



Washington State Association of Counties

February 9, 2012

The Honorable Lisa Brown, Majority Leader
The Honorable Mike Hewitt, Minority Leader
The Honorable Ed Murray, Chair, Senate Ways & Means Committee
The Honorable Joe Zarelli, Ranking Member, Senate Ways & Means

The Honorable Frank Chopp, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Pat Sullivan, Majority Leader
The Honorable Richard DeBolt, Minority Leader
The Honorable Ross Hunter, Chair, House Ways & Means Committee
The Honorable Gary Alexander, Ranking Member, House Ways & Means

Dear Senate Majority/Minority Leaders, Mr. Speaker, Ways & Means Chairs, and Ranking Members:

On behalf of the 39 counties across the state, I am writing this letter seeking your help and leadership.

Counties have been reducing their budgets over the last few years because of declining revenues, a narrow tax base and policy changes at the state level. Most of them have significantly reduced or eliminated non-mandatory programs; reduced employee compensation and benefits; reduced hours of service; and enacted currently authorized revenue options that work in their county.

Before session started, you asked local governments to help identify a series of reforms, budget reductions and revenue options in anticipation of significant state general fund reductions. We agreed to do this as governmental partners and as problem solvers and, in fact, were able to offer several such solutions included in Governor Gregoire's budget proposals.

The Association of Cities and the Association of Counties have jointly requested legislation to help us control costs and provide revenue flexibility (SB 6372, SB 6521/HB 2641 and HB 2728). Unfortunately, the House bill was re-referred to another policy committee on the cutoff day and subsequently died. The Senate bill was amended in committee to take out all of the cost savings ideas and left only the public health study portion. We understand many of the components of this bill had opposition from one group or another including to the only reductions and reforms remaining. We are open to other suggestions that will help us reduce our expenses. We are asking for your leadership to find common ground.

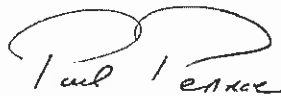
We are trying really hard to find a balance between protecting the environment, public safety and labor relations. We need your assistance to reduce our expenses and increase local revenue options in anticipation of your potential budget reductions. Our ability to

assume new services and programs is severely limited. Our ability to maintain the existing services is declining.

We understand the choices facing the state, counties and cities will require some dramatic changes and difficult decisions. We are here to help and we need your help to meet the needs and expectations of Washington's residents. Finally we hope you will provide us some time to react to your preliminary choices and work with you on ways to shape the impacts to counties.

Thank you for your consideration, your open door and your candor. We look forward to a solution that meets all of our needs on behalf of Washington's residents.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Pearce". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "P".

Paul Pearce
President, Washington State Association of Counties
Skamania County Commissioner

cc: Governor Chris Gregoire