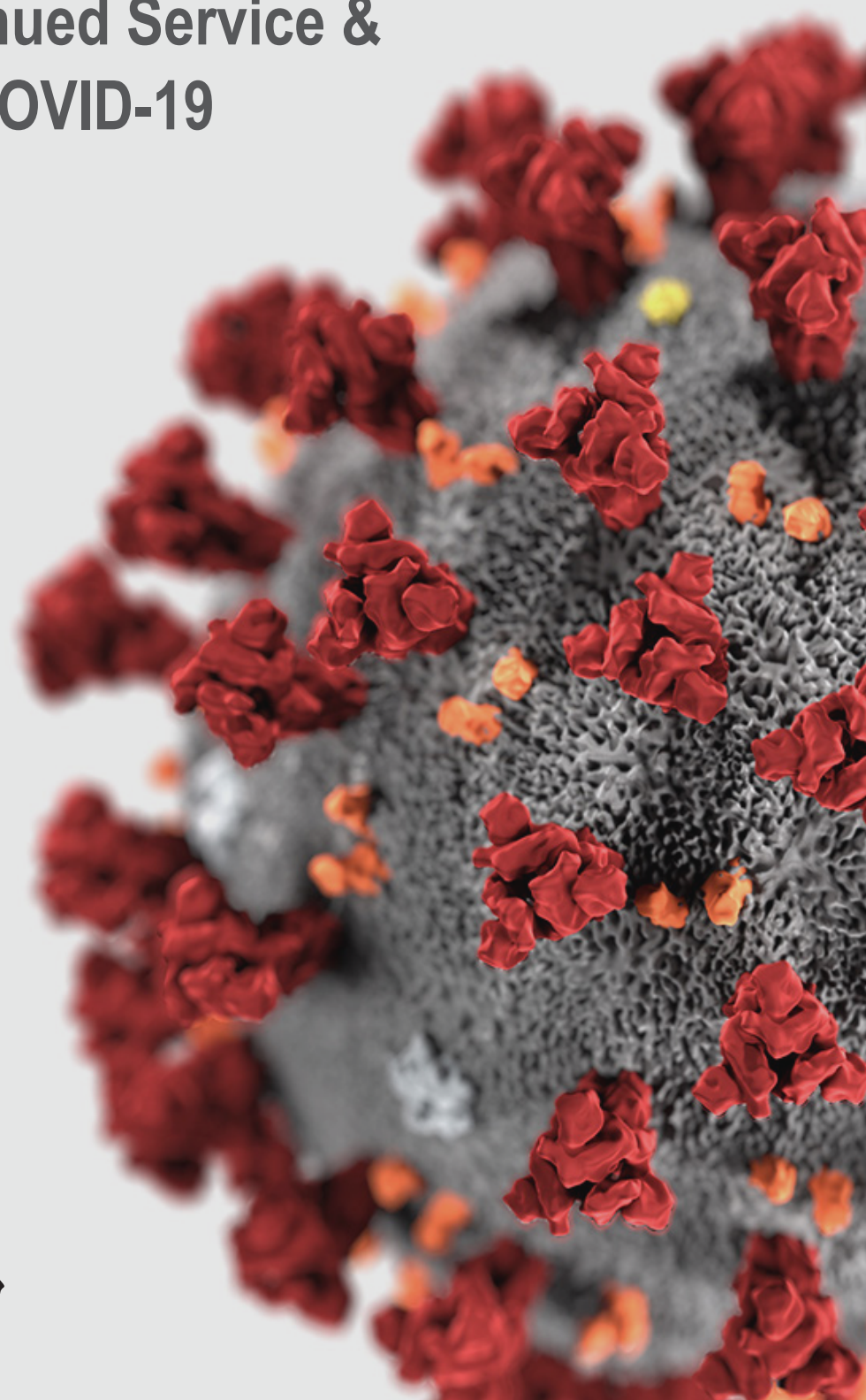


Counties on the Front Lines:

The Cost of Continued Service &
Protection Amid COVID-19



COVID-19: A THREAT TO GOVERNMENT SERVICES

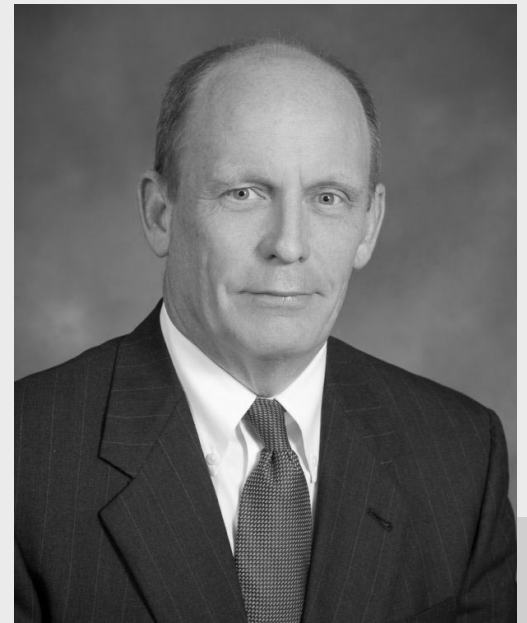
Last year about this time, Alabama's counties were developing their budgets for the next fiscal year, and no one had heard of something called COVID-19. As the 2020 Legislative Session comes to a close, hardly anyone at the county commission level is thinking about anything other than the pandemic we face and the strain it is placing on counties' ability to provide essential services.

