenue from online sales," Henderson said. "These are dollars that counties wouldn't receive otherwise — and they're being used to enhance public services."

CROAA members have also been an essential part of defensive wins for counties. In 2003, their advocacy helped block Alabama from joining a national sales tax streamlining agreement that would have cost counties millions of dollars.

An education program, now part of the County Government Education Institute, was established early in CROAA's history. Graduates earn the Certified County Revenue Officer (CCRO) designation. "License inspection and sales tax collection have always been closely linked, so tweaking the education program to provide license content was a seamless transition," said CROAA President Terisa Lang of Madison County. ■



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Expanded Jail Inmate Report Reveals Deepening Crisis

The first edition of ACCA's latest research publication, "Alabama's Unresolved Inmate Crisis," detailed a dark picture — an influx of State inmates into county jails was costing counties big bucks, an extra \$63 million a year to be precise.

But it became apparent that the crisis is only worsening, and quickly, once final numbers came in for another budget year. With the addition of fiscal year 2019 data, the influx is costing counties an extra \$93 million a year compared to 2014, equivalent to nearly three times the rate of inflation.

"Funding the growing needs of county jails and sheriff's departments since 2015 has been done by reducing other services at the local level," said

ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. "For counties, that's really the only option available."

What changed? The Alabama Prison Reform Act, intended to reduce overcrowding at the state level, became law in 2015 and led to dramatic shifts in inmate populations:

- 5,000 fewer State inmates in State prisons;
- 6,000 more State inmates in county jails.

And, as ACCA's research indicates, the influx of State inmates into county jails was not accompanied by any increase in funding to cover the increase in costs. Addressing the inmate crisis is a top priority for counties in 2020.

"At this point, we're very

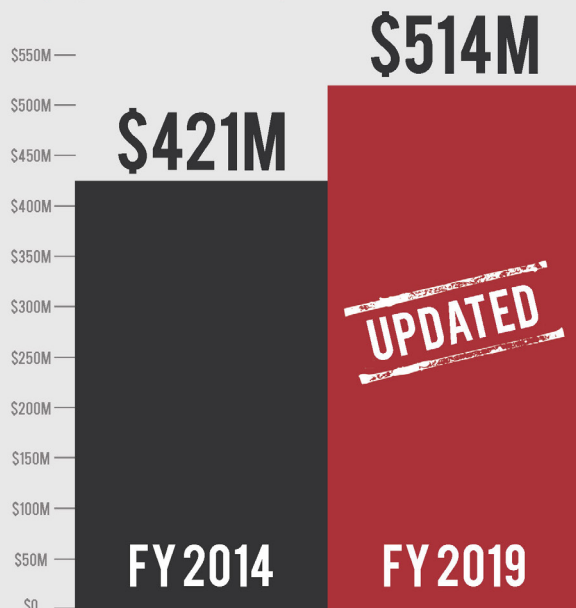
concerned that counties will soon have to look at reducing law enforcement costs to pay for the parole and probation violators and Class D felons who — since 2015 — now have to sit in the county jail, where taxpayers pay for their medical care, lawsuits and housing."

When a task force was developing the 2015 reform legislation, counties expressed grave concerns about unintended consequences and encouraged more study. Counties warned that new punishments for parole and probation violators, called "dips" and "dunks," would put pressure on jail beds, increase medical costs and lead to more costly lawsuits against counties.

County leaders also cautioned

COMBINED COST TO COUNTIES FOR STATE INMATE INFUX

Covers jail operation costs and sheriff's department costs

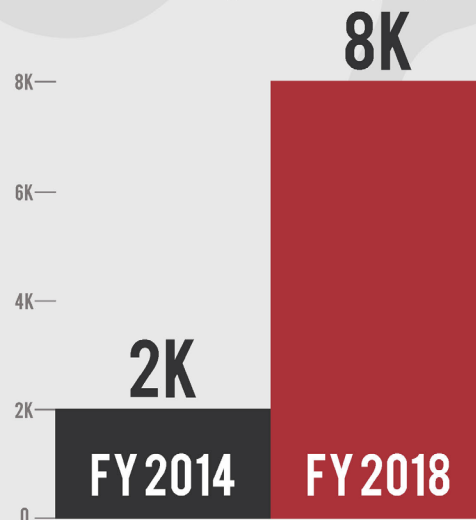


County costs increased by **\$93M** from 2014 to 2019, nearly **3x the rate of inflation**.

