



CITRUS COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES 2025 SESSION

Ensuring our voice is heard.

Tuesday, December 17, 2024



Legislative Planning Retreat

Tuesday, December 17, 2024

9:00 a.m. Welcome & Introduction

- Invocation
- Pledge of Allegiance

Opening Remarks

- Chairwoman Rebecca Bays
- County Administrator Steve Howard

9:15 a.m. Federal Policy Priorities

- Maurice Kurland, *Alcalde & Fay*
- Commissioner Discussion

10:15 a.m. State Appropriations Requests & Policy Priorities

- Sarah Busk Suskey, *The Advocacy Partners*
- Commissioner Discussion

Closing Comments & Next Steps

- Chairwoman Rebecca Bays
- County Administrator Steve Howard

Adjournment

*Lecanto Government Building
3600 W Sovereign Path, Room 166
Lecanto, FL 34461*

Ensuring our voice is heard.



County-Specific Vetoes

2024 Florida Legislative Session

CITRUS COUNTY FINAL BUDGET REQUESTS – VETOES

1. Crystal River High School Health Academy Expansion

- Amount Requested: **\$345,833**

2. Inverness State Trail Connector

- Amount Requested: **\$1,125,000**

3. Halls River Multi-Use Path Phase Two

- Amount Requested: **\$2,000,000**

4. Watson Road Phase Two

- Amount Requested: **\$3,600,000**

5. Crystal River Government Center Phase Two

- Amount Requested: **\$10,000,000**

6. Crystal River Ladder Truck

- Amount Requested: **\$350,000**

HERNANDO COUNTY FINAL BUDGET REQUESTS – VETOES

1. Hernando County Beach Wastewater Resiliency Project

- Amount Requested: **\$1,000,000**

2. Hernando Public Safety Training Center

- Amount Requested: **\$1,000,000**

SUMTER COUNTY FINAL BUDGET REQUESTS – VETOES

1. House of Hope - Substance Abuse Services for Adolescents

- Amount Requested: **\$100,000**

2. Wildwood Water Reclamation Facility: Nutrient Removal and Capacity Expansion

- Amount Requested: **\$2,000,000**



County-Specific Vetoes

2024 Florida Legislative Session

MARION COUNTY FINAL BUDGET REQUESTS – VETOES

1. Belleview Water Reclamation Facility Expansion Project

- Amount Requested: **\$2,000,000**

2. Ocala Force Main Construction

- Amount Requested: **\$500,000**

3. Ocala Sewer Ex-Filtration Project

- Amount Requested: **\$250,000**

4. McIntosh Town Hall

- Amount Requested: **\$275,000**

MARTIN COUNTY FINAL BUDGET REQUESTS – VETOES

1. Broward County Student Athlete Mentoring Expansion Program

- Amount Requested: **\$250,000**

2. Aerospace Manufacturing REACH Center

- Amount Requested: **\$1,570,579**

3. Ignite Careers for Martin County Teens

- Amount Requested: **\$200,000**

4. Sewall's Point Road Reconstruction Phase Three

- Amount Requested: **\$500,000**

5. Stuart Sewer Connection Assistance

- Amount Requested: **\$500,000**

6. CR 710 Alignment

- Amount Requested: **\$3,550,000**



Citrus County Trends

Labor Market & Education

EMPLOYMENT & JOB MARKET

- **Year-Over-Year Job Change:** -1,008 (Improving)
- **Growth Rate:** -2.1% (Decline)
- **Projected Net New Jobs by 2030:** 5,691
- **Current Open Job Postings:** 1,089 (Increase)
- **Unemployed Individuals:** 2,761 (Decrease)
- **Unemployed Individuals per 100 Jobs:** 254
- **Unemployment Rate:** 5.6% (Increase)
- **Current Population:** 158,009
- **Projected Population Range by 2030:** 170,700 - 187,800

EDUCATION & LITERACY

- **3rd Grade Reading Proficiency:** 53% (Improvement)
- **Number of Students Not Reading at Grade Level:** 560 (Decrease)
- **High School Graduation Rate:** 84.9% (Decline)

POVERTY & HOUSING

- **Percentage of Children in Poverty:** 23.2% (Decrease)
- **Overall Poverty Rate:** 15.0% (Worsening)
- **Housing Permits Issued:** 2,202 (Increase)

REVENUE & CONSERVATION

- **Annual Sales Tax Revenue:** \$1.13 Million (Increase)
- **Land Under Conservation:** 36%

Source: All data presented in this document has been sourced from the Florida Scorecard, an online platform developed by the Florida Chamber of Commerce. The platform is designed to track and assess key metrics that impact the state's long-term economic and social outcomes.



Citrus County Statistics

Incarceration

CITRUS COUNTY CORRECTIONAL FACILITY – KEY METRICS

- **Average Daily Population (ADP):** 695
- **Incarceration Rate per 1,000 Residents:** 4.2
- **County Share of State ADP:** 1.25%
- **Number of Felony Pretrial Detainees:** 233
- **Number of Misdemeanor Pretrial Detainees:** 54
- **Total Percentage of Pretrial Detainees:** 41.3%

COMPARISON OF CITRUS COUNTY & NEIGHBORING COUNTIES

As of October 2024, Citrus County accounts for 1.25% of Florida's average daily population (ADP) of incarcerated individuals. This is a higher proportion compared to its neighboring counties, including Hernando (1.10%), Levy (0.31%), and Sumter (0.85%), but lower than Marion County, which stands at 3.39%.

In terms of incarceration rate, Citrus County has a rate of 4.2 per 1,000 residents, which is notably higher than that of its neighboring counties, including Hernando at 2.9, Levy at 3.8, and Sumter at 3.0. However, Citrus County's rate remains slightly lower than Marion County, which has an incarceration rate of 4.5.

Source: All data presented in this document is derived from the Florida Department of Corrections Bureau of Research and Data Analysis, October 2024 Florida County Detention Facilities Average Inmate Population Report. This report consolidates county-specific information as mandated by F.S. § 951.23(2), which is submitted to the Florida Department of Corrections. It offers a detailed, monthly overview of inmate populations across Florida's detention facilities.



