



# FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2021

# PRIORITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an untold amount of suffering, economic impact, and devastation across all parts of the nation. Minnesota counties have seen firsthand the pandemic's effects on our main streets, business and non-profit communities, senior and residential care facilities, renters, and those most in need facing homelessness or without access to food.

In response, counties have shifted all their focus and efforts in 2020 to responding to the community's needs by adopting new and creative ways to continue to serve residents and clients as well as creating customized relief programs aimed at food, shelter, and rent assistance along with business and non-profit grant programs. From partnering with local colleges to support workforce training programs, to creating unique business assistance programs to provide relief to specific industries impacted by the pandemic (logging, pork producers, restaurants), counties have once again proven their ability to work professionally, creatively, and with an eye towards those most in need in their communities.

As counties look to 2021, we know there is much more to be done to ensure a safe, speedy, and equitable recovery. We thank you for your partnership and advocacy on behalf of our state and stand ready to collaborate with you to do best for Minnesotans. ■

## **Federal Pandemic Response and Relief**

Minnesota counties are grateful for Congress' work to pass the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) in April of 2020. Since receiving the funds in June, counties have worked diligently to send millions of dollars out in direct assistance to residents through food, rental, housing, business, and non-profit assistance programs as well as strategic and impactful investments in local public health responses, PPE, broadband, and more. These resources have been critical to Minnesotans suffering from the economic and health impacts of the pandemic and a lifeline to the business and nonprofit communities that are attempting to weather financial disruptions caused by closures and reduced income. As we enter 2021, AMC urges Congress to work expeditiously and in a bipartisan fashion to pass an additional federal pandemic relief package that includes direct allocations to state and local governments with extended spending timeframes, clearer guidelines, and additional flexibility around use of funds. ■

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## Public Health

AMC supports ongoing, flexible funding for local public health to allow local agencies and the state to continue efforts to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Responding to disasters and emergencies is a core responsibility of Minnesota's local public health departments. Local public health agencies across the state have re-directed their staff to COVID-19 response and have been in full response mode since as early as February. Despite some state and federal funding appropriated in 2020 that was crucial for COVID-19 response, funding for response in 2021 remains unclear for local public health agencies and ongoing response funding will be crucial for local public health response to continue. Ongoing, flexible funding for local public health is needed to continue efforts to mitigate the spread of the virus, investigate cases, deliver essential services to families in quarantine including food and prescription drug delivery, cleaning supplies, transportation, and housing supports. Finally, as the vaccine becomes available, local public health will need to step up and play a key role in community education, outreach, and vaccine delivery. ■

## Televisit Flexibility

AMC asks for continued support for televisit flexibility to allow counties to assist more clients.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, local public health has started to deliver services in new ways, including via telemedicine (both phone and video). One of the federal-level requirements for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program is that visits be conducted in-person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, waivers have been put in place at the state and federal level to allow visits to happen via phone or video. However, this waiver expires 30 days after the end of the federal declaration of emergency. Allowing televisits has enabled local public health to reach more clients in need, increase efficiency of staff by allowing them to see more clients and spend less time traveling, and has reduced barriers for clients. For example, clients are still able to access services even if they don't have the transportation to come to local public health offices to meet in person. Although local public health soon hopes to return to in-person visits, permanent changes would provide flexibility in how services are delivered and best meet client needs. ■

## WIOA Reauthorization

AMC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to assist job seekers while promoting a speedy, sustainable, and equitable economic recovery after the pandemic.

A strong federal workforce system is key to our economic recovery after the disastrous effects of COVID-19 on workers, businesses, and local economies. As such, AMC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which was signed into law in 2014 and is up for reauthorization in 2020. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. We support increasing funding for WIOA workforce and adult education grants to at least FY 2020 authorized levels and restore career and technical education (CTE) state grant funding to \$1.3 billion. After nearly two decades of disinvestment, the economy needs significant new investment. ■

## Broadband

AMC supports a federal infrastructure bill that includes funding for broadband in order to help achieve border-to-border high-speed internet access the state.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the need for investment in our broadband infrastructure nationwide as more and more people work, learn, and receive healthcare at home. National efforts that provide tax credits to telecommunication providers and other funding mechanisms that support expanded broadband service help Minnesotans get closer to our statewide goal, particularly in underserved and unserved areas. AMC supports a federal infrastructure bill that includes funding for broadband in order to help achieve border-to-border high-speed internet access the state. AMC also supports the work of NACo's newly created Broadband Task Force to study the lack of reliable broadband and the challenges facing underserved communities. ■

## Transportation

Counties play a critical part in the nation's transportation system and should be provided levels of funding and authority that adequately reflect this role. In Minnesota alone, the County State Aid Highway System (CSAH) makes up more than 35,000 miles of roadway in the state while county roads add nearly 15,000 more. Despite the recent one-year extension of the FAST Act, additional highway and transit funding is needed. AMC supports congressional and executive branch efforts to pass a comprehensive infrastructure bill that increases funding for county-owned highways and bridges. In addition, AMC supports fully funding the Federal Transit Authority's Capital Investment Grants which assist communities in funding major transit investments such as heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail, street cars, and bus rapid transit. AMC also supports NACo's work to ensure that the federal government continues subsidies for assisting airlines serving small communities and fully fund the Essential Air Services Program. ■

