



## TABOR Issue Brief

The Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights (TABOR) restricts the amount of revenue that can be spent on state and local services—from health care to transportation to education. In the 1990s, TABOR forced reductions in many state services, and since 2000 the revenue situation has become especially dire. TABOR’s ratchet effect won’t let services recover, even when the economy rebounds, so the cuts caused by revenue shortages remain in place. Services will never be able to catch up or keep pace with real economic growth—and will, in fact, continue to shrink—unless we change TABOR’s spending limits and eliminate the ratchet effect.

According to Legislative Council’s Dec. 2004 forecast, under current revenue projections, the General Assembly will have to reduce FY 2005-06 expenditures by \$244.9 million to accommodate allowable General Fund growth as prescribed by TABOR, while simultaneously giving back \$459.2 million in refunds. Colorado’s improving revenue environment means that programs supported by either General Fund or cash funds will compete against each other under TABOR spending restrictions.

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## Public Health and Environment

- Essential responsibilities of the Colorado Department of Public Health include:
  - Controlling community health problems such as hepatitis, whooping cough, and influenza, particularly among vulnerable populations, and preventing the spread of health hazards such as Escherichia coli, and Salmonella.
  - Mitigating health hazards, such as the elimination of mosquito breeding grounds to prevent West Nile virus infections, and investigating food safety, air and water quality complaints.
  - Enforcing state laws and federal regulations that protect consumers’ health and safety through inspections of restaurants, septic systems, and childcare centers.
- Between 1992 and 2002, the average annual change in per capita total appropriations for the Department of Public Health declined 0.16%. This means that for over ten years no additional funding has been provided to cope with the state’s population increase or to combat new health threats, such as the West Nile virus.
- In 2004, Colorado ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the nation in per capita public health spending.
- In 2003, General Fund appropriations of approximately \$1.9 million for enforcement of the Safe Drinking Water and the Clean Water Acts were replaced by a 66% increase in the fees charged to water consumers and polluters.
- The national average ratio of health officials per capita is approximately 437 for every 500,000 citizens. Colorado’s ratio is less than half that with only 204 health officials for every half million persons.

## TABOR ISSUE BRIEF: PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

- In FY 2005-2006, many of the public health fee increases that have been enacted by the legislature are scheduled to expire. Under the TABOR refund and deficit situation the state is currently facing, the Department cannot generate additional revenue from fees. This is because cash funds collected over the TABOR limit must be refunded and thus reduces the amount of total funds available for health and other essential state functions.
- Due to budget cuts and immediate problems, such as West Nile Virus and influenza, Public Health departments have been forced to pull all available staff from their daily duties so that any emerging crisis can be adequately addressed—as a result health inspections of schools, restaurants and day-care centers have been scaled back.
- A county's local public health department is the first responder and initial line of defense against a possible act of bio-terrorism. Budget shortfalls have placed serious restrictions on the ability of local departments across the state to maintain adequate standards of emergency preparedness.

**The Colorado Public Health Association Board of Directors considers the recent veto by Governor Bill Owens of the per capita funding for local departments of health and environment a devastating blow to the public health infrastructure of this state. The public deserves to know how much is being cut from each local department and how these cuts will impact services to their communities.**

**... The services we are discussing are not frivolous or minor. They include communicable disease control, tuberculosis screening, investigations and treatment for exposed individuals, safe public drinking water, immunizations, perinatal risk reduction services, food safety, health education and funding for maternal child health programs.**

**Colorado Public Health Association  
Board of Directors, July 2002**

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(SOURCES: CDPHE, State Title V Block Grant Narrative, 2004; Colorado Public Health Association Board of Directors, press release July 2002; United Health Foundation, 2004 Edition; JBC, 2005-06 Briefing Report; El Paso County Department of Public Health and Environment, 2004, 2005).

*For more information on efforts to reform TABOR, visit [www.thebell.org](http://www.thebell.org) or call 303.297.0456  
Prepared by The Bell Policy Center 3/10/2005*