



Washington State
Association of Counties

County Government Overview

House Ways and Means

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Counties are the oldest form of local government; the first counties were created by the "Provisional Government" set up by Oregon Trail immigrants before Congress organized the Territory. Counties were the first form of government in the new territory. Governor Stevens convened the first Territorial Legislature in 1854, and it promptly added seven new counties and redrew the boundaries of the old counties for a total of fifteen in western Washington. Until 1859, when Klickitat County was created, Walla Walla was the only county in eastern Washington. Spokane County was twice created by the Legislature, in 1858 and 1860, but never organized; in early 1864 it was annexed to Stevens County, created in 1863. By statehood, however, there were thirty-four counties with most of the new counties created in eastern Washington.









Today there are 39 counties; the last formed was Pend Oreille in 1911. The initial role of counties was to serve as the administrative arm of the state – maintaining all the vital records that people needed, providing courts and law enforcement, building roads, assessing property, collecting taxes and conducting elections. Counties are run by full-time elected officials including commissioners (or council members and an executive), a sheriff, judges, assessor, treasurer, prosecutor, auditor, clerk and coroner. The commissioners function as both the legislative and executive body.

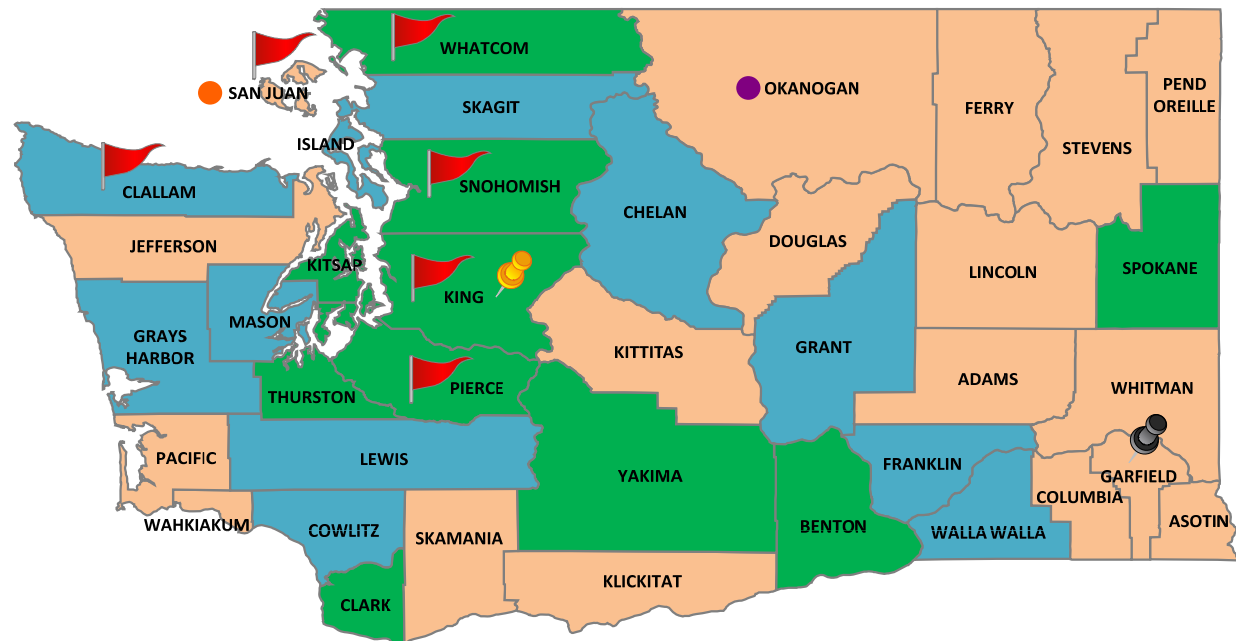
Not all counties are alike, of course, and some contrasts may suggest the range of local governments' size and functions in 2007. Counties range from King County, with 1,861,000 people and a budget of approximately \$4 billion per year, to Garfield County, with 2,350 people and a budget of \$10.6 million per year. King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties have the largest number of cities and special purpose districts. In King County alone there are 39 cities and 90 special purpose districts.

Counties have evolved since statehood by playing two additional roles assigned by the Legislature. Counties provide a limited number of "local" public services to primarily rural residents and businesses. Most "urban" services are provided by cities. In addition, counties have been asked to coordinate and sometimes provide "regional" services that serve all residents within a county.

Some people live in a city...

but **EVERYONE** lives in a county.

