

Minnesota Counties

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A SYSTEM ON THE EDGE

**How Antiquated
State Technology Puts
Minnesota's Safety Net
at Risk and Helps Push
Property Tax Levies
to the Brink.**

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President's Column

By Larry Lindor, Pope County Commissioner
2026 AMC President

Happy New Year to all of you! Thank you again for voting for me to serve as your 2026 AMC President. It is truly an honor, and I am grateful for your confidence and support.

I hope everyone who attended the Annual Conference enjoyed their time. There was great food, music, exhibitors, and informative sessions—but most of all, valuable networking, visiting, and good conversation. I always look forward to reconnecting with commissioners I've gotten to know over the years. Commissioners really are a special group of people and I always look forward to opportunities throughout the year for us to gather, talk, connect and advocate on behalf of all 87 counties.

In my remarks, I spoke about the importance of all Minnesota commissioners working together in the coming year. I believe we will need to be teachers, persuaders, influencers, guides, and partners with our state legislators so that counties' voices and concerns are clearly heard. I know my two legislators personally, and I imagine many of you do as well. I truly believe that neighbor-to-neighbor conversations will make a difference this year.

Thank you again, and I hope to see you at upcoming AMC events. ●



AMC President Larry Lindor being sworn-in by Past President Mike Slavik.



AMC President Larry Lindor delivering his first address following the election.



MEET AMC'S 2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: [L to R] 2nd Vice President Jenny Mongeau (Clay), 1st Vice President Barb Weckman Brekke (Scott), President Larry Lindor (Pope), Past