Citrus County Trends

Mental & Behavioral Health

HOSPITALIZATIONS & EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS FROM MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS

Between 2021 and 2023, Citrus County experienced various rates of mental health-related hospitalizations and emergency department visits. Hospitalizations for mental disorders were 866.9 per 100,000 in the county, slightly lower than the state rate of 928.0 per 100,000. Rates varied by age group, with the highest hospitalization rates seen in those aged 18-21 (1790.9 per 100,000) and 25-44 years (1866.0 per 100,000), both exceeding state averages. Emergency department visits for mental disorders were also prominent, with the county rate at 967.6 per 100,000, slightly higher than the state rate of 933.3 per 100,000. Rates for eating disorder-related hospitalizations were lower, with 35.0 per 100,000 in those aged 12-18 compared to the state rate of 71.2 per 100,000. In general, the county's rates for mental health-related hospitalizations and emergency visits were slightly lower than or comparable to state averages, with some age groups showing significantly higher rates.

MENTAL HEALTH STATUS & COMPLICATIONS

Between 2019 and 2023, Citrus County reported various mental health indicators. In 2019, 17.8% of adults had a cognitive disability, higher than the state rate of 12.9%. Additionally, 16.4% of adults in the county reported poor mental health on 14 or more days in the past month, compared to the state's 13.8%. The county also saw a higher prevalence of depressive disorders, with 19.2% of adults reporting ever being told they had one, above the state rate of 17.7%. A significant 27.3% of adults experienced poor physical or mental health that interfered with their daily activities for 14 or more days, while 83.6% reported good mental health, lower than the state rate of 86.2%. On average, county residents reported 4.9 unhealthy mental days in the past month, slightly higher than the state's average of 4.4 days. Among those with poor mental or physical health, 8.1 days were affected by health-related limitations, compared to 5.6 days statewide. In schools, 0.67% of students had emotional or behavioral disabilities, and 17.3% of students reported intentionally hurting themselves without the desire to die. Furthermore, 38.6% of students felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row.

Source: All data presented in this document is derived from a report published by the Florida Department of Health, Division of Public Health Statistics and Performance Management, and is available for reference at [FLHealthCharts.gov](https://flhealthcharts.gov).



2025 Legislative Priorities

Staff Proposals for Board Consideration

Section 1: *Appropriations Requests*

1. Funding for the Barge Canal Boat Ramp
2. Funding for the Halls River Multi-Use Path
3. Funding for Citrus County Fire Rescue Station 8

Section 2: *Requests for Special Consideration*

1. Septic-to-Sewer
2. Sadowski Housing Trust Fund
3. Nitrogen-Reducing Septic Systems
4. Lecanto Highway (CR-491) Expansion to SR-200
5. Local Government Cybersecurity Grant Program
6. Invasive Plant Management Section
7. Small County Outreach Project (SCOP) Program
8. State Aid to Public Libraries
9. Trail Improvements
10. Ozello Trail (CR-494)

Section 3: *State Policy Proposals*

1. Code Enforcement Anonymous Complaints
2. Continuing Contract Thresholds
3. Emergency Briefings Public Meetings Exemption
4. Local Fuel Tax Indexing
5. Electric Vehicle Registration Fees
6. Inmate Medical Care
7. Firefighter Training Insurance Coverage
8. Transportation Concurrency
9. Florida Springs Basin Management Action Plans

Section 4: *Federal Policy Proposals*

1. Southern Rail Commission
2. Affordable Connectivity Program
3. Disaster Preparedness Response and Recovery
4. Mental and Behavioral Health



SECTION ONE

APPROPRIATIONS REQUESTS



APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST: BARGE CANAL BOAT RAMP - PHASE I

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project aims to develop a boat ramp that will enhance access to the Cross Florida Barge Canal. In 2012, Citrus County secured a conceptual permit from the Southwest Florida Water Management District (SWFWMD). Since then, the County has successfully navigated the federal permitting process, receiving approvals from both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA Fisheries (National Marine Fisheries Service). Final approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is anticipated in the near future.

The new boat ramp is expected to alleviate pressure on the County's existing ramp facilities, which are often congested with boaters waiting in long lines to launch and retrieve their vessels. Additionally, parking lots regularly reach capacity, causing pickups and boat trailers to overflow onto the roads leading to the ramps. Beyond reducing congestion at the ramp, the strategic location of the new boat ramp on the Barge Canal, with direct access to the Gulf, will help ease traffic along the Crystal River. This will provide boaters with a more efficient route for traveling between Kings Bay and the Gulf, particularly during peak boating hours.

Phase One of the project will include the construction of a 400-foot-wide boat ramp, three gangways with floating docks, 24 vehicle parking spaces, 60 boat/trailer parking spaces, and the necessary stormwater management infrastructure. This phase will be developed on a 18.55-acre site located just south of the Citrus-Levy County border, along the Cross Florida Barge Canal. The project is expected to boost local tourism by attracting recreational boaters, enhancing access to the Gulf, and supporting local businesses in the area.

TOTAL COST

\$11,180,000 (estimated)

LOCAL FUNDING

General Fund:

\$215,528

Boating Improvement Fees:

\$410,000

RESTORE Act (application pending)

\$3,293,924*

REQUEST: Citrus County is seeking \$7,260,548 to fund the construction of Phase One of the Barge Canal Boat Ramp project.



APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST: HALLS RIVER MULTI-USE PATH - PHASE II

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project entails the construction of a 10-to-12-foot-wide asphalt path extending 3.2 miles, from South Riverview Circle to US-19 in Homosassa. The path will connect residential neighborhoods with local businesses and restaurants, seamlessly linking to the established multi-use path along US-19. Citrus County has requested that the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) oversee the project, with a vendor selected to handle design, permitting, construction administration, and inspection services.

Multi-use paths offer a wide range of benefits for both residents and visitors. For residents, these paths provide a safe, convenient, and accessible means of non-motorized transportation, encouraging healthier lifestyles by promoting walking, cycling, and other forms of physical activity. By enhancing connectivity between neighborhoods and key destinations, such as local parks and businesses, the path will reduce traffic congestion and the reliance on automobiles, improving overall mobility within the community.

From a tourism perspective, multi-use paths are a significant asset, drawing visitors who seek recreation in a safe and scenic environment. By connecting local attractions and businesses, the path will not only support the local economy by increasing foot traffic but also contribute to longer visitor stays.

The proposed path will enhance Citrus County's appeal as a destination for outdoor activities, attracting cyclists, runners, and nature enthusiasts. By connecting popular local attractions and businesses, the path will not only support the local economy by increasing foot traffic but also contribute to longer visitor stays, ultimately benefiting small businesses and the regional tourism industry.

This project represents a key investment in both community infrastructure and the county's tourism potential. Additionally, it is included on the Hernando-Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization's Transportation Alternatives List of Priority Projects, further underscoring its importance to regional development and connectivity.

