

Hi, this is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento governmental relations firm of Aprea & Micheli and an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law. Today's podcast concerns a brief overview of county government in the state of California.

Counties provide numerous services on behalf of the state, such as: health and human services, law enforcement, property assessments, [and] elections. Counties are also authorized to have taxing and police powers.

Counties in the state are provided for under the state constitution as well as the California Government Code. Primarily, the Legislature has provided counties with corporate powers that are required to provide for the health and welfare of the general public within their respective county lines. The Legislature is viewed as having broader control over counties versus cities. Also, counties generally lack the broad revenue raising powers that cities possess.

There are thirteen charter counties, while the others are general law counties. They are governed by five-member elected Boards of Supervisors, except San Francisco which has an eleven-member Board as it is a consolidated city and county and the only one in the state. Almost all Supervisors are elected by district, except in a few distinct counties.

These Boards have quasi-legislative, quasi-judicial, and executive authority over their respective county governments. They in turn utilize executives to manage the county's functions. The main executive of a county is generally the Chief Administrative Officer, CAO. While this title may vary slightly among the counties, the role is essentially identical. This individual oversees the day-to-day operations of the county and the county's employees.

In all counties, the District Attorneys, the County Assessors, and the Sheriffs are elected countywide. Most counties also elect their Treasurers. There are a number of other positions that occur in county government throughout the state. For example, in fifty-four of the fifty-eight counties the Auditor/Controller is an elected officer. Many of the County Clerks are also elected at the county level.

Some of the other key positions in county government include County Counsel that provides legal services, Environmental Health departments, Information Technology departments that provide IT goods and services, the Planning departments to carry out county planning functions, Probation departments generally for both juvenile and adult offenders, Public Defenders for indigent offenders, Public Works departments overseeing the county infrastructure, and Social Services for public assistance, among others.

This is a brief overview of county government in the state of California. Thanks for joining.