

STATE ⇒ TO ⇒ STATE

What issues are driving state associations' legislative agendas? What are the latest and most persistent challenges your county colleagues in other states are facing? What looks to be looming on the horizon?

State-to-State explores these questions and helps keep you in touch with your fellow leaders across the country.

Maine



Taming state plans to assume more control over county jails was the top priority of the Maine County Commissioners Association (MCCA) during the state Legislature's 2014 session.

A law enacted in 2008 mandated that the local share of jail budgets be capped at a specified amount. Any shortfall was to be made up by the state Board of Corrections. However, jail costs have been "far exceeding the state allocations," said Rosemary Kulow, MCCA's executive director. This created what the Legislature termed an "emergency" in L.D. 1824, a bill "to provide additional authority to the state board of corrections."

The legislature created a task force, whose members included representatives from the MCCA, the Maine Association of Sheriffs and other stakeholders, which reached a compromise they all could live with, she said. It passed but was vetoed by the governor, an action subsequently overridden by state lawmakers.

One provision of the law allows the State Board of Corrections to transfer inmates from overcrowded county jails to others that are under capacity.

"We may see some improvements along the line of seeing more economies of scale and more savings," Kulow said. "But what it boils down to is that counties will still need additional funding from the state to make sure that county jails operate safely and in an up-to-date fashion for the safety of our citizens, corrections officers, and the inmates that they house."

MCCA will continue to work with the State Board of Corrections to create standards that will apply across the board to all the counties and their jail systems, Kulow said.

As for ongoing county challenges, she said the still-recovering economy remains a concern. The Pine Tree State's 16 counties, as with counties everywhere, are looking for new sources of revenue other than property taxes.

MCCA recently had a strategic planning retreat that Kulow said was valuable in hearing from counties how the association can better serve their needs. "I think that technical assistance and education of newly elected and appointed officials are high on their priority list," she said. "MCCA now has employees who are doing that through their focus on Maine counties."