TOTAL COST

\$8,300,000 (estimated)

LOCAL FUNDING

General Fund: **\$800,000**

Impact Fees: **\$410,000**

STATE FUNDING

2023 Request: **\$2.3 million**

REQUEST: Citrus County is seeking \$5,000,000 to assist the Florida Department of Transportation in the construction of the Halls River Multi-Use Path.



APPROPRIATIONS REQUEST: **FIRE RESCUE STATION 8**

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Relocating Citrus County Fire Rescue Station 8 to Inverness Airport offers significant enhancements to both safety and operational efficiency for the airport and surrounding communities. Positioned strategically on airport property, the station will provide immediate access to critical facilities, including runways and fueling stations, enabling rapid response to aviation emergencies such as aircraft incidents and hazardous material situations.

This relocation will not only strengthen safety for pilots, aviation businesses, and visitors, but also align with industry standards, potentially attracting additional aviation-related enterprises to the area. Furthermore, its proximity to U.S. Highway 41 and State Road 44 will improve response times across rural and high-traffic zones, expanding coverage to 20,900 residents within a five-mile radius.

Beyond safety and operational improvements, this move will provide considerable economic benefits, supporting the development of the Inverness Airport Business Park and contributing to the region's long-term growth.

Relocating from its current residential location in the Highlands will reduce noise and traffic disruptions in local neighborhoods while enhancing service across both urban and rural areas. The new location will also improve the county's Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings, potentially lowering insurance premiums for property owners. Overall, the relocation will strengthen Citrus County's emergency response capacity, stimulate economic development at the Inverness Airport Business Park, and bolster public safety, fostering a more resilient and thriving community.

TOTAL COST

\$3,500,000 (estimated)

REQUEST: Citrus County is seeking \$3.5 million in funding to support the relocation of Fire Rescue Station 8 to the Inverness Airport.



SECTION TWO

REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: **SEPTIC TO SEWER**

BACKGROUND

Citrus County is home to three first-order magnitude springs and associated rivers and estuaries, which support diverse wildlife, including the West Indian Manatee. These critical water systems, however, are impaired by nutrient pollution, primarily from septic tank effluent that contaminates groundwater and eventually reaches the springs. To address this pressing issue, implementing a central sewer system is essential, as it will treat wastewater more effectively and reduce pollution, benefiting both the environment and the health of the community.

A significant challenge in this effort is the financial burden on homeowners, who face high costs for septic-to-sewer conversion. These costs include connection fees, plumbing adjustments, and septic tank abandonment, which can be prohibitively expensive and may discourage participation in the program. As a result, securing funding assistance is crucial to ensure widespread participation and the success of this vital initiative, which aims to safeguard water quality and public health.

To help offset these financial challenges, Citrus County has launched the Citrus County Sewer Connection Incentive Program, offering up to \$4,000 in grant funding for eligible homeowners in pre-approved areas. This program, which aligns with state laws and water protection goals, supports the county's broader efforts to improve water quality, protect local ecosystems, and preserve its natural resources for future generations. Homeowners are responsible for any costs exceeding the grant amount and must ensure compliance with local codes, health requirements, and any necessary adjustments to their properties. By providing financial assistance, the program fosters greater participation and engagement in the community's long-term environmental stewardship.

Additionally, Citrus County is working closely with local agencies and stakeholders to raise awareness about the importance of this initiative and its role in preserving the region's vital water resources. The success of this program will not only protect the springs but also help ensure the continued health of the West Indian Manatee and other wildlife that depend on these ecosystems.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to provide funding for local septic-to-sewer conversion programs through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, to support ongoing efforts to improve water quality and protect the state's natural resources.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: **SADOWSKI HOUSING TRUST FUND**

BACKGROUND

The Sadowski Housing Trust Fund, established in 1992, is a crucial resource for addressing affordable housing needs across Florida. It is primarily funded through documentary stamp tax revenues from real estate transactions, providing a sustainable source of funding for affordable housing initiatives. The Trust Fund supports programs such as the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP), which offers down payment assistance, home repairs, and affordable rental housing. It also funds the Florida Housing Finance Corporation's efforts to develop and preserve affordable rental housing throughout the state, ensuring that low- and moderate-income families have access to safe and affordable homes.

Continued investment in the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund is essential as Florida grapples with rising housing costs and an expanding population. Without sufficient funding, the state risks worsening its affordable housing crisis, making it even more challenging for low-income households to find stable housing.

Fully funding the Trust Fund helps to develop affordable housing options, prevent homelessness, and improve the quality of life for Florida residents. By maintaining strong support for the Trust Fund, the state can ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of its communities.

Moreover, fully utilizing the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund can stimulate economic growth by creating jobs in construction, real estate, and home improvement sectors. This economic boost benefits not only the housing market but also local businesses, contributing to broader state prosperity. Ensuring the continued funding of this Trust Fund aligns with Florida's commitment to building resilient, inclusive communities that provide opportunities for all its residents. As the state faces continued population growth and increased demand for housing, sustained investment in the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund will be essential to addressing the evolving housing challenges ahead.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to sustain funding for the Sadowski Housing Trust Fund in order to effectively address the critical housing needs of Florida's most vulnerable populations.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: NITROGEN-REDUCING SEPTIC SYSTEMS

BACKGROUND

Providing funding for local nitrogen-reducing septic system conversion programs in Florida is essential for protecting the state's water quality and environmental health. Traditional septic systems release excess nitrogen into the ground, which leaches into nearby water bodies, contributing to harmful algal blooms, degraded water quality, fish kills, and loss of biodiversity. Florida's freshwater springs, lakes, and coastal ecosystems, which are highly vulnerable to nutrient pollution, would benefit significantly from converting outdated systems to nitrogen-reducing models. By addressing these issues, Florida can reduce nitrogen runoff and preserve its delicate environmental balance.

Local governments, often at the forefront of these efforts, require financial resources to implement effective septic system conversion programs. Without adequate funding, many property owners, especially in rural or low-income areas, may be unable to afford the necessary upgrades. A well-funded program ensures equity by making eco-friendly technologies accessible to all communities, regardless of socio-economic status.

Additionally, investing in these systems supports Florida's tourism industry, which relies on clean water for recreation, while reducing long-term costs associated with water pollution, damaged fisheries, and public health issues. These conversion programs help safeguard both the environment and the economic well-being of the state's communities.

