

January 19, 2011

Representative Phil Barnhart
State of Oregon
900 Court Street NE, H-383
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Representative Barnhart:

As you are aware, the Lane Council of Governments (LCOG) is comprised of 28 units of local government, including cities, schools, LCC, other special purpose districts and Lane County itself. While this organization has occasionally taken advocacy positions on individual legislative issues, it has not been our pattern to speak with one voice—a regional voice—on a number of legislative concepts prior to the start of a Session of the Legislature. We now believe that such a regional voice would be both in the interests of our member jurisdictions and their citizens and supportive and informative for you, as a member of our delegation.

Our Board of Directors is entirely made up of local elected officials from LCOG's member jurisdictions, and they represent metro, suburban and rural constituencies. The Board has considered a number of legislative concepts and has authorized me, as the Chair, to urge your consideration of our collective positions. Perhaps above and beyond our views on individual pieces of proposed legislation, we recognize the difficult fiscal prospect with which the State is confronted, and yet firmly believe that addressing the State's revenue shortfalls by shifting costs to local governments is not in the public interest. We oppose the imposition of "unfunded mandates." We oppose actions by the Legislature that would curtail current revenue options available to local government and/or impose additional costs to already strained local budgets. And, we would urge your support of maximum flexibility for local decision makers with respect to revenue generation and local public policy formation.

More specifically, LCOG:

Urges opposition to the State's charging for local government access to the criminal justice data system, LEDS. Proposed has been a charge of one dollar per inquiry. This is not only a budget issue, but a public safety issue. If the State adopts a scheme of increasing revenue by putting LEDS information into a "vending machine" environment for local governments, charging local police agencies on a per inquiry basis, cash-starved local governments can be expected to make less use of the system and, thereby, miss critically important intelligence—sometimes in life or death situations.

Urges support for proposed revisions of the local option levy. Specifically, we encourage the Legislature to permit local governments to seek voter approval for 10-year local option

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levies and to take such levies outside of “compression.” This would maintain the people’s control over the taxes that are imposed, but would allow citizens to provide support for their local governments’ services.

Urges support for pre-paid cell phone tax collection for 9-1-1 fee. This would require pre-paid cell phone companies to collect and remit the \$0.75 fee for 9-1-1. This is both a revenue issue and a fairness issue. Increasingly, 9-1-1 calls utilize cell phone technology.

Urges support for the initiation of a multi-session discussion to bring about an overhaul of the currently broken state property tax system. This is perhaps the most important policy step that could be taken to address a system that has been contorted by the initiative process and now is neither equitable nor adequate to the needs of local governments that depend upon this revenue source.

These advisory positions were culled by the LCOG Board of Directors from a larger list of legislative concepts. While not universally applicable to each LCOG member, they have been considered appropriate for the organization’s regional voice, as we near the start of the 2011 Session. We would be happy to provide additional information regarding these issues or to respond to any questions that you may have. Further, LCOG would can serve as a information resource for you, as well as a sounding board for local government feelings about legislative matters, as the Session progresses. Please contact our Executive Director, George Kloeppe, at 541.682-4395 or at gkloeppe@lcog.org. And finally, lest it go unsaid, we greatly appreciate the complexity and difficulty of your work in the Legislature. We may not always agree with the decisions reached, but we are grateful for your dedication and for your service.

Sincerely,

Chris Pryor
Chair, LCOG Board of Directors
Member of the Eugene City Council