LEGEND	
	Population of 150k+
	Population of 50k - 149k
	Populations of 49k or less
	Highest Population 2007 Est. - 1,861,300
	Lowest Population 2007 Est. - 2,350
	Charter County
	Largest County 5,268 Square Miles
	Smallest County 175 Square Miles



For More Information Contact:
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Mandatory/Discretionary Functions of Counties and Cities

Program	City	County
Administrative Support	D	D
Adult Detention Felons		M
Adult Detention Pretrial & Misdemeanor	M	M
Air Pollution	M	M
Airport	D	D
Animal Control	D	D
Arts	D	D
Assessor		M
Attorney (City/County Cases)	M	M
Auditor		M
Boundary Review Boards		M (D in small counties)
Budget	M	M
Building/Fire Code	M	M
Capital Facility Planning	M	M
Cemetery	D	
Community Development	D	D
Cooperative Extension		D
County Fair		D
Courts	M	M
Developmental Disabilities		M
Elections		M
Electric Energy	D	
Emergency Medical Services	D	D
Employment and Training	D	D
Executive	M	M
Finance/Treasurer	M	M
Fire Suppression	D	
Historic Preservation	D	D
Hospital	D	D
Involuntary Treatment		M
Juvenile Detention and Courts		M

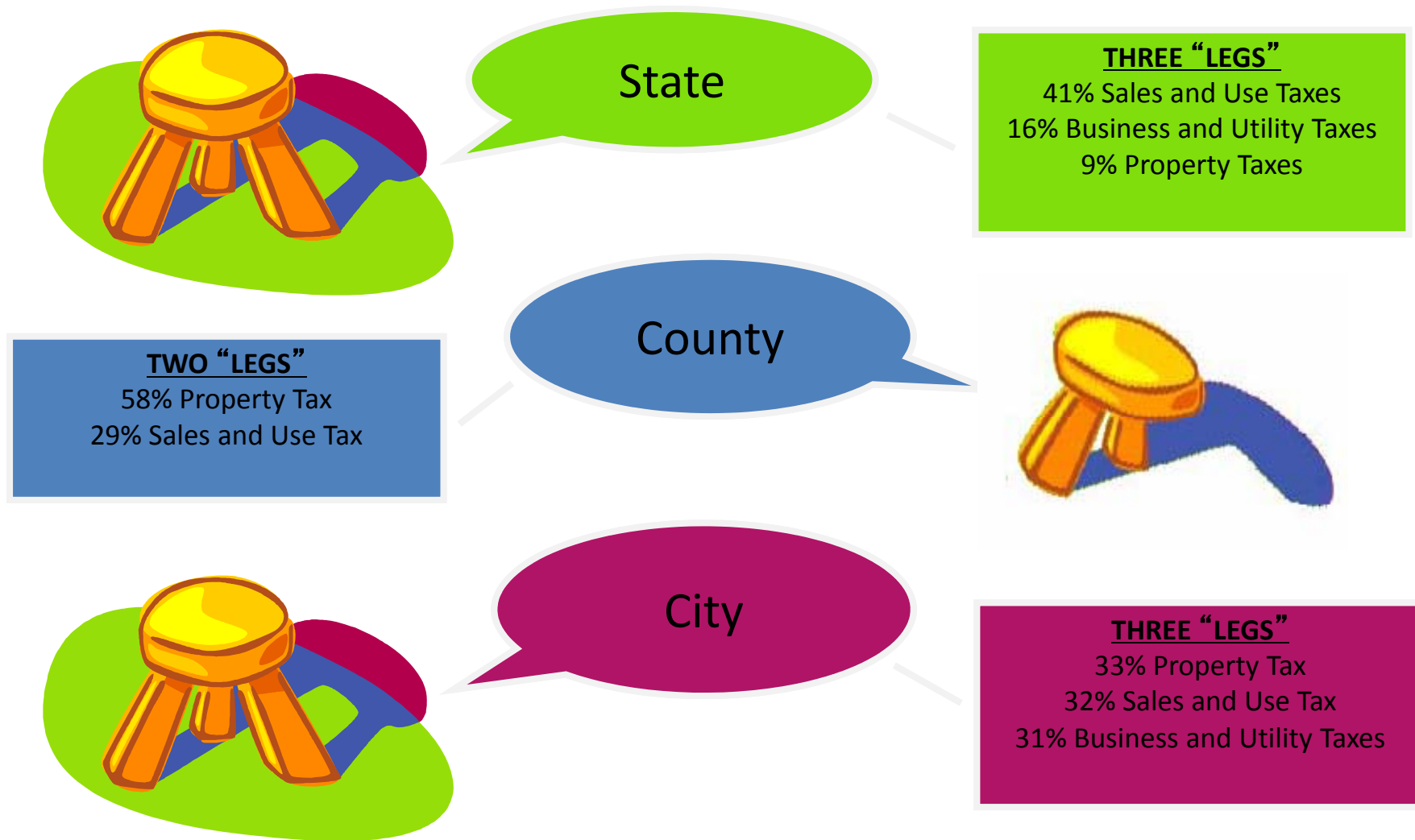
Program	City	County
Land Use Controls (GMA)	M	M
Legislative Council	M	M
Library	D	D
Licensing	D	M
Medical Examiner		M
Mental Health		M
Parks and Recreation	D	D
Planning (GMA)	M	M
Public Defense	M	M
Public Health		M
Public Safety (Crimes)	M	M
Public Transportation	D	D
Roads	M	M
Sewage Collection/Treatment	D	D
Solid Waste Collection	D	
Solid Waste Disposal	D	D
Surface Water	M	M
Traffic Enforcement	M	M
Veteran's Programs	D	M
Water Supply	D	D
Workmen's Compensation	M	M
Youth Services	D	D