The long-term benefits of nitrogen-reducing septic systems extend beyond water quality improvements. By reducing the levels of nitrogen in local water bodies, these systems can help restore the health of ecosystems, improve biodiversity, and support the vitality of fish and wildlife populations. Moreover, these conversions can contribute to the resilience of Florida's water systems, enhancing their ability to withstand future environmental challenges. Ensuring the funding of such programs is a proactive approach to safeguarding Florida's natural resources, which are critical to the state's economy, public health, and quality of life.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to allocate funding for local septic system conversion programs in advance of the tentative mandate to adopt nitrogen-reducing models, to ensure that this necessary environmental requirement does not become an unfunded mandate that imposes undue financial burdens on residents and local governments.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: LECANTO HIGHWAY EXPANSION TO 200

BACKGROUND

Lecanto Highway (CR-491) is a critical regional corridor in Citrus County, serving as a minor arterial and essential hurricane evacuation route. Starting in Hernando County and connecting to State Road 200 (SR-200), it provides a vital north-south link through the county. Over time, segments of the highway have been widened and upgraded to accommodate growing traffic demands. The next phase of expansion targets a seven-mile stretch from Pine Ridge Boulevard in Beverly Hills to SR-200 in Holder, addressing current capacity limitations and ensuring safer travel.

The expansion project will improve the existing two-lane rural road within a 100-foot right-of-way. Planned enhancements include the construction of a 12-foot-wide multi-use path for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as a 5-foot sidewalk for pedestrian safety. These improvements aim to support alternative transportation modes and enhance overall accessibility for residents and visitors. Additionally, the project will integrate essential infrastructure such as water, wastewater, and stormwater systems to improve functionality and manage environmental concerns.

In November 2024, the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners approved a corridor realignment study for the CR-491 expansion, with an estimated cost of \$927,500. Funded through local impact fees, this study is a crucial step in advancing the project, ensuring thorough planning and design to increase road capacity and safety. The project is also designated as a priority in the Hernando-Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2025-2029 Transportation Improvement Program, aligning it with regional transportation goals.

This expansion project underscores Citrus County's commitment to enhancing its transportation infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing community. As a vital evacuation route, improving CR-491 will help ensure safer travel during storm events and provide long-term benefits to the region's residents, making the area more resilient to future challenges.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to allocate the necessary funding and regulatory support to the Citrus County and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to facilitate the essential enhancements to this critical evacuation route.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: LOCAL CYBERSECURITY GRANT PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The Local Government Cybersecurity Grant Program is a state initiative designed to support local governments in enhancing their cybersecurity measures. The program provides funding to help municipalities, counties, and other local entities strengthen their digital infrastructure and protect sensitive information from cyber threats. This funding is aimed at improving the cybersecurity posture of local governments, which are often targeted by cybercriminals due to the sensitive data they manage, including personal information, financial records, and critical infrastructure systems.

The program was established to address the growing concerns about cyberattacks, ransomware, and data breaches that can disrupt government operations, compromise citizen data, and lead to financial losses.

Local governments may use the grant funds for various cybersecurity initiatives, such as implementing more advanced security technologies, conducting cybersecurity training for staff, upgrading systems to meet best practices, and enhancing data protection measures.

The program is part of a broader effort by the state to bolster the cybersecurity resilience of public entities and protect against the increasing frequency and sophistication of cyber threats. It aims to ensure that local governments have the necessary resources to defend against cyberattacks, safeguard public trust, and maintain the integrity of essential services.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to sustain funding for the Local Government Cybersecurity Grant Program in order to strengthen the cybersecurity defenses of local governments, protect critical infrastructure, and ensure the security of sensitive data against growing cyber threats.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT SECTION

BACKGROUND

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Invasive Plant Management Section is responsible for overseeing the management and control of invasive plant species in Florida's freshwater ecosystems. Invasive species such as hydrilla, water hyacinth, and Brazilian pepper pose significant threats by disrupting native habitats, degrading water quality, reducing biodiversity, and impairing recreational activities. The section is focused on preventing the spread of these invasive plants, restoring affected ecosystems, and minimizing their adverse effects on Florida's waterways.

The Invasive Plant Management Section employs a comprehensive approach that includes mechanical removal, herbicide application, biological control, and habitat restoration. The section works in collaboration with local, state, and federal agencies, as well as private stakeholders, to coordinate and implement the most effective management strategies.

Through these efforts, the section helps protect Florida's aquatic ecosystems, preserve biodiversity, support recreational activities, and safeguard the long-term health of the state's water resources.

For more than three decades, Citrus County has relied on funding from the FWC's Invasive Plant Management Section to effectively manage aquatic plant growth in its waterways. This partnership has been instrumental in maintaining the ecological health of the county's freshwater systems. However, recent reductions in funding have severely impacted the county's capacity to implement comprehensive aquatic plant management programs, putting the vitality of its waterways at risk and threatening the environmental, recreational, and economic benefits they provide to the community.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to provide full funding for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Invasive Plant Management Section to protect and preserve our waterways and vital ecosystems.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: SMALL COUNTY OUTREACH PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) Small County Outreach Program (SCOP) is designed to assist counties with populations under 200,000 in improving their road and transportation infrastructure. These smaller counties often face challenges in funding and maintaining road networks, and SCOP provides an essential source of financial support for projects like resurfacing and road reconstruction. The program helps address the transportation needs of these areas by improving road safety, mobility, and overall infrastructure quality.

SCOP funding is allocated to local governments based on project applications, allowing counties to focus on critical roads that impact residents' daily commutes, emergency services, and economic activities. These projects can range from resurfacing to more extensive road reconstruction aimed at improving traffic flow and safety.

FDOT manages the program to ensure equitable distribution of funds and adherence to state standards for construction and safety.

By supporting smaller counties, SCOP fosters collaboration between local governments and the state, helping to stimulate local economies through better connectivity. The program plays a vital role in ensuring that all regions of Florida, regardless of size, have the resources needed to maintain safe, efficient transportation systems for their communities.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to uphold full funding for the Small County Outreach Program (SCOP), emphasizing the critical need to support rural communities in maintaining their infrastructure networks amidst unprecedented growth.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: **STATE AID TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

BACKGROUND

The Florida State Aid to Libraries Program is a state initiative that provides funding to public libraries throughout Florida to support their operations and services. The program aims to ensure that libraries across the state, particularly those in local and underserved areas, can offer essential resources and services to their communities. The funding is intended to enhance the ability of libraries to meet the growing needs of residents for educational, informational, and recreational resources.

The program allocates funds based on factors such as population size, service levels, and local library needs, with a focus on improving library infrastructure, expanding access to materials, and increasing the availability of technology. These funds can be used for a variety of purposes, including purchasing books and digital resources, enhancing library facilities, and offering educational programs and community outreach.

