



FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2024

Minnesota counties work each day to serve their residents and address unique needs specific to their communities. Counties are always working to adopt new and creative ways to serve residents and clients, with an eye to addressing the most critical needs such as partnering with local colleges to support workforce training programs and creating unique solutions to address challenges in housing, childcare or food access. As counties look to 2024, we know there is more to be done to ensure safe, resilient, and economically vibrant communities. 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.

Jail Healthcare

Minnesota counties are responsible — and required by federal law — for delivering critical health services to inmates. Incarcerated individuals 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 incarcerated individuals would help counties break the cycle of recidivism caused or exacerbated by untreated mental illness and/or substance use disorders, thereby improving public safety.

AMC urges congress to support current legislative efforts to restore Medicaid and other federal benefits for incarcerated individuals during periods of pre-trial incarceration and 30 days prior to release from prison or jail. The Medicaid Inmate Exclusion Policy (MIEP) prohibits the use of federal funds and services for medical care provided to inmates of public institutions. This prohibition of federal resources has negatively impacted rehabilitation outcomes and puts a financial strain on local budgets. Allowing incarcerated individuals to receive services while in pre-trial custody and prior to their release from jail or prison will expand access to vital mental health and addiction services, thereby decreasing recidivism and improving health outcomes for individuals reentering the community. Ensuring uninterrupted health coverage for incarcerated individuals, particularly during the transition period when they are reentering their communities, is essential for protecting the health and safety of the community overall. ■

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization

A strong federal workforce system is key to support sustained economic growth, address the workforce shortage, and ensure all jobseekers have the opportunity to be successful in the labor market. As such, AMC supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which has been up for reauthorization since 2020. WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to access jobs in high-demand fields and match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. AMC joins the Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards (MAWB) in supporting increased funding for WIOA workforce and adult education grants to at least FY 2020 authorized levels as well as restoring career and technical education (CTE) state grant funding to \$1.3 billion. Adjusted for inflation, federal funding levels are \$3 billion less today than what our nation collectively invested in the publicly funded workforce system in 2000. Now more than ever, we need strong and widely available workforce development programming to address critical workforce challenges. After nearly two decades of disinvestment, the economy needs significant new investment. ■

AMC supports legislative efforts to restore benefits under the Social Security Act for incarcerated individuals.

AMC supports the reauthorization of the WIOA to assist job seekers while promoting a speedy, sustainable, and equitable economic recovery after the pandemic.

PRIORITIES

Broadband and Transportation

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act delivers much needed federal investments in both transportation and broadband. The bipartisan bill includes \$284 billion for transportation, including a long-term surface transportation reauthorization, increased investments in off-system bridges, and \$100 billion in competitive resources for counties over five years. Additionally, the bill provides \$65 billion for broadband, including \$42.45 billion in grants to states for broadband deployment. AMC will continue to work together with NACo and our partners at the state level to ensure successful implementation of the funding and programs provided for in the bill. While this funding is pivotal in the success of our infrastructure – roads, bridges, transit, broadband, and beyond – there is much work to do to get our transportation system up-to-speed and deliver border-to-border broadband across the state and nation. ■

Child Wellbeing

AMC supports federal efforts to assist states and counties to make the needed reforms in all areas related to the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Working in conjunction with broader state and local family strengthening efforts, the FFPSA is intended to transform child welfare systems into systems that support children and families in community, reducing the need for out of home placement. 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 strains on workforce, program and service availability and the mental health needs of residents. As jurisdictions continue to work towards implementation of FFPSA, AMC supports efforts to increase administrative flexibility, bolster the Title IV-E Clearinghouse to increase programing and expand access to culturally relevant and responsive programming and increase funding and supports, including workforce and mental health supports, aimed at assisting counties making the transition. Additionally, 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. ■

Election infrastructure

Counties play a major role in administering Minnesota's elections. From election preparation (printing ballots, purchasing/testing election equipment, processing voter registration applications, training election judges) to administering and issuing absentee mail balloting, running voting sites on and before election day, submitting election results, and running canvassing boards, counties are the frontline of Minnesota's election system making sure the election process runs orderly and professionally. Elections serve as the pillar of democracy and thus, counties support ongoing, direct federal support to local governments in purchasing new equipment, supporting the staffing and operations of elections, and investing in infrastructure to respond to increasing cybersecurity threats. Federal funding should be direct to counties and local government. ■

