



Association of  
Minnesota Counties

# Legislative Policy Priorities

Adopted by AMC Board of Directors 12/3/23

# 2024

## Mental Health and Human Services Modernization

### Mental Health/High Acuity

Minnesota's mental and behavioral health infrastructure must include crisis stabilization and rehabilitation services, along with ongoing community support services to ensure limited placements in jails and emergency rooms. The state must develop a concrete five-year plan to meet our state's acute mental health care and behavioral health needs that includes substantial state funding and regional investments to address gaps in Minnesota's mental health infrastructure to ensure that appropriate services are available for children and adults with high needs in all communities.

Necessary facilities and services with an appropriate level of care include Minnesota State-Operated Community Services (MSOCS), Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Hospitals (CABHH), crisis beds, high acuity placements, integrated developmental disability and mental health homes, and both secure and non-secure therapeutic treatment options for adults and children involved with the criminal justice system.

Counties advocate to permanently codify language passed in 2023 which temporarily relieved counties of a cost share for mentally ill and dangerous patients transferring between state facilities, and counties seek language regarding priority admissions that will create accountability for the state's role and require that individuals' needs are met in an appropriate setting.

AMC supports investments to expand services and address gaps in the state-wide mental health continuum, specifically to address acute, complex behavioral health placements and community services and clarify the state's safety net role in providing and funding these critical services.

AMC supports structural investments to modernize, sustainably fund, and collaboratively govern human services technology system improvements, with specific targeted funding to facilitate local system infrastructure and innovation.

### Human Services Systems Modernization

DHS received \$200 million from the Legislature in 2023 for investments in human services system modernization, but this initial investment is not supported with ongoing or sustainable funding. Counties rely on the state for technology infrastructure in health and human services, but too many of our current statewide systems operate on antiquated technology platforms that are inefficient and burdensome for county staff. These technological shortcomings, plus cumbersome and inefficient administrative rules and requirements, prolong administrative work and create roadblocks for county workers. Ongoing funding is needed to replace functionally obsolete technology infrastructure because counties need updated systems in order to be flexible, nimble, and responsive to community needs. Counties need a stronger voice in modernization decisions by the state, starting with utilizing a county impact assessment in investment decision-making. Failure to invest in the systems requirements needed to implement Targeted Case Management Redesign has the potential to cost counties million in federal reimbursements. The state must allocate a portion of state transformation funds and enhanced federal funding to counties for local innovation efforts and to offset the county cost of implementation of new state-provided technologies.

# Environment, Land Management, and Infrastructure

## Bonding

Bonding for these four transportation programs is a priority for AMC and an important piece to funding the statewide transportation system. Counties are grateful for the significant investment in these programs in the 2023 bonding bill and in the Omnibus Transportation Finance and Policy bill, but there is still a considerable need for additional funding for these programs statewide. Counties and cities have adopted county board and city council resolutions that have prioritized an additional 959 bridges for replacement over the next five years with an estimated total replacement cost of \$781 million, including anticipated requests of \$288 million in state bridge funds. With inflation, it is anticipated that the state bridge fund need will be closer to \$350 million, which represents an approximate 20% increase. Additionally, during the 2023 Local Road Improvement Program (LRIP) competitive solicitation process, MnDOT State Aid received 379 applications totaling \$418 million in LRIP funding. In addition, a cash investment for the Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program is needed to make up for previous years when the program went without funding. The 2023 bonding bill included general obligation bonds for the program, which will be used for construction and wetland establishment activities to build up wetland bank credits across the bank service areas, but a cash infusion will help purchase private wetland bank credits in order to meet short-term needs.

AMC supports a bonding bill that includes funding for transportation-related programs, including the Local Road Improvement Program, the Local Bridge Replacement Program, the Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program, and the Busway Capital Improvement Program.

AMC supports adhering to the current requirements for public notice of drainage work and hearings according to Minn. Stat. 103E and the Minnesota Drainage Manual. Updates or modernization of these requirements should not create additional reporting, add to county or system costs, or impact timely maintenance and repairs.

## Drainage

Minnesota counties serve as drainage authorities responsible for the management and maintenance of drainage systems, which are financed by the impacted landowners. Drainage authorities follow the notice and public hearing requirements in state statute and often go beyond those obligations to be good public stewards. Minnesota's drainage law already includes extensive process, notice, and hearing requirements that are often very costly.

AMC has concerns with statutory changes that include additional, redundant requirements, prevent timely maintenance and repairs, or are designed to lengthen project timelines and costs.