M=Mandatory D=Discretionary

A blank space indicates that the jurisdiction does not have authority to perform the activity or it is not a significant activity for that class of jurisdiction.



General Fund Tax Revenue Comparison





County Major Local Funding Sources

County Wide

- Up to \$1.80 Property Tax Levy
- Sales Tax (15% of City Tax)
- 0.1% Sales Tax
Correctional Facilities
- 0.1% Sales Tax
Criminal Justice Assistance (shared with cities)
Mental Health
- Up to 0.3% Sales Tax with voter approval
(Shared with cities with 1/3 dedicated to Criminal Justice)

Unincorporated

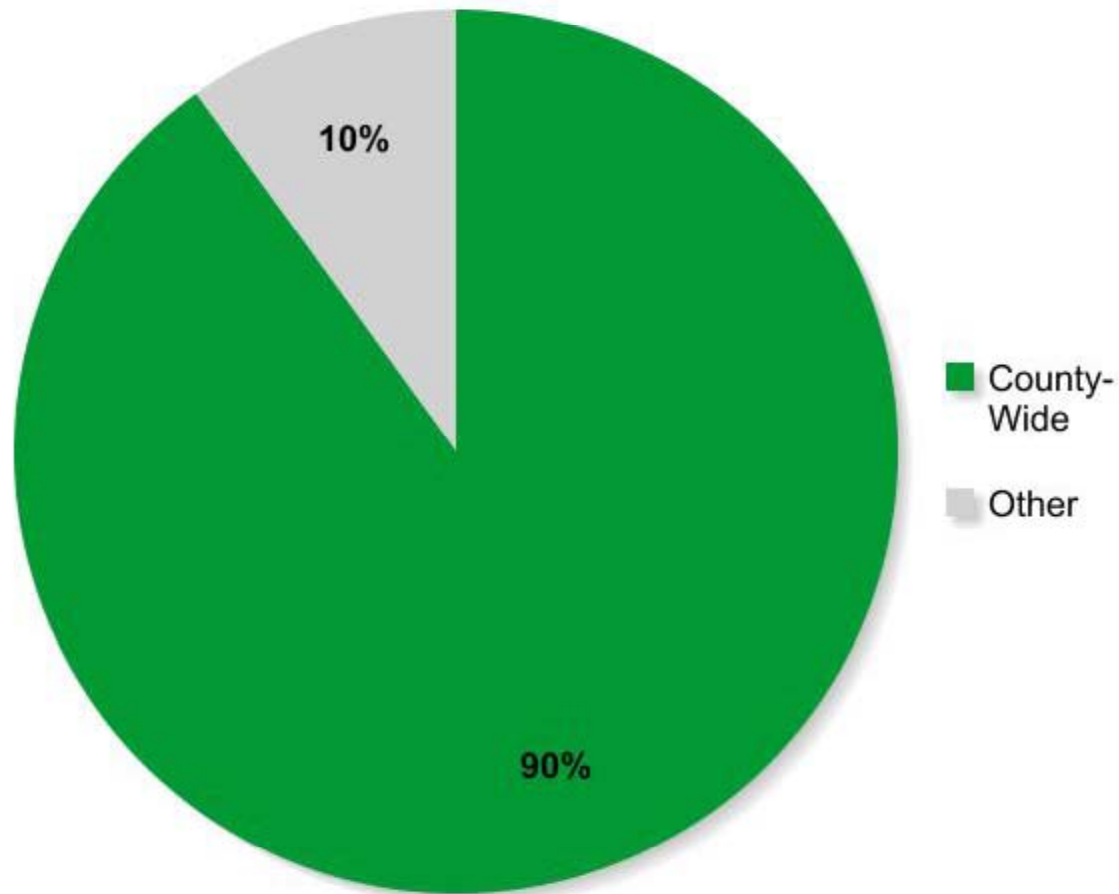
- Up to \$2.25 County Road Tax Levy
- Up to 1% Sales Tax