The Florida State Aid to Libraries Program is administered by the Division of Library and Information Services (DLIS) within the Florida Department of State. By providing financial support, the program helps ensure that libraries can continue to be a valuable community resource, fostering lifelong learning and serving as hubs for information access and cultural enrichment across the state.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to allocate sufficient funding to the State Aid to Libraries Program, ensuring that rural counties have the resources necessary to deliver vital library services to their communities.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: **TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS**

BACKGROUND

The Florida Greenways & Trails 2019-2023 System Plan highlights the economic, personal, and social benefits of outdoor recreation, which contribute to the health and vitality of communities. The Florida Department of Health has found that for every dollar spent on walking trails, approximately three dollars are saved in medical costs. In addition, the U.S. Treasury has recognized that investments in improving outdoor spaces are an effective response to the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings underscore the value of recreational trails in promoting economic development, public health, and community well-being.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is responsible for developing a comprehensive outdoor recreation plan through its Division of Recreation and Parks, as outlined in section 375.031(1), F.S. This plan is created with input from other public land managers and includes a focus on the state's recreation needs.

DEP's objective is to plan, promote, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities, particularly through a network of trails and access points. The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) serves as the state's primary document for guiding outdoor recreation planning efforts.

The Florida Department of Transportation administers several funding sources to support the development of trail systems. These include the Florida Forever Program, the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, the Recreational Trails Program, and Florida Communities Trust. Combined with additional state appropriations and federal grants, these resources enable local transportation planning organizations and county governments to achieve their trail network development goals, advancing the vision of an interconnected Florida Greenways and Trails System.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to continue dedicating state funding for the construction, enhancement, and designation of additional trails, thereby expanding recreational opportunities for Floridians and bolstering the local tourism economy.



REQUEST FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: **OZELLO TRAIL (CR-494)**

BACKGROUND

Ozello is an unincorporated coastal community in Citrus County, located between Crystal River and Homosassa along the Gulf of Mexico. The community is bordered by the St. Martin's Marsh Aquatic Preserve, a region renowned for its exceptional biodiversity and ecological productivity. Ozello offers a variety of recreational opportunities, including boating, paddling, and fishing, attracting both residents and visitors. Access to the community is limited to Ozello Trail (CR-494), a single, storm-vulnerable roadway that serves as the sole point of ingress and egress for approximately 1,105 homes and small businesses, thereby increasing the risks residents face during extreme weather events.

Citrus County has made considerable efforts to address soil erosion and the deterioration of roadway shoulders along Ozello Trail, investing nearly \$300,000 in maintenance activities such as asphalt repairs, debris removal, drainage improvements, emergency response, and vegetation management. The erosion of the shoulder area has significantly compromised the structural integrity of the roadway, as the slope and shoulder have historically served as a critical buffer between the tidal waters and the road.

This degradation has also created safety hazards, particularly in the road's curved sections, where the absence of a clear recovery zone increases the risk of accidents involving vehicles leaving the roadway.

With sufficient funding, Citrus County could restore the slopes and shoulders along Ozello Trail using a proven protective method involving geo-textile fabric, geo-web, and natural stone infill. Plans have been developed to mitigate erosion and reinforce the slope areas adjacent to the tidal water ditches. This approach has been successfully implemented by the Department of Public Works in other coastal areas of Citrus County, including the Dixie Shores community. This natural armoring technique not only protects sensitive slopes in tidal zones but has also been shown to foster the growth of mangroves, which are crucial for enhancing coastal resiliency.

REQUEST: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to allocate funding for resilience enhancements to Ozello Trail (CR-494), a vital access route that supports the safety and well-being of over 1,000 residents.



SECTION THREE

STATE POLICY PROPOSALS



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: **CODE ENFORCEMENT ANONYMOUS COMPLAINTS**

BACKGROUND

Code enforcement investigations typically begin following a complaint or tip from the public, often submitted by phone or through an online form, or because of a code enforcement officer personally observing a potential violation during their duties. Since code enforcement is primarily a function of local governance, the procedures for collecting complaints have historically varied across jurisdictions. In many areas, complaints could be made anonymously, while in others, the complainant was required to provide identifying information. Code enforcement officers generally accept any information provided in complaints and, using their discretion, may investigate the reported allegations.

Under Section 162.06(1)(b) of the Florida Statutes, a person reporting a potential code violation is now required to provide their name and address to the local government before any code enforcement action can commence.

The Florida Senate Bill Analysis and Fiscal Impact Statement (FIS) for CS/SB 60, which enacted this change during the 2021 legislative session, did not specify the intended purpose or identified a particular issue the bill sought to address. However, it appears that the primary intention behind requiring the disclosure of the complainant's personal information was to prevent the misuse of the code enforcement process for harassment purposes.

While the intent may have been to curb malicious complaints, the disclosure of the complainant's personal details exposes them to potential harassment, threats, or intimidation from the alleged violator. This legal change has already led to a decrease in the number of code complaints, thereby increasing the risk to public health, safety, and welfare due to unreported violations.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County advocates for amending Florida law regarding county and municipal code enforcement to restore the authority that allows code inspectors to investigate complaints submitted anonymously, as was permitted prior to the enactment of Chapter 2021-167, Laws of Florida.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: CONTINUING CONTRACT THRESHOLDS

BACKGROUND

The Florida Statutes related to the Competitive Consultant's Negotiation Act (CCNA), which governs the procurement process for professional services such as those provided by architects, engineers, and surveyors, have become increasingly cumbersome in the context of current economic conditions. One of the primary challenges faced at the county level is the restriction posed by the continuing contract study cap thresholds, which have not kept pace with inflation and rising costs within the industry. These thresholds significantly impact the efficiency of procuring essential consulting services and can lead to delays in important public infrastructure projects.

As construction costs continue to rise, it is critical that the continuing contract study cap thresholds be amended to reflect current inflationary trends and the increasing cost of professional services. The CCNA process, which is designed to ensure fair and competitive bidding for these services, typically takes up to three months to complete. By revising the study cap thresholds and reducing unnecessary restrictions, the process could be streamlined, ultimately shortening the time it takes to procure necessary consultants. This reduction in procurement time would result in faster project initiation, thereby benefiting taxpayers who are eagerly waiting for improvements such as road construction and designs for various public projects.

Notably, while the contract thresholds were raised last year to account for rising costs, the continuing contract study cap thresholds remained unchanged. This discrepancy has created a mismatch between the value of available contracts and the services that can be procured within the established caps. The proposed legislation seeks to address this gap by adjusting the study cap amounts in alignment with the newly increased contract thresholds. By doing so, we can ensure that the procurement process remains competitive, fair, and efficient, while also adapting to the financial realities of the current market.

