NYSAC’S
2021
Year in Review
As we close the book on another year dominated by the coronavirus pandemic and prepare for the challenges and opportunities that will confront counties as they respond and rebuild, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on results from our collective efforts on behalf of New York’s counties in 2021.

Over the last 21 months, counties have been the front-line leaders in the fight against COVID-19. As a result, residents, legislators, and policy makers have, for the first time in decades, come to fully comprehend the essential role of county government in our communities. Throughout this extraordinary time, NYSAC has worked to build on that momentum as we carry out our mission to represent, educate, advocate for and serve New York’s counties.

Telling the County Story

As part of our advocacy work in 2021, NYSAC and NYSCEA took the unprecedented step of commissioning a book to document the hardships, victories, and lessons learned from the first year of the pandemic. Titled *Our Darkest Hours: New York County Leadership & the COVID Pandemic*, the book combines a collection of firsthand accounts of leadership with detailed policy analysis to inform the continuing response and prepare government leader when the next pandemic strikes.

This year NYSAC also went to extra lengths to support America’s veterans in the wake of the end of the war in Afghanistan by launching Operation Green Light. The campaign encouraged counties, businesses, and residents to shine a green light outside their buildings, homes or businesses to create a visible symbol of support for veterans and raise awareness about the challenges faced by many veterans as they transition back to civilian life. Operation Green Light successfully secured the participation of more than 30 of New York’s 57 counties as well as the City of New York, New York State and SUNY, and received widespread media coverage.
Education and Training

One of NYSAC’s core functions is to provide education and training to county officials. Despite the challenges posed by a global health pandemic, NYSAC was able to maintain its commitment to education and training in both in-person and virtual formats, holding an in-person Fall Seminar along with a virtual Legislative Conference and County Finance School. Additionally, NYSAC hosted 52 webinars this year, including:

- Federal Aid for COVID Expenses
- Foundations of County Government
- Cannabis and Public Safety: Considerations for County Leaders
- County Redistricting and Weighted Voting Systems
- Backup to Recovery: A Critical Cybersecurity Tool When Ransomware Impacts Counties
- The ETS Sponsorship Program, Operation Green Light and Supporting our Veterans
- EPR for Solar Panels in New York
- Planning for Safe School Re-Openings: Screening Testing 101
- The ABCs of PFAS: What County Officials Need to Know

These and many more can be viewed on our YouTube channel at www.YouTube.com/NYSACTV.

NYSAC provides education and training to county leaders on issues vital to public policy and county services.

For more information on education and training offered by NYSAC, please visit our website at www.nysac.org/education
Advocacy

In a year when strong and effective county leadership was more critical than ever, NYSAC was proud to represent county officials at the state and national level, advocating for the resources and support they needed to lead their communities. To this end, NYSAC staff:

- Reviewed, monitored, and commented on 1,746 bills and provided written or oral testimony to numerous state legislative committees,
- Attended meetings in 35 counties, New York City, and Washington DC,
- Continued legal support to counties in the opioid epidemic battle,
- Provided legal support, memos, and guidance to County Attorneys,
- Provided legal training classes (CLEs) at the annual County Attorneys’ Association Conference;
- Facilitated new, and expanded existing, private sector partnerships to help improve local government service delivery and reduce costs;
- Assisted counties with local law development and interpretation, charter revisions, and employee-related matters; and
- Represented county government on several advisory panels, including the Medicaid Waiver DSRIP Panel; Advisory Council for the Retirement System; Raise the Age and other juvenile justice reform panels; Invasive Species Advisory Committee; State’s Criminal Justice Reform Task Force, and the Special Education Fiscal Advisory Workgroup, among others.

NYSAC is proud to represent county officials at the state and national level, while promoting the critical services counties provide. We will continue to forge these partnerships to improve the future for New York counties and our communities.

For more information on NYSAC’s continued advocacy efforts, including our 2022 Legislative Program, please visit our website at

www.nysac.org/advocacy
Budget Victories

Beginning in earnest with the release of the Executive Budget, the annual state budget process is typically NYAC’s greatest opportunity to secure significant results to local leaders. In this year’s budget, counties were able to secure the following victories.

**Funds State and Municipal Facilities Program (SAM)**
- Funding for the SAM program is provided at $385 million in the SFY 2022 adopted budget.

**Study Broadband Accessibility and Connectivity**
- The enacted budget included language that required the Public Service Commission to study the availability, affordability, and reliability of high-speed internet services and to publish a detailed internet access map of the State (S.4847-A).

**Boards of Elections Capital Infrastructure Investments**
- The enacted budget included an additional $25 million capital appropriation, of which $20 million shall be made available to local boards of elections for replacement of voting systems and equipment, absentee ballot scanners, mail processing equipment and infrastructure to protect the connectivity and security of county election software.

**Boards of Elections Operating Assistance**
- The enacted budget included $2 million appropriation for county boards of elections for reimbursement of costs related to the expansion of early voting pursuant to a plan by SBOE.

**Increases Municipal Rebates and Grants for Electric Vehicles and Charging Infrastructure**
- The enacted budget included legislation to increase the amount of the municipal zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) rebate, which counties, cities, towns, and villages can use to purchase or lease clean vehicles. The rebate will now be a minimum of $2,500 per vehicle (previously $750) and a maximum of $7,500 (previously $5,000).