- 39 Counties
- All citizens (6.6 million) receive county wide services (including cities)
- 2.5 million citizens receive unincorporated services including:
 - Sheriff
 - County Road



County Wide Services as Percentage of General Fund



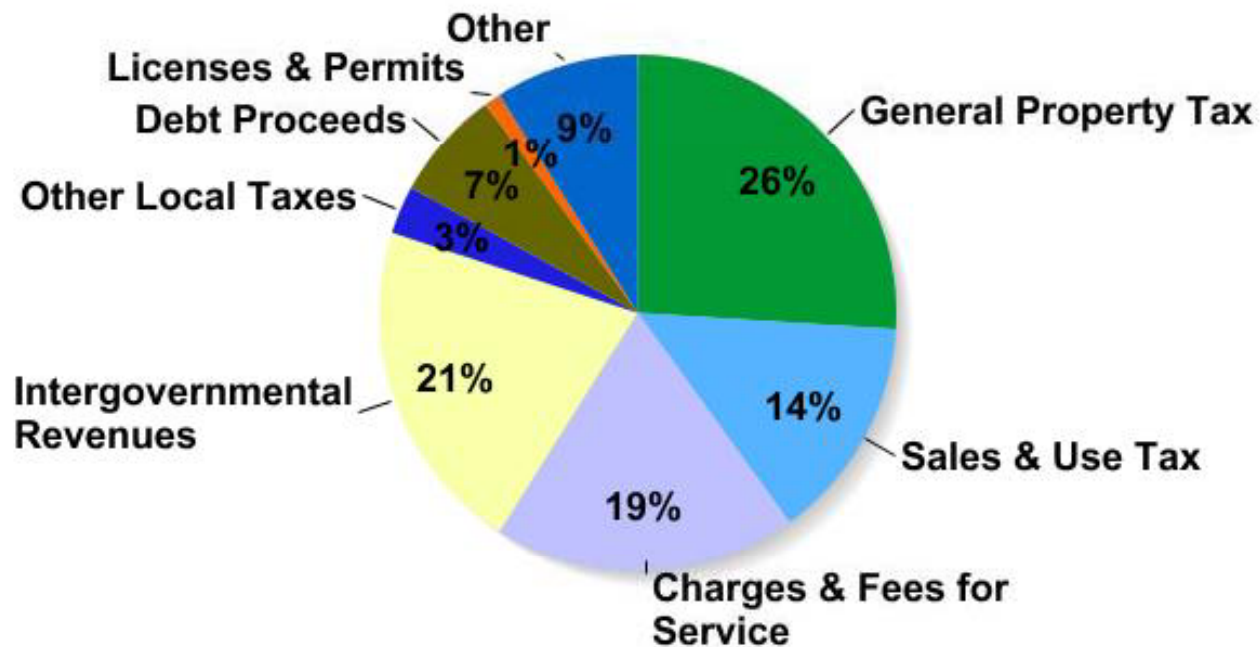


Services Funded Generally Include:

- Public Safety (Law Enforcement and Fire Protection)
- Health & Human Services
- General Government
- Natural Resources (Environment, Development and Parks & Recreations)
- Capital (Utilities)
- Transportation
- Courts, Prosecution, Jails