These proposed changes are not only crucial for maintaining the integrity of the CCNA process but also serve to protect public interests by expediting the delivery of much-needed projects that serve our communities. It is imperative that the legislative framework governing these procurement practices be updated to reflect the contemporary economic landscape, ensuring the timely and effective use of taxpayer dollars in the delivery of public infrastructure.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to consider necessary amendments to the Competitive Consultant's Negotiation Act (CCNA) by easing existing restrictions and increasing the continuing contract study cap thresholds.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: **EMERGENCY BRIEFINGS PUBLIC MEETINGS EXEMPTION**

BACKGROUND

Section 286.011, Florida Statutes, currently restricts county elected officials from collectively participating in emergency-related briefings during a declared state of emergency. This limitation can hinder the ability of local governments to effectively coordinate and respond to critical situations.

It is imperative to amend this statute to allow an exemption for county elected officials to participate in such briefings, thereby enabling more efficient and cohesive decision-making during emergencies. This exemption would facilitate timely communication and collaborative execution of emergency policies among local leadership, ultimately improving the county's response to emergencies.

The proposed exemption would be narrowly tailored to occur only during a declared state of emergency, thereby preventing potential abuse. Importantly, the authority to trigger this exemption would rest with the Governor of the State of Florida, ensuring that it is invoked in alignment with the broader public safety needs of the state.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County respectfully urges the Florida Legislature to enact legislation that would grant an exemption allowing county elected officials to participate in emergency-related briefings during a declared state of emergency.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: LOCAL FUEL TAX INDEXING

BACKGROUND

Local fuel tax revenues have been steadily declining due to rising road construction and maintenance costs, as well as the increasing fuel efficiency of vehicles. Unlike local governments, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has the ability to index its motor fuel tax rate to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), allowing the state to keep pace with inflation. However, local governments are unable to do the same, leaving them struggling to meet growing transportation needs.

Motor fuel taxes are a primary source of funding for local transportation systems, but the value of these taxes continues to erode as costs rise. While the state's motor fuel taxes have been indexed since 1997, increasing from 6.9 cents per gallon to 16.2 cents per gallon by 2017, local fuel taxes have remained fixed since at least 2007. As the CPI has risen by nearly 96% since indexing began, local governments are facing a growing gap in funding for infrastructure maintenance and development.

Aligning local fuel tax indexing with the state's system would enable counties to better fund transportation projects and ensure the continued viability of local, regional, and state infrastructure. The Florida Department of Transportation's use of indexing has generated an additional \$985 million in revenue in 2022-2023. If local governments were granted similar indexing authority, they would see a comparable increase in funding, helping them meet the growing demands of their transportation systems.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to support the enactment of legislation that would index local option fuel taxes to annual adjustments in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: ELECTRIC VEHICLE REGISTRATION FEES

BACKGROUND

Local fuel tax revenues have been steadily eroded as vehicles become more fuel-efficient, while the costs associated with constructing, maintaining, and operating roadways continue to rise annually. This disconnect, where the cost of road infrastructure increases without a corresponding adjustment to the fuel tax rate, diminishes the purchasing power of motor fuel tax revenues. As a result, deficiencies in local road infrastructure will only worsen as the effectiveness of these tax revenues declines.

Simultaneously, the growing number of electric and alternative energy vehicles on the road exacerbates the issue. These vehicles do not contribute to road user fees, which are essential for funding road construction, maintenance, and operations.

The decline in local fuel tax revenues, coupled with rising road costs and the increasing prevalence of fuel-efficient and electric vehicles, underscores the urgent need for policy adjustments.

The traditional "pennies per gallon" motor fuel tax system is no longer sufficient to keep pace with escalating expenses, resulting in reduced funding for road maintenance.

Previous legislative efforts, such as SB1070 (2023), sought to address this imbalance by introducing additional registration fees for electric and hybrid vehicles. This bill aimed to establish a more equitable framework for funding road infrastructure while ensuring sustainable revenue generation. Furthermore, a national trend, as identified by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), reveals that many states are considering separate registration fees for electric vehicles to address both revenue shortfalls and fairness concerns.

The intersection of declining fuel tax revenues and the rise of electric vehicles calls for thoughtful and forward-looking policy interventions. These adjustments must ensure fair and consistent funding for road infrastructure while adapting to the evolving automotive landscape.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to enact legislation that establishes a fair and equitable system for electric and alternative energy vehicles to contribute their appropriate share towards the costs of operating the road system, thereby mitigating the loss of local fuel tax revenues.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: INMATE MEDICAL CARE

BACKGROUND

Currently, Florida Statute 409.9025 prohibits incarcerated individuals from receiving Medicaid reimbursement for care, services, or supplies unless the care lasts more than 24 hours. This restriction places a financial burden on counties, requiring them to cover medical costs for inmates, including those with pre-existing conditions, injuries, or illnesses that would otherwise be eligible for Medicaid. While federal regulations allow Medicaid to cover inpatient stays for inmates who are admitted for 24 hours or more, Florida's AHCA Rule 59G-1.050 prevents Medicaid payments for those residing in correctional facilities, despite allowances for inpatient services provided outside the facility.

Expanding Medicaid coverage to include inpatient care for incarcerated individuals would reduce county expenses by shifting some of the medical costs to Medicaid. With the current Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP), the federal government would cover 57% of the costs, with the state covering 43%.

If Florida were to expand Medicaid, the federal contribution for this population would rise to 90%, with the state covering just 10%. This change would particularly benefit counties like Orange County, where it is estimated that Medicaid could cover medical expenses for approximately 60 inmates annually, primarily for pregnant women or those with severe medical conditions.

County detention facilities face significant financial challenges in providing medical care, as Florida Statutes require reimbursement for inmate healthcare, including hospitalization and specialty care, which is not capped. Compensation for healthcare providers is limited to 110% of the Medicare allowable rate, or 125% in specific circumstances. These costs can lead to financial strain, particularly when compared to state correctional facilities. Modifying Medicaid rules to include coverage for inmate inpatient stays would help alleviate this financial burden while ensuring essential medical services for incarcerated individuals.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to amend Section 409.9025(1) of the Florida Statutes to allow incarcerated individuals to continue receiving medical assistance for care, services, or supplies provided within a 24-hour period during their incarceration. Additionally, Citrus County supports the implementation of a cap on the reimbursement rates for medical facilities providing specialty or offsite medical care to inmates.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: **FIREFIGHTER TRAINING INSURANCE COVERAGE**

BACKGROUND

Currently, Section 112.191(g)(2) of the Florida Statutes provides health insurance benefits for the spouses and dependent children of firefighters in the event of the firefighter's death, but only under specific circumstances. While the statute includes provisions for coverage following injuries sustained in the line of duty, the language surrounding the eligibility for benefits appears inconsistent, particularly when it comes to injuries incurred during training exercises. This inconsistency creates a gap in coverage that leaves firefighter families vulnerable in situations where a firefighter sustains an injury while performing duties related to training.