Farm Bill Reauthorization

AMC supports reauthorization and updates to all chapters of the Farm Bill, which expires in September 2024. The Farm Bill helps Minnesota counties make critical investments in infrastructure, economic development, nutrition, and conservation. Preserving these programs is vital to the strength of our local and state economy. ■

Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative

As the headwaters state of the nation's most famous river, Minnesota values its unique position and role as a steward and protector of the Mississippi River natural resources area. As such, AMC supports the Mississippi River Restoration and Resilience Initiative (MRRRI), which will create a new, non-regulatory, geographic grant program to provide federal planning and funding supports to enhance river restoration, resilience projects and program activities in the Mississippi River states. AMC believes the passage of the MRRRI will complement ongoing state and local efforts by providing additional federal resources to ensure this vital resource is available for future generations. ■

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. ■

Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in Minnesota's public health workforce. Since 2008, local health departments across the United States have lost more than 20% of their workforce, which is equivalent to more than 50,000 jobs. A significant increase in investment in the public health workforce is needed and should include efforts to establish a public health student loan repayment program. AMC supports efforts to provide loan forgiveness for eligible individuals who work in a local, state, or tribal public health department for three consecutive years and offer up to \$35,000 in repayment assistance for each year of service. Loan repayment will be key in recruiting a robust new public health workforce in the years to come. ■

Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)

Responding to disasters and emergencies — whether health-centric or not — is a core responsibility of Minnesota's local public health departments. In Minnesota, PHEP funding goes to the state and is passed through to locals. Past proposals to redistribute PHEP funds and a series of funding cuts highlight the vulnerability of federal funding and compromised local public health's ability to respond to emergency events, such as COVID-19. Despite a temporary influx of federal funds in response to COVID-19, historically, federal funding has been cut and funding expectations were not realigned to reflect the cuts. AMC supports adequate, sustained funding for local public health emergency planning and response to support ongoing training and equipment needs and alignment of grant expectations with funding levels. ■

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. ■

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, Community Services Block Grant, Community Development Block Grant, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. ■

Telemedicine Flexibility

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, local public health and human services agencies started delivering services in new ways, including via telemedicine (both phone and video). This change allowed for increased flexibility, creating opportunities for counties to better meet clients' needs. For example, one of the federal level requirements for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programming is that visits be conducted in-person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, waivers were put in place at the federal level to allow visits to happen via phone or video. Allowing televisits for WIC 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. Although local public health has largely returned to in-person visits, permanent changes would provide flexibility, efficiencies, and client convenience in how services are delivered. ■

Workforce Shortages

AMC supports comprehensive immigration reform that creates clear, enforceable immigration policy while also strengthening local economies and workforce. In the face of increasingly tight labor markets, a growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of Minnesota's most significant barriers to sustained economic growth. With a historically low unemployment rate, there are currently more than two job vacancies for every jobseeker looking for work. This worker shortage is taking a toll on Minnesota employers as they struggle to fill positions and retain talent. There are multiple issues contributing to the current workforce shortage. Minnesota's labor force participation rate has returned to pre-pandemic levels but as our population ages, Baby Boomers are retiring from the workforce, reducing the already struggling labor pool. Minnesota's labor market has a larger share of Boomers than other states—Boomers, aged 56 to 74 in 2020, made up about 22.5% of Minnesota's labor force in 2020, compared to 21.5% for the entire United States. We also lose native Minnesotans to other states and domestic migration into Minnesota is low. Because of these constraints, it has become evident that immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of the workforce that employers need to succeed. Immigrants have become critical to Minnesota's economy, providing a rapid stream of new workers in the face of an aging native-born workforce. Minnesota's net international migration has been positive over the past two decades and has offset the loss of Minnesota residents leaving for other states. AMC supports enacting legislative and regulatory proposals that provide improved and efficient legal and consistent avenues for immigrants to legally enter the United States, both permanently and temporarily, and contribute to the workforce and local economies and maintain the area standard industry wages for the local marketplace. ■