

July 24, 2017

Douglas County residents,

In the spirit of the County's mission to *"provide for the safety and well-being of Douglas County citizens through professional and efficient delivery of essential public services,"* the FY 2018 operating and capital budget makes great strides in upholding and advancing that mission.

In light of significant challenges posed by the first year of property tax lid imposed by the State of Kansas, the 2018 budget represents a fiscally and socially responsible roadmap for Douglas County's future and its efforts to address key challenges in the areas of criminal justice and behavioral health.

The 2018 budget includes a 46.008 mill levy rate, an increase of 1.916 over the 2017 mill levy. Recognizing the need to balance the financial burden placed on Douglas County taxpayers, Douglas County remains committed to protecting and promoting the interests of our most vulnerable citizens, who have experienced a loss or deterioration of critical services available due to the State of Kansas' fiscal challenges. The strain of the continued loss of state funding for these services and other socio-economic factors has increased the burden placed upon our public safety, emergency response, and human service personnel, and put the safety and well-being of citizens at risk.

Tax Lid

The approach to developing the 2018 budget in the first year of the property lid imposition by the State was to maintain core county services and partnerships with community agencies before considering service enhancements and new initiatives in priority areas. The combined impact of stable valuations, employee health insurance savings, and the exemption of law enforcement and public safety functions has put the County in a position to accommodate a limited number of enhancements and new initiatives while staying within the limits of the tax lid.

Initial expectations for significant increases to employee health insurance for the 2017-2018 were avoided following the decision to switch provider networks which allowed Douglas County to access deeper discounts and more providers, resulting in overall plan savings of approximately \$300,000. While this was welcome news in terms of developing the 2018 budget and future budgets under the constraints of the property tax lid, overall the total plan cost increased by 3.9%, an increase borne by both the Employer and the Employee. In addition, increases to the KPERS funding rate were less than originally expected. These developments strengthened the County's ability to address challenges in other areas of our employee workforce, namely a highly competitive job market, which is perhaps most pressing in the Sheriff's Office where we are experiencing significant challenges in hiring and retaining qualified candidates.

Service Enhancements

Following months of conversations and research with community stakeholders and subject-matter experts, the County was able to accommodate significant enhancements to services in the areas of behavioral health and public safety, including:

- **\$400,000** one-time support in the [CIP Capital Projects](#) budget to offset expenses at Lawrence Memorial Hospital to expand the crisis stabilization unit;
- **\$1,580,322** in the [Commissioner's](#) budget to support [Behavioral Health Projects](#), including:
 - **\$922,800** to expand community psychiatry services at Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center and Heartland Community Health Center;
 - **\$397,282** to pilot the development of an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team to over a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary approach to community consumers with severe and persistent mental illnesses on a 24/7 basis;
 - **\$260,000** for expanded addiction support and treatment partnerships with DCCCA to access regional social detoxification services and provide substance use disorder (SUD) treatment in partnership with the Douglas County Jail Re-Entry Program.
- **\$130,000** to create a second [Douglas County District Court](#) pro tem judge
- **\$334,849** for the [District Attorney's Office](#) to provide coverage for the District Court judge addition, and provide staffing and equipment to review body camera video obtained from Lawrence police officers in 2018, and;
- **\$211,113** to support three new [Douglas County Sheriff](#) Deputy positions to meet ongoing staffing shortages in the patrol division.

Future Outlook

Douglas County stepping in to meet the needs of the community where the State has retreated is not a new role for this organization. We are confident that the 2018 budget is a measured and fiscally responsible approach to meeting community needs while maintaining core County services. The \$1.98 million investment in new and expanded behavioral health initiatives included in the 2018 budget support to the County's efforts to establish a Crisis Center where we will be able to serve more who need treatment, and do so more efficiently. Because Douglas County is projected to grow faster than any other county in Kansas over the coming decades, and the need for crisis services is unlikely to diminish, these investments in 2018 will lay a strong foundation for the future delivery of crisis services, and allow the County and taxpayers to avoid the higher costs of not meeting this need.

Finally, in the coming year the County will continue discussions with the City of Lawrence to identify areas for improvement to cost-sharing service agreements to ensure a consistent and equitable approach to financing community infrastructure and community services.

Douglas County Board of County Commissioners

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