STATE INMATE POPULATION IN COUNTY JAILS

Based on public data provided by the Alabama Department of Corrections and Alabama Board of Pardons and Paroles

These conservative figures account for state inmates in county jails, as well as the "dips and dunks" state inmate population created by the 2015 Alabama Prison Reform Act. Probation and parole violators can receive six "dips" — up to a three-day stay in a county jail — before being "dunked" for up to 45 days in a state prison on three separate occasions. "Dunked" inmates often remain in a county jail for weeks before being picked up and transferred to a state prison.



The number of state inmates in county jails **increased by 6K** from 2014 to 2018.

Status Report: Rebuild Alabama

Counties continue to demonstrate efficiency, transparency

Editor's Note: In recognition of the Rebuild Alabama Act's significance, County Commission Magazine will feature a status report on county progress in every issue.

The first months of 2020 were filled with implementation milestones for the Rebuild Alabama Act, including:

Grant Announcement

On January 16, the first \$7 million of awards by the Rebuild Alabama Annual Grant Program were announced by Gov. Kay Ivey and the Alabama Department of Transportation. The program sets aside \$10 million of the state's share of new gas tax revenue for local roads and bridges. It is expected that all 31 projects will be under contract by the end of the calendar year. A second award cycle is expected later this year for the remaining \$3 million.

Revenue Distribution

Counties received their first distributions of Rebuild Alabama revenue in January. Six cents of the fuel tax increase went into effect Oct. 1, 2019, and the combined county share of first quarter receipts came to \$12.4 million. Actual revenues were in line with estimates counties had received prior to enactment. A bipartisan group of 111 members of the Alabama Legislature voted for Rebuild Alabama, and these first payments sparked further expressions of gratitude for their leadership.

Communication Enhancement

To improve timeliness of communication with contractors, the ACCA launched the "Rebuild Alabama Counties" mobile app. Users receive notifications each time a new



Governor Kay Ivey

@GovernorKayIvey

Gov. Kay Ivey continues to be Rebuild Alabama's top advocate. She tweeted in January, "Our state's economy depends on our roads & bridges – by investing in them, we're continuing to say, 'AL is open for business!' I'm thrilled to unveil the first of many #RebuildAL signs to come. They'll stand as a reminder of our promise to invest in infrastructure. #alpolitics"

bid announcement becomes available inside the app, which also features other resources, including a directory of county officials and employees.

Conference Participation

Engineers Justin Barfield (Geneva), Josh Harvill (Chambers) and Richie Beyer (Elmore) presented at Auburn University's 63rd Annual Transportation Conference in February. Barfield's talk focused on balanced mix

designs related to his county's Rebuild Alabama projects, while Harvill and Beyer delivered a joint presentation about counties' statewide implementation of Rebuild Alabama.

ATRIP-II Project Implementation

The Act established the Alabama Transportation Rehabilitation and Improvement Program-II (ATRIP-II) grants to invest in projects of local interest on the state highway system.

A round of funding was announced in October, and design work on the first ATRIP-II projects got well underway in early 2020.

Federal Aid Exchange Progress

Another provision of the Act created a process for counties to exchange their annual allocation of federal aid dollars — and the red tape that comes with it — for less-restricted state dollars. The Technical Advisory Committee of the Association of County Engineers of Alabama met with Alabama Department of Transportation leadership in February to discuss Rebuild Alabama implementation and to finalize the memorandum of agreement governing the Federal Aid Exchange Fund procedures. These funds will begin flowing from the state once eligible counties execute the memorandum of agreement. ■



What is Rebuild Alabama?