Back home, county government delivers and administers a diverse array of programs — which in many cases touch the lives of your constituents as often as the state programs and services included in the budgets you adopt each year. The impact of this current crisis can be seen at both the state and county levels, and any solution addressing the unexpected financial strain caused by COVID-19 should address both levels of government.


This report — developed over the past week — is intended to provide you with insight into the role counties have played in the virus recovery and response process during the past 10 weeks. It is, admittedly, short on details regarding costs. But its intended purpose is to provide you with a window into the role counties have played and to encourage your support of counties during discussions on use of the reimbursement funds available through the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.


We do not intend for this document to be the only communication on this issue. Counties stand ready to provide a detailed accounting of expenditures and to comply with the federal guidelines that restrict the use of the CARES funding. We look forward to the opportunity to engage in that portion of the implementation process.

Please let us know if you have any questions about the content of this report or if we can provide you more details in the days ahead. In the meantime, please accept our congratulations on a successful session and know that we look forward to working with you on our remaining 2020 Legislative Priorities during the expected special session.



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Impact of COVID-19 on County Budgets

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis in Alabama...

- Who has continued to provide aid in the operation of local hospitals, long-term care facilities and public health departments?
- Who has continued to be there when citizens call 9-1-1 for help?
- Who has continued to provide essential emergency management and recovery services?
- Who has continued to protect our communities by providing life-saving first response?
- Who has continued to maintain order in our localities through the patrol of law enforcement officers and operation of our jails?
- Who has continued to house and care for the state's inmates who have been refused by the Alabama Department of Corrections?
- Who has continued to repair and maintain the roads and bridges that make up a majority of our state's transportation infrastructure?
- Who has continued preparation for the administration of our state's upcoming elections?
- Who has continued to provide access to essential services in the courthouses and other public buildings?
- Who has continued to collect and remit revenue to enhance the operation of both county and state government?
- Who has continued these essential services on an even further limited budget while also establishing and implementing costly plans and procedures to best protect Alabama citizens?

The answer — the officials and employees who make up Alabama's county governments.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis in Alabama, our county governments have remained on the front lines — because the work of Alabama's counties does not and cannot stop, even amidst a global health emergency. **Consequently, a significant portion of current county budgets have been expended in maintaining service levels while adhering to state and federal COVID-19 health orders and guidelines to protect local communities.** And with the minimal financial relief provided thus far to local governments, county leaders will soon be forced to choose between spending their remaining budgetary dollars on everyday services and spending them on public health response.

Alabama's counties urge the State Legislature to recognize the county need for financial relief and to appropriate to counties sufficient funding — from the state's dollars received through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act — for the reimbursement of mounting costs in responding to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Costs Incurred by Counties

As county costs from COVID-19 response continue to rise in the coming months, county governments will soon be forced to assess what remains of their current budget and decide whether to continue providing existing services or to protect citizens from the current public health crisis.

Select examples of the costly COVID-19 expenses incurred thus far by counties cover:

- Increased payroll for public safety, public health and similar essential county employees mitigating and responding to COVID-19
- Significantly increased overtime and hazardous pay to certain county employees to achieve compliance with public health measures
- Paid sick leave, paid family leave and medical leave for specific county employees to allow for COVID-19 guideline compliance
- Enhanced law enforcement presence at the courthouse to assist with the flow of public interactions
- Mitigation of the threat of COVID-19 in county jails and maintaining safety measures for jail employees
- Implementation of building and construction projects to enforce social distancing at county facilities
- Inter-departmental communications upgrades for continued work by county personnel
- Purchase of increased telework and remote work technology for county personnel to continue providing county services
- Alteration of the local court system and courtroom layouts to ensure proper social distancing while conducting business
- Implementation of enhanced setup and procedures for social distancing during the upcoming elections
- Increased funding for health department operations and supplies
- Operation, maintenance and enhanced cleaning of senior centers
- Meal preparation for and delivery to senior citizens and others in need
- Appropriation of funding and support to local educational facilities and institutions
- Installation of broadband services and WiFi “hotspots” for public use
- Absorption of waived convenience, mailing and processing costs to encourage reduced public traffic in county courthouses and county departments
- Public health materials and items to support and assist public medical and treatment facilities
- Public signs and notification postings
- COVID-19 public announcements and advertising for public awareness
- Establishment and operation of testing centers and subsequent supplies
- Enhanced cleaning of county facilities for personnel and public interactions
- Additional and stronger cleaning materials and sanitation supplies
- Facemasks, hand sanitizer and additional personal protective equipment