

DRAFT Op-Ed

Collective Bargaining: A Bad Deal for Counties and Taxpayers

County governments have a proud employment tradition in Colorado and _____ County is no different. County employment is a **good job** and the _(#)_ employees who serve _____ County residents are dedicated public servants. Nowhere was this more on display than the recent public health emergency posed by COVID-19. Counties were the face of the local pandemic response and our _____ County workforce admirably served our citizens during those trying times, working long hours as we fought to continue providing essential county services in the midst of a public health and economic crisis.

HB22-_____/Legislation being considered by the General Assembly would implement a top-down collective bargaining obligation on county governments across Colorado and could jeopardize our working relationship with our employees. Collective bargaining (a required negotiation process that happens after a workforce votes to unionize) has the potential to create an adversarial relationship between government and its workforce, instead of the cooperative relationship we currently share.

Counties are already facing tightened budgets due to the continued COVID crisis, increased operating costs (gas, inflation, etc.) and supply chain issues. County property tax revenues are finite in nature – we cannot “generate” more revenue without asking the voters for a tax increase. Collective bargaining will necessitate additional staff time, legal resources, human resources expertise, dispute resolution costs and ultimately higher wages and additional benefits. Challenges to static county budgets may necessitate cuts to services for our citizens or local tax increases to accommodate higher employee salaries.

Another major concern is that the legislation does NOT contain a no-strike provision. County employees provide frontline services such as distributing cash assistance to needy families, plowing snow off our roads, enforcing laws and protecting public safety. If county employees were to walk off the job during a labor dispute, it could very well threaten the health and welfare of our community and its citizens.

To be clear, counties do NOT oppose collective bargaining as a policy tool – in fact several counties around the state have embraced collective bargaining and it is working well in those jurisdictions. But this is a local decision that should be left up to county commissioners and their employees.

This mandated collective bargaining approach has the potential to make hiring and retaining our county workforce in a post-COVID world even more difficult, especially as counties compete with municipalities for a limited pool of public sector employees. This legislative effort is bad for counties and bad for Colorado.