The Alabama Legislature passed the Rebuild Alabama Act last year, and Gov. Kay Ivey signed it into law in March 2019.

The Act is historic because it is the first increase in recurring funding for roads and bridges in the state since 1992. Revenue comes primarily from a phased-in, 10-cents-per-gallon tax on gasoline and diesel fuels, with proceeds benefitting State, county and city infrastructure. Rebuild Alabama also set new standards of transparency and accountability so citizens will be well informed about how the revenue is benefitting all 67 counties.

Those requirements have been taken to heart at the county level. "We have consistently said counties will be efficient and transparent with the new funds," said ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield. "Throughout the implementation phase, county governments have worked collectively so they can be responsible and accountable with each and every dollar, and we will continue to do so."

On the Web | AlabamaCounties.org/RebuildAL

- **County Transportation Plans from All 67 counties**
- **Bid Announcements**
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Alabama Association of 9-1-1 Districts | AAND

County Revenue Officers Association of Alabama | CROAA

With sincere gratitude,

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Association of County Commissions of Alabama**



CRS UPDATE

Enhancing Member Services in Risk Management

County Risk Services Inc. — the ACCA Self-Insurance Funds' in-house, third-party administrator — began operations a little over a year ago as somewhat of a hybrid, blending the fast pace of a startup company with the reliability of a long-established, successful organization.

Showing its responsiveness to member needs, CRS has recently reconfigured its safety team into a new Risk Management Department.

“Going through the reorganization process gave us the opportunity to really look at the services we were providing to our members and ask ourselves, ‘What could we do to improve upon those services?’” said CRS Vice President Mary Kay Frazee. “Doing so allowed us to recognize the need for more frequent and substantive site visits with our members; better resources and training; and a stronger emphasis on a holistic approach to risk management.”

Another need that emerged was for the Risk Management and Underwriting departments to work more closely. “This is necessary if we want to further strengthen our services and create more cohesive solutions that benefit our members and the Funds over the long term,” Frazee said. “I believe these changes will produce tangible results that the membership will soon start to see in their counties, and we expect continued gains as we move forward with implementation.”

ACCA's Self-Insurance Funds provide workers' compensation, liability and/or property coverage for a majority of Alabama's 67 counties and dozens of county-related entities. CRS, established to elevate

member services, is responsible for claims administration and risk management.

One of the biggest advancements that CRS rolled out right away is Origami Risk — a world-class, cloud-based software system for the insurance industry. It is utilized by both the membership and CRS staff, who have been working to further develop the risk management module.

“The expanded module will serve as a platform for facilitating and managing county site visits. Soon, we will be able to use the platform to gather important information and documents prior to a site visit,” Frazee said. “This will allow our field consultants to conduct more quality-based site visits that we believe will prove more beneficial for the member.”

“The goal is to be able to work with each member and focus on their unique set of circumstances so that we can provide more customized recommendations and support.”

A search is underway to hire a permanent manager for the new Risk Management Department, but in the meantime, Chris Steskal is filling in on an interim basis. Steskal is a familiar face to many in county government, since he has been providing members with safety services for more than two years.

Steskal emphasized the strategic value of the reorganization. “Utilizing regionally-based field consultants will allow CRS to provide better coverage for



members,” he said. “Consultants will be more accessible, and this will increase the total number of annual visits.”

For the first time, CRS will now have a staff member located in North Alabama. And while Risk Control Field Consultant Tom Sparks is new to CRS, he is well-versed in local government, having retired from the Hartselle Police Department. With his home base in Morgan County, he is centrally located to serve members throughout the region.

“During my career in public service, I was fortunate to build a wide span of strong and lasting relationships,” Sparks said. “I am excited for the opportunity to continue growing those relationships, and I look forward to building many more.”