**18-B Family Court Attorney Funding**
- The enacted budget included $2.5 million for improving the quality of representation provided to people who, under county law article 18-B, are entitled to counsel in Family Court matters and are financially unable to obtain counsel.
Expanded Aid for Assisted Outpatient Treatment

- The enacted budget included $7.5 million for assisted outpatient treatment pursuant to Article 9 of the mental hygiene law.

Jail-Based Treatment Funding

- The enacted budget included $8.75 million, a full restoration of $3.75 million and an additional $5 million for jail-based substance use disorder treatment funding.

Local Highways and Bridges

- The enacted budget funded the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) and the Marchiselli program at $538 million, an increase of $100 million over last year’s funding level. The Budget also continues $150 million in highway aid through the PAVE NY program, an increase of $50 million, and $100 million to fund local bridge projects from the BRIDGE NY program. The counties working with our Highway Superintendents Association fought very hard to restore extreme winter weather recovery for $100 million. These programs are further improving conditions on State and local roads and bridges.

Restores Funding for Veterans Support Services

- The enacted budget provided $4.5 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Support Program. Twenty-three counties receive this funding to help veterans deal with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and depression. This appropriation restored program funding to the amount included in last year’s enacted budget.

- The enacted budget also included a new $495,000 appropriation for a new Joseph P. Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Pilot Program. It has not yet been determined how this new appropriation will be spent.
Legislative Victories

In addition to the state budget process, NYSAC advocates for a wide range of priorities throughout the legislative session. This year, we were able to secure the following legislative victories.

Expanded Investment Options for Counties
(Chapter 255 of the Laws of 2021)
• Counties now have the same expanded investment options as New York City. This provision will need to be extended in 2023.

Extended Authorization for Local Government Piggyback Contracts
(Chapter 95 of the Laws of 2021)
• This legislation extends the authority for counties and other local governments’ to “piggyback” on competitively bid contracts from the Federal government and/or any state or local government for apparatus, materials, equipment, or supplies, and any services related to their installation, maintenance, and repair for an additional two years, to July 31, 2023.

Broadband Infrastructure (A.2396-A (Woerner) / S.7028 (Hinchey))
– Passed Both Houses
• This bill amends the Public Service Law to make it easier and more cost effective for internet providers add broadband service to existing utility poles.

Early Intervention Program (S.5560-A (Reichlin-Melnick) / A.5339 (Paulin))
– Passed Both Houses
• This legislation creates a $40 million covered lives assessment fee on commercial insurance to help relieve the Early Intervention program’s financial burden on local governments and to streamline the process by which funds are distributed to municipalities for these programs.

Extension of Eviction Moratorium, Authorization for Remote Meetings,
ERAP Program Modifications (Chapter 417 of the Laws of 2021)
• Governor Hochul called a special session of the legislature to return to Albany to pass an extension of the emergency rental assistance program, modifications to the open meetings law, and additional state appropriations for the emergency rental assistance program. This legislation extends the authority of any state or local public body to hold virtual public meetings until January 15, 2022.
The Less is More Act – Technical Parole Violator Reform (Chapter 427 of the Laws of 2021)

- When New York State stopped reimbursing counties for sheltering technical parole violators, it created a new unfunded mandate for counties. This legislation will provide significant relief by reforming technical parole violations to reduce unnecessary re-incarceration for nonviolent offenses.

Raising the Age of JD’s from 7 to 12 (A.4982-A (Hevesi) / S.4051-A (Bailey)) – Passed Both Houses

- This legislation would raise the minimum age for juvenile delinquency from seven to twelve years old and create differential response programs for children under the age of twelve to prevent future interactions with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. This reduces county detention costs, but may result in additional program costs through local social service districts.

Looking Ahead

Counties enter 2022 in a far different place than they did last year. While COVID-19 remains a threat and continues to upend facets of daily life, the availability of vaccines and treatments has changed the nature of our response to the virus. With businesses largely able to stay open, local sales tax revenues have rebounded and reversed the dire economic forecasts of a year ago. As the state and counties proceed into this new phase of the pandemic, NYSAC will continue to advocate for policies and legislation to restore local control over sales tax, invest in public health, and help counties deliver services with improved efficiency at lower cost to local taxpayers.

For the last year and more, counties have led the local response to a national emergency and proved that whether it’s protecting public health and safety, rebuilding infrastructure, protecting the environment, or providing social safety net services, it’s counties that get it done.

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2021 Snapshots

Fall Seminar

Registration desk at the 2021 Fall Seminar.

Luncheon in the ballroom of the Downtown Syracuse Marriott Hotel.

NYSAC President Martha Sauerbrey, Immediate Past President Jack Marren and Executive Director Stephen Aqquario.

NYSAC's 2021 Fall Seminar featured 20 educational and timely workshops for county government leaders.

Panelist speakers for the Women Leadership Council workshop on diversity and inclusion.

Martha Robertson introducing Dr. Bridget Seegers of NASA for a plenary presentation.

Operation Green Light

Dutchess County

Onondaga County

Clinton County

Yates County

Monroe County

NYSAC offices at DASNY in Albany