## Child Welfare

AMC supports federal efforts to assist states and counties to make the needed reforms related to the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). The FFPSA is intended to transform child welfare systems. Counties seeking to prevent or respond to abuse and neglect and to support families in preventing children from entering foster care have been further challenged by the impacts of COVID-19 in program implementation. As states and counties continue to work toward implementing FFPSA approaching the 2021 implementation deadline in law, AMC supports administrative flexibility as well as additional funding aimed at assisting counties making the transition. AMC supports maintaining federal Title IV-E funding for placements as states struggle with meeting requirements of the Adam Walsh background study requirements and Child Abuse and Neglect Registry Checks (CANR) during the pandemic. AMC supports a waiver for Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs) to be considered Institutions of Mental Diseases (IMDs), to ensure federally funded health care and treatment are available to eligible children in these placements. AMC also supports additional primary prevention resources, outside of the narrow FFPSA definition of candidacy, being provided by the federal government to truly meet the stated goals of FFPSA of providing services that prevent children from entering foster care. ■

## Preemption

AMC firmly believes in the importance of local control and community-driven decision making. State and national efforts to "preempt" local governments from making critical decisions or policy changes for their constituents are contrary to the principles of federalism and directly impact community sustainability. ■

## Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)/Secure Rural Schools (SRS)

A considerable percentage of land in Minnesota is owned by the federal government, as such, AMC shares the priority of NACo to support restoring the full mandatory funding for the Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, which compensates counties for tax-exempt federal land within their boundaries. AMC and NACo also support extending the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program as a transitional funding mechanism until the federal government fully implements a sustainable long-term forest management program with adequate revenue sharing for forest counties and schools. ■

## Support for Individuals & Families

Counties are on the front line in maintaining the safety net for those unable to work and encouraging the achievement of self-sufficiency for those who can. AMC supports increasing federal funding for and alignment among programs that assist those most in need and encourages the maximum amount of efficiency and flexibility possible at the local level. Key federal programs that assist counties in tackling poverty include the Social Services Block Grant, the Community Services Block Grant, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. ■

## Vital Communities

AMC supports federal assistance to communities in reaching their workforce and economic development potential in order to enhance the quality of life for all Minnesotans. Investments in community development, affordable housing, small/medium business development, infrastructure, job training, and cleanup/redevelopment are integral to these efforts. ■

## Jail Healthcare

Minnesota counties are responsible for delivering critical health services to inmates and are required by federal law to provide those services. Many pre-trial inmates have diverse and significant health needs, such as chemical use disorders and mental health diagnoses. Individuals with mental health and/or chemical health indicators are more likely to return to jail than those without these indicators. Providing access to federal health benefits to pre-trial inmates would help counties break the cycle of recidivism caused or exacerbated by untreated mental illness and/or substance use disorders, thereby improving public safety. Inmate health care is a significant cost to counties and those that have not yet been convicted of a crime should retain their eligibility for these programs. AMC urges Congress to pass legislation that would differentiate between pre-trial and post-conviction incarceration and restore pretrial detainee access to federal health benefits. ■

## Rural Healthcare

Counties play a critical role in providing healthcare services to citizens across the entire state of Minnesota, including those that live in more rural parts of the state. In some rural Minnesota counties, there are very limited options that exist for healthcare plans and a lack of access to care. AMC supports federal efforts to broaden healthcare access and options throughout the entire state of Minnesota. Policy and funding reforms should provide cost containment while enhancing quality care choices and grant the maximum amount of decision-making authority and flexibility as possible to the local level. ■

## Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)

AMC requests that Congress guarantee that the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) remain a separate program, separately funded from all other grants to ensure it is a truly all-hazards program. Additionally, AMC requests that the EMPG be funded at or above current funding levels, with a requirement that a minimum of 70 percent of EMPG funds be passed through to local government with a 50/50 match requirement. AMC continues to oppose the complete consolidation of the existing Homeland Security and Emergency Management grant programs into block grant programs. ■

## State Assumption of the US Clean Water Act: Sec. 404 Permit Program

Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act is administered by the US Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the US, including wetlands. Federal law allows for state administration of these programs. Recent changes to interpretation of assumable waters by the Corps prompted AMC to support and pass legislation for Minnesota to develop an application for assumption. Additionally, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is amending the federal 404 assumption regulations to clarify the parameters by which states may assume jurisdiction of the program. Counties believe the time is now to proactively advocate for and pursue changes to the federal rules that will allow states to efficiently and effectively assume jurisdiction of this program, which will provide a more efficient and timely permitting process for local infrastructure projects. ■

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