Risk Control Coordinator is also a new position, and Shawn Jennett is new to CRS. His main responsibilities are scheduling risk assessments, assisting the field consultants with investigations, coordinating and preparing materials for safety-related trainings and assisting the department's manager. “I am new to Alabama,” he said, “and I am enthusiastic about getting out and meeting people.” ■

Get to Know the CRS Risk Management Department



Chris Steskal | Email: csteskal@countyrisk.org
 TITLE: Interim Manager, CRS Department of Risk Management,
 and Risk Control Field Consultant for Law Enforcement
 PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: 2 years in the insurance/risk management field with CRS and
 Meadowbrook; 21 years in law enforcement in sheriff's departments and the U.S. Marine Corps
 HOME BASE: Montgomery, Ala.



Tom Sparks | Email: tsparks@countyrisk.org
 TITLE: Risk Control Field Consultant for North Alabama
 PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: 26 years in law enforcement; Retired from Hartselle Police
 Department as captain (second in command)
 HOME BASE: Hartselle, Ala.



Shawn Jennett | Email: sjennett@countyrisk.org
 TITLE: Risk Control Coordinator
 PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND: 2.5 years in risk management and 9 years in safety
 HOME BASE: Montgomery, Ala.

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COUNTY FAMILY FEATURE



ACCA Involvement: Take the Next Step, Wherever You Are

Cherokee County Commission Chairman and Probate Judge Tim Burgess has been in the County Family for 16 years, but eye-opening experiences within the past few years have brought him to a much deeper appreciation of what it means to be part of “67 Counties, One Voice.”

It was 2004 when Burgess left his accounting business to take the administrator’s position in Cherokee County. He was hired to oversee the county’s budget, the part of the job most familiar to him, and so he put his focus there. He said he wasn’t sure if or how ACCA fit in with his responsibilities.

About a decade later, Burgess set out to earn the Certified County Administrator designation from the County Government Education Institute. “I started realizing what ACCA was actually doing for counties across the state, and I began to get more active,” he said.

In 2017, he completed the education program, earning the right to add “CCA” after his name. But a few months later, tragedy struck Cherokee County with the untimely death of Chairman and Probate Judge Kirk Day. Gov. Kay Ivey went on to appoint Burgess to the vacancy, and the following year, he won election to a six-year term without opposition.

“Being administrator, you learn a lot about local government, and now I’ve gone from that role to being the decisionmaker,” he said.

As his county responsibilities

have grown, so has his involvement with ACCA. In fact, commission members chose him to represent them on the ACCA Legislative Committee. That was how he found himself speaking at an ACCA District Meeting earlier this year, urging commission and affiliate members to take the next step to increase their Association involvement, especially when the Alabama Legislature is in session.

“Wherever you are, whatever your level of participation has been, you can do better,” he said, noting that his next step forward is getting active on Twitter. “Just try to do a little more each year than you’ve done in the past year.”

These days, Burgess is quick to praise ACCA Executive Director Sonny Brasfield and the staff. “They do an excellent job of providing us with information and letting us know what’s going on,” he said. “They can talk to legislators all day long, but unless the grassroots back home call and verify what they’re saying, legislators may not take it seriously.” ■



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Photos from Alabama Counties



Advocating on Goat Hill

St. Clair County's commission members and affiliate group members (above left) made a strong showing at the March ACCA County Day, pausing while at the Statehouse for a picture with Sen. Jim McClendon. Altogether, nearly 60 county advocates (above right) converged on Montgomery that day to speak up for county government.



@DONNAWOOD67



@ALABAMACOUNTIES



Making the County Voice Heard at the National Level

Four County Family members serving on the National Association of Counties (NACo) Board of Directors traveled to Washington, D.C., this past winter to speak on behalf of all 67 Alabama counties at NACo's Annual Legislative Conference.