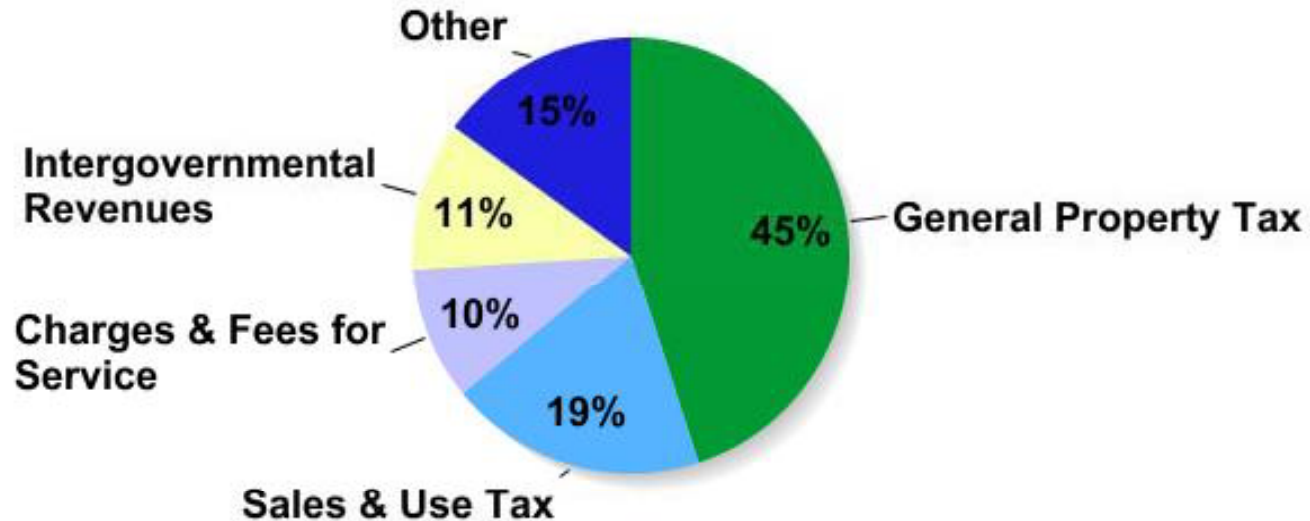
Revenue - All Funds



State Auditor's Office LGFRS - 2009



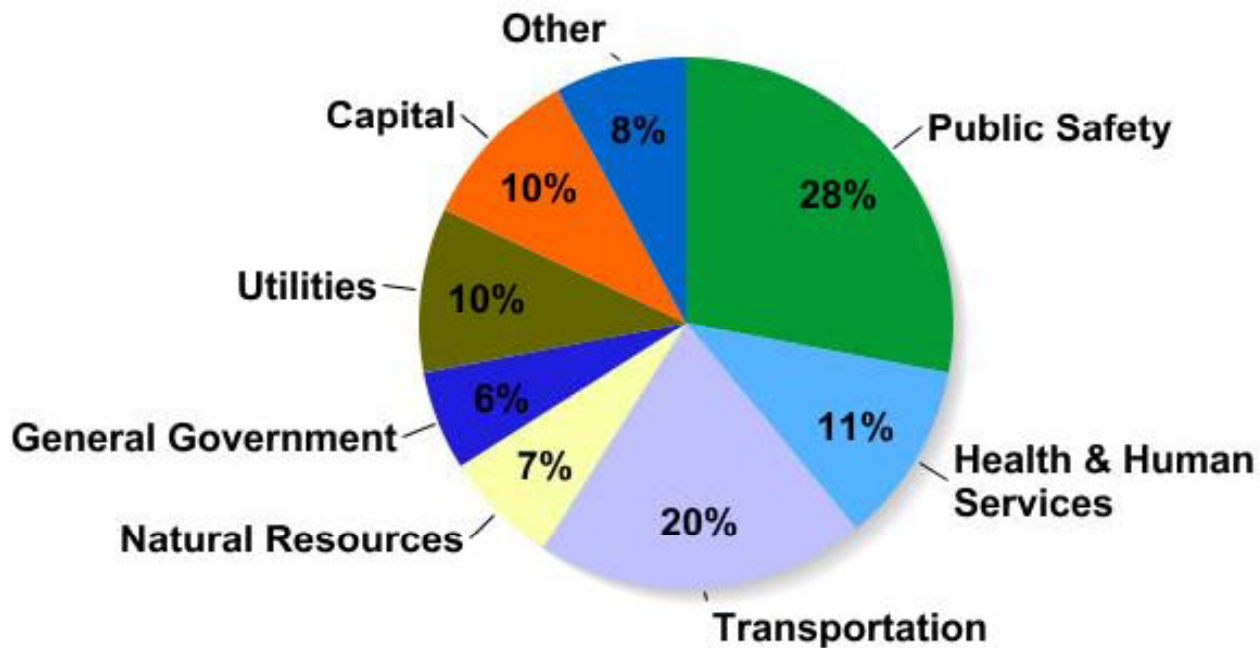
Revenue - General Fund



State Auditor's Office LGFRS - 2009



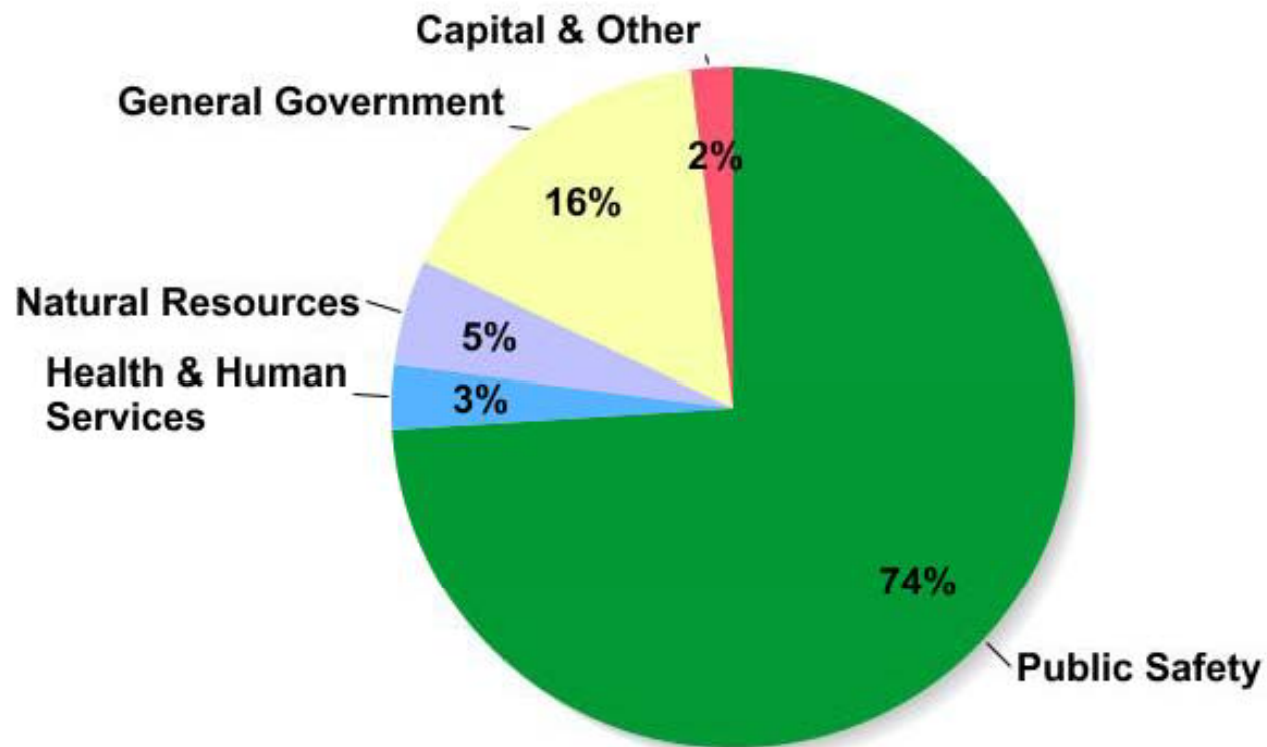
Expenditures - All Funds



State Auditor's Office LGFRS - 2009



Expenditures - General Fund



State Auditor's Office LGFRS - 2009



The Problem

Counties, for the past few years, have faced the same problems the state is currently experiencing - increased costs and declining revenues. Every county has reduced their budgets from five (5%) to twenty (20%) percent. Like the state, counties are achieving their budget reductions through hiring freezes, lay-offs, furloughs, reduced capital spending, as well as program and service reductions.

However, with only two major sources of revenue (property and sales tax), both of which are restricted in use and growth, the deficits in the county tax structure is as great or greater a contributor to our budget problems as the current economic recession.



Potential Solutions

✓ Short Term Examples

Diversify and expand county revenue authorities

Reduce the cost of providing services

Repeal low priority programs

Don't enact new programs that drive expenses



Potential Solutions

✓ Mid-Term Examples

Examine and realign responsibilities between state and local government

Regionalize certain services (law enforcement, jails, courts, fire, parks)

Continue examining opportunities for sharing and coordinating services between local governments

Repealing low priority programs

Reducing the cost of health care for employees and employers



Potential Solutions

✓ Long-Term Examples

Review and consolidate special purpose districts into general purpose local government

Review and repeal low priority programs

Modernize tax code



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