Citrus County is requesting that the Florida Legislature amend this statute to extend health insurance benefits to the spouses and dependent children of firefighters who sustain injuries during official training exercises. By clarifying and expanding the statute, the Legislature would provide consistent and comprehensive protection for the families of firefighters who are injured to the extent that they are no longer able to work.

This modification would ensure that firefighters across the state, and their families, have access to crucial benefits if an injury during training results in permanent disability or unemployability.

Firefighters face considerable risks not only while responding to emergency situations but also during training exercises, which are a critical component of their ongoing professional development. The Florida Firefighters Safety & Health Collaborative has consistently emphasized the importance of robust safety measures for firefighters, particularly during training activities, to mitigate the risks they face. By extending coverage to include injuries sustained during training, the state would reinforce its commitment to the safety and well-being of its firefighters and provide a safety net for their families should the unthinkable occur. This legislative change would ensure that the brave men and women who risk their lives for the safety of others are not left without critical support in the event of an injury that impairs their ability to work.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to enact legislation that provides insurance coverage for the families of firefighters injured during official training exercises.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: TRANSPORTATION CONCURRENCY

BACKGROUND

In 1985, the Florida Legislature enacted the "Growth Management Act" to regulate new development statewide, requiring local governments to ensure adequate road capacity was available concurrently with new development to mitigate its traffic impact. While well-intentioned, transportation concurrency had unintended consequences, particularly in urban areas where expanding road capacity was cost-prohibitive. This led to a shift towards suburban sprawl, where road capacity was either more readily available or more cost-effective to develop.

In 2011, the Legislature replaced the "Growth Management Act" with the "Community Planning Act," repealing statewide transportation concurrency requirements and making them optional for local governments. In 2013, the Legislature further amended the "Community Planning Act" to encourage local governments to implement alternative mobility funding systems, such as mobility plans and fees, to replace transportation concurrency, proportionate share, and road impact fees.

In response to these legislative changes, the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners, in 2011, formally adopted a policy to make transportation concurrency optional within the county, thereby eliminating the mandatory requirement for this system. To reestablish concurrency, the Comprehensive Plan would need to be updated to rescind the optional concurrency provision. This update would also include the adoption of a minimum level of service (LOS) for roadways, along with the establishment of a schedule to achieve the LOS and the inclusion of necessary improvements in the Capital Improvements Element (CIE). Furthermore, projects identified in the CIE must meet the established LOS within five years. Once the minimum LOS has been met, a process would be implemented to analyze and schedule concurrency for future projects, ensuring that road improvements are made as needed to maintain the required service levels.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to amend the Community Planning Act to establish a more efficient pathway for local governments to reinstate transportation concurrency systems. By simplifying the process for reestablishment, we can foster more seamless growth while effectively managing traffic congestion.



STATE POLICY PROPOSAL: **FLORIDA SPRINGS BASIN MANAGEMENT ACTION PLANS**

BACKGROUND

Spring Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) are integral to Florida's strategy for protecting and restoring the state's water resources, with a particular focus on its springs. These plans are developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) in response to water quality concerns in spring basins—geographic areas surrounding and including the springs that contribute to groundwater flow. BMAPs are designed to address water quality impairments caused by pollutants, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which can lead to harmful algal blooms, the degradation of aquatic ecosystems, and poor water quality in spring-fed rivers and wetlands. The primary objective of these plans is to reduce the concentration of these pollutants in spring basins, ultimately restoring the ecological health of the springs and their downstream waters.

Currently, the competitive grant process requires counties to compete for limited funding, creating uncertainty about the availability of financial resources needed to address water quality issues.

This approach can lead to delays in implementing critical projects and hinder long-term planning efforts. The unpredictability of funding further complicates the effective allocation of resources for comprehensive water management strategies, which are essential to achieving the pollution reduction goals set by the state.

To address these challenges, it is proposed that a dedicated funding formula be established to ensure a stable and predictable source of funding for counties involved in BMAPs. A dedicated funding formula would allocate resources based on the specific needs and priorities of each BMAP-affected area, ensuring fair and consistent distribution of funds. This approach would provide local governments with greater confidence, enabling them to plan and implement water quality improvement projects without the uncertainty of competitive grant cycles. By guaranteeing ongoing financial support, counties would be better positioned to meet the state's pollution reduction targets and implement effective, long-term water management solutions.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the Florida Legislature to eliminate the competitive grant process for counties participating in Basin Management Action Plans (BMAPs) and to implement a dedicated funding formula that ensures consistent, annual funding for counties affected by a BMAP.



SECTION FOUR

FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSALS



FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL: SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION

BACKGROUND

Restoring passenger rail service throughout Florida would deliver substantial economic benefits, enhance transportation connectivity, and significantly improve the quality of life for its residents. By joining the Southern Rail Commission (SRC), Florida could collaborate with neighboring states—Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama—to tap into federal funding and resources aimed at expanding and modernizing rail infrastructure across the South.

Founded by the U.S. Congress in 1982, the SRC promotes safe and efficient rail transportation, with the goal of driving economic growth, providing viable transportation alternatives, and improving emergency evacuation routes. While the SRC currently includes Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, Florida, as a contiguous state, is eligible for membership. By joining the SRC, Florida can unlock opportunities to secure federal funds for rail initiatives that benefit both its economy and its residents.

The SRC has a proven track record of securing millions of dollars in federal funding for rail projects. For example, in 2023, the SRC secured \$178 million to restore rail service from New Orleans to Mobile and is working on the Gulf Coast Passenger Rail project, which will connect Baton Rouge to Orlando.

These projects demonstrate the potential for passenger rail to stimulate economic activity, create jobs, and attract new investments, all of which would benefit Florida's economy.

Federal funding for rail infrastructure is largely channeled through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program and the Restoration and Enhancement Grants (REG) Program, both of which are supported by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The IIJA allocates \$66 billion to rail infrastructure—the largest investment in rail transit in over 50 years. With the SRC's success in leveraging these programs to improve infrastructure and support passenger rail operations, Florida stands to gain significant economic advantages by partnering with this established organization.