@NACOTWEETS



@MORGANCOCOMM



@COMMLUDGOOD



@WRBSPPEARPOINT



Teaming Up Amid a Health Emergency

In DeKalb County, coordinated meetings among public safety, school, health and emergency management officials began the first week of March — before Alabama had its first confirmed case of COVID-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus.



@DEKALB_CO_EMA



Connecting with State Legislators on Priority Issues

Elmore County Commission members and employees met with their state lawmakers in February to discuss local legislation as well as issues concerning all 67 counties, such as the inmate crisis and public safety.



@ELMORECOMM



Surveying Costly Flood Damage

ACCA Immediate Past President and Choctaw County Commissioner Tony Cherry spoke with local news media in February about then-recent flooding and its impact on his county.



@CHOCTAWEMA



Collaborating to Enhance County Efficiency and Effectiveness

The Association of County Administrators of Alabama (ACAA), one of ACCA's affiliate groups, stayed active in February with a series of regional meetings around the state. In the next-to-last gathering of the year, members convened in Marengo County to discuss current projects and challenges, as well as methods for better communicating with one another.



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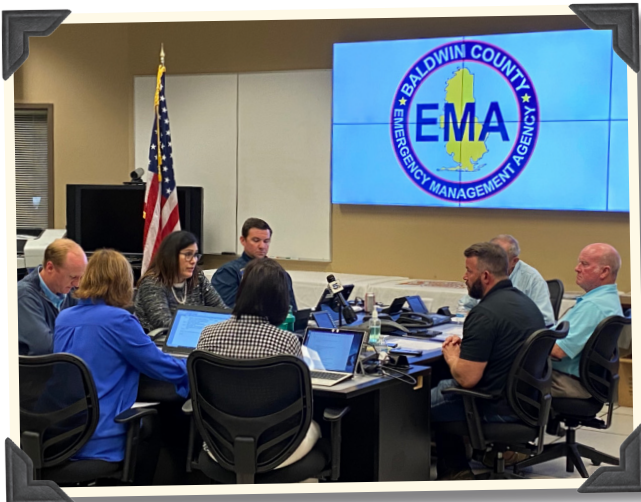


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Responding to COVID-19

One day after Alabama's first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus, the Baldwin County Commission conducted a special Saturday meeting to determine whether to declare a local state of emergency in response to COVID-19.



@BCCOMMISSION



@BALDWINEMA



Maximizing Census Participation

Houston, Geneva and Henry County Probate Judges/Commission Chairs joined state and city elected officials in January to publicly urge Wiregrass residents to participate in the critical 2020 Census.



@MARKCULVER



@DAVIDMONEY72



Advocating on Capitol Hill

In March, members of the Board of Directors for the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers (AAEM) joined Alabama EMA Assistant Director Jonathan Gaddy on Capitol Hill to advocate for essential federal funding for state and local emergency management efforts.



@ALEMERGENCYMGRS

Please send your photos to ACCA for the Family Album!

County Commission magazine wants to publish a selection of member photos in every issue to showcase the many ways county government touches the lives of Alabamians and to recognize the dedicated men and women who make counties work. Please send photos (large file sizes preferred) to Abby Fitzpatrick, Director of Communication & Engagement, at afitzpatrick@alabamacounties.org.

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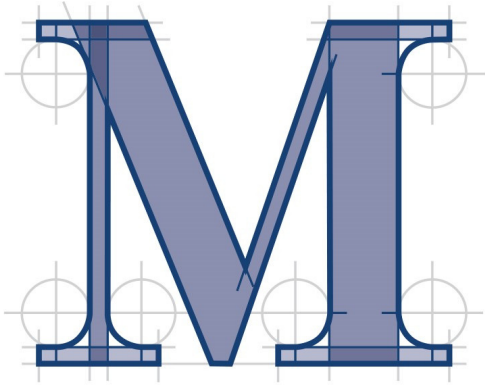
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