



RURAL COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TAX REBATE SHARING PROGRAM REFORM

Multiple small- and medium-sized counties throughout the state seek legislative adjustments to the economic development focused tax rebate program first promulgated by [RCW 82.14.370](#) in 1997. The program is set to expire in the early 2020s. Several counties, including Benton County, have been spearheading this effort. Maintaining the program in some similar form is a priority for Benton County and its stakeholding city and port governments, as it has been providing substantial funding for larger economic development projects that are otherwise difficult to finance.

RED MOUNTAIN INTERCHANGE

An access break along Interstate 82 will not be allowed by the Federal Highways Administration, essentially killing the prospect of the “Red Mountain Interchange” for the foreseeable future. In 2015, the Legislature appropriated \$25 million for this project through the Connecting Washington transportation bill and funding package. Benton County’s priority, working with our local partners, is to keep that funding in the greater Benton City / West Richland area for other transportation improvements.

ADDRESS UNFUNDED MANDATES

[Adequate Funding for Trial Court Indigent Defense](#)

Access to a defense attorney in criminal matters is a basic constitutional right that counties were assigned by the Legislature. Yet, the state funds less than 4% of these services, with counties currently spending a combined sum of approximately \$155 million annually on trial court indigent defense services, and the state providing a total of \$6 million statewide. To continue providing citizens with access to justice, the County supports the Legislature fully fund trial court indigent defense services.

[HB 1291/SB 5073 Fair Share Election Costs Reimbursement](#)

Currently, the State is only paying its share of election costs in odd-year elections (as required by RCW 29A.04.420), opposite of when there have been State races on the ballot. The amount that Benton County pays for even-year election costs varies greatly but has been anywhere between \$60,000 and \$152,000 since 2016. Benton County urges the State to fully fund its share of odd- and even-year State elections.

[RCW 13.34.080 Publication of Notice for Juvenile Court Dependency](#)

Currently, County Clerks are responsible to pay for publishing all notices in a legal newspaper for dependency and termination of parent-child relationship cases. When statute was changed to make these cases the responsibility of the Attorney General, this statute was left unchanged. As such, counties have remained responsible to pay for the publication of said notices and are therefore required by the State to expend funds on behalf of the Attorney General for cases that are no longer the County’s responsibility.

[HB 1926 Interest, Penalties, and Costs Imposed on Certain Delinquent Property Taxes](#)

The interest, penalties, and costs imposed on delinquent property taxes are funds collected by the County which go directly into the General Fund. Removing these penalties would have a significant impact on the County – estimated at over \$2.6 million in revenues for the 2019-2020 biennium. If the County cannot rely on these revenues, other critical services, including public safety, may be reduced.

SUPPORT OF PARTNER PRIORITIES & REQUESTS

[Washington State Association of Counties \(WSAC\) & Washington Association of County Officials \(WACO\)](#)

Benton County supports the legislative priorities of WSAC and WACO, including items not expressly identified in this document.

[Yakima Basin Integrated Plan \(YBIP\) & Salmon Recovery Funding Board](#)

Benton County seeks sustained backing of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board to provide continued partnership and funding for projects throughout the Yakima Basin.