By reestablishing passenger rail, Florida can stimulate job creation, reduce traffic congestion, boost tourism, and enhance overall regional connectivity, all of which are crucial to the state's long-term economic prosperity.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County supports the State of Florida's membership in the Southern Rail Commission and advocates for actively pursuing federal funding to restore passenger rail service throughout the state.



FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL: **AFFORDABLE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAM**

BACKGROUND

Internet access has become an essential utility for every American—no longer a luxury. Citrus County has been at the forefront of efforts to bridge the digital divide, building strategic partnerships, securing funding, and promoting community engagement to expand high-speed internet access in unserved and underserved areas. The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) plays a crucial role in supporting these initiatives.

Established as part of the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the ACP offers low-income households a monthly discount of up to \$30 for internet service, and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands or in high-cost areas, making broadband access more affordable—and in many cases, entirely free. Currently, approximately 1 in 5 Americans without home internet cite cost as a barrier, and nearly 43 percent of adults with household incomes under \$30,000 lack access to high-speed internet.

In Citrus County alone, the ACP has already assisted over 20,000 households in gaining more affordable access to the internet. By supporting local efforts to expand broadband availability, the ACP is enabling residents to access critical services such as telehealth, education, commerce, and government resources in ways that are more efficient and accessible than ever before.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County supports the passage of legislation to replenish funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program, ensuring that low-income residents continue to have affordable access to internet services.



FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL: DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & RECOVERY

BACKGROUND

Counties play a critical role in all facets of emergency management, including planning, preparation, mitigation, response, and recovery. As the frequency and severity of natural and man-made disasters continue to rise, so too do their financial impacts. In this context, counties urge Congress and the administration to provide increased federal resources to local governments. Such support is essential to ensuring that counties can effectively safeguard the health, safety, and well-being of their residents, protect critical infrastructure, and preserve local economies during and after disasters.

Citrus County strongly advocates for comprehensive reforms to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance Program, with the goal of ensuring more efficient and expedited reimbursement processes for communities recovering from disasters. Streamlining these processes will help local governments rebuild more quickly, minimize disruptions to essential services, and alleviate the financial burden placed on communities in the aftermath of a disaster. Citrus County also advocates for the establishment of universal documentation standards across federal agencies to simplify and expedite the disaster reimbursement process for residents. A standardized approach to documentation would reduce administrative delays, promote transparency, and ensure that resources reach those in need more quickly and effectively.

In addition, Citrus County calls on Congress to pass long-term reauthorization and reform of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). These reforms should focus on improving the affordability of flood insurance, enhancing mitigation assistance, updating flood risk mapping, and refining program administration. The NFIP serves a critical role in reducing the financial impact of flooding on both private and public properties and fostering long-term resilience through affordable coverage. Furthermore, counties support efforts to incentivize and assist communities in adopting and enforcing comprehensive floodplain management regulations to mitigate flood risk and promote sustainable development.

Finally, counties advocate for an increase in federal funding for the Emergency Management Grant Program and other related mitigation grants. These funds are essential for local governments to implement hazard mitigation strategies, bolster disaster preparedness, and enhance community resilience. With sufficient resources, counties can continue to lead the charge in protecting lives, property, and infrastructure, ensuring that communities are better equipped to withstand and recover from future disasters.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County supports strengthening community resilience through enhanced collaboration between federal, state, and local governments to improve disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts.



FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL: MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

BACKGROUND

Counties invest billions of dollars each year in programs designed to improve the health and well-being of their residents. Behavioral health initiatives, such as the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant and the Substance Use Prevention, Treatment, and Recovery Block Grant, exemplify the effective federal-state-local partnerships that play a critical role in maintaining the health of our communities. These grants enable counties to provide a wide range of services to adults and children with serious mental health conditions, including employment and housing assistance, case management (including Assertive Community Treatment), school-based support, family and parenting education, and peer support services. To ensure the continued effectiveness of these efforts, Congress must fully fund these programs, allowing counties to leverage these vital tools in addressing the ongoing mental health crisis.

The federal-state-local partnership that underpins Medicaid is a cornerstone of county health systems, improving access to care for vulnerable populations. Strengthening this partnership through federal policies that recognize counties' dual role as both administrators and investors in Medicaid enhances the program's efficiency and capacity to serve those in greatest need.

County public health initiatives are further supported by dedicated, direct, and flexible funding, which is why Citrus County advocates for the protection of the Prevention and Public Health Fund, the only federal funding source specifically designated for local public health.

Citrus County is also committed to improving health outcomes for justice-involved individuals and support policies that eliminate barriers to care during critical transition periods. To advance these efforts, Congress must pass federal policies that amend the Medicaid Inmate Exclusion policy to ensure uninterrupted access to healthcare for pretrial individuals, and immediately reinstate health care benefits for adults reentering their communities. Programs such as the Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCPC) play an important role in addressing mental health issues in jails by promoting inter-system collaboration for screening and treatment. These efforts can be further enhanced by fully funding the JMHCPC at its authorized level for fiscal year 2025.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the United States Congress to prioritize improved outcomes within and across the behavioral health, homelessness, and criminal justice systems.



FEDERAL POLICY PROPOSAL: FEDERAL TRUCK WEIGHT LIMITS

BACKGROUND

Counties nationwide are grappling with significant challenges as proposed legislation threatens to increase the size and weight of heavy trucks beyond the current 80,000-pound federal limit. As the owners of nearly half of all public road miles and one in four bridges in the U.S., this issue directly affects county budgets and, more importantly, the safety of our residents.

At their current weight, heavy trucks already inflict substantial damage on local roads and bridges, yet there is no corresponding funding to address the costs of more frequent road repairs, bridge reinforcements, and ongoing maintenance projects. According to a study by the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT) in conjunction with county road officials from four counties, the proposed upgrades to accommodate heavier trucks would cost nearly \$80 billion. This estimate does not include the additional, staggering expenses required to repair local and state roads and highways.

For most counties—especially those in rural and underserved areas—this financial burden is simply unmanageable. With already constrained budgets, limited resources, and competing priorities, the proposed changes would place an insurmountable strain on local governments. Most concerning is the fact that local taxpayers will not only shoulder the burden of these increased infrastructure costs but will also face heightened safety risks as heavier trucks are allowed on county roads and bridges.

PROPOSED POLICY: Citrus County urges the United States Congress to reject any legislative provisions that would raise the current maximum weight or length limits for trucks.