## SCORE

The Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) was created in 1997 to help state and local governments address waste management. 27% of the taxes collected are diverted to the general fund for other purposes. Minnesota's solid waste management laws require counties to provide the proper management of waste generated in their county and establish mandates and goals for improved environmental outcomes. SWMT revenues continue to grow, but the level of funding directed back to counties has been largely stagnant relative to the funds generated and costs of providing services.

AMC seeks to redirect the SWMT revenues currently going to the general fund to counties' waste management efforts through SCORE Grants.

AMC supports allocating 100% of the revenue generated by the Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) to state and county waste management activities, including increased funding for SCORE grants to counties.

AMC supports state statute reforms to address the impacts of the U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding *Tyler v. Hennepin* that protect and enhance Minnesota's historic commitment to preserving home ownership and create a new system that assists counties in managing tax-forfeited properties, protects memorial lands that provide state benefit, and creates a clear and transparent process for all parties moving forward.

## Tax Forfeiture

Last spring, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Minnesota's tax forfeiture system was unconstitutional because, in certain cases, local governments were keeping revenue from tax-forfeited sales that were in excess of the total debt owed from delinquency. In Minnesota, counties are responsible for managing the tax forfeiture process on behalf of the state. This process is not only complex but costly, especially when counties bear the responsibilities associated with cleaning up damaged, vacant, or unsafe properties in order to return them to productive use. While there were certain sales of tax-forfeited property that did provide excess/net value, those cases were a minority and by no means outweighed the true total costs of tax forfeiture administration. As such, the U.S. Supreme Court decision has the potential to create new costs for counties while also creating a significant financial liability on the question of what happens to past excess takings. An AMC Tax Forfeiture Work Group has outlined a legislative solution to address these issues and create a new property tax foreclosure system that is centered on fairness, is administrative and budgetarily efficient/transparent, provides local governments flexibility to protect public interest, and provides property owners with ample opportunities to reclaim property.

## Public Safety and Emergency Medical Services

### Youth Mental Health Continuum of Care

An increase in mental health services is necessary throughout the state, and particularly in rural Minnesota. A gap in services exists for individuals that exhibit high-risk behaviors due to mental health conditions. An expansion in placement and program options is necessary to ensure that individuals are not incarcerated due to lack of mental health services.

This is especially true for youth. The gap in services for juveniles that exhibit high-risk behaviors due to mental health conditions is even larger than the gap that exists for adults. The state must invest in therapeutic placement programs to ensure that secure detention facilities are not the only placement option for juveniles due to lack of services. The criminal justice system is often used as a tool to connect juveniles with appropriate services when other methods do not work. It is imperative that the children of Minnesota are never in contact with the criminal justice system solely to treat mental or behavioral health issues that are more appropriately addressed elsewhere.

AMC supports initiatives to address gaps in the mental health continuum of care for youth in the justice system including increased early youth intervention, long-term treatment and housing, and supports for youth experiencing severe mental illness.

AMC supports sustainable, ongoing state funding to update and maintain Minnesota's emergency response systems including Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER), Next Generation 9-1-1, Public Alert System (IPAWS), and others that are necessary to promote interoperability of emergency response communications.

AMC also supports efforts to modernize, improve, fund, and maintain emergency medical services across the state to ensure all Minnesotans have access to 24/7 ambulance services.

## Emergency Response Systems Investments

Minnesota's emergency preparedness system has been funded primarily by inconsistent federal sources. An ongoing stream of state funds to provide the critical functions of this process is needed, particularly related to the Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Radio (ARMER) and upgrades related to Next Generation 9-1-1. The 9-1-1 telecommunications service fee can be utilized for costs related to the 9-1-1 system, but federal rules do not allow the funds to be used for ARMER maintenance or equipment outside of a dispatch center. Thousands of radios in Minnesota are outdated and in need of replacement or updated encryption capabilities. Radios can cost upwards of \$5,000 each. The ARMER system is necessary to support the work of law enforcement, emergency management, firefighters, EMS, and other public safety officials. All equipment and infrastructure for the different facets of Minnesota's emergency response system must be up-to-date and in good working order to ensure that our communities can get help fast whenever they need it.

The Legislature appears to be on the cusp of making consequential decisions regarding ambulance and emergency services in Minnesota and has created a new Task Force on Emergency Medical Services with several important legislative appointments and the support of both Majority Leader Dzierdzic and House Speaker Hortman. Much of this work is expected to surround recommendations on revisions to primary service areas (PSAs). While AMC does not have an official position on what legislative changes should look like, staff believe all counties will have an active interest in creating a sustainable model for emergency medical services and should be ready to provide membership perspective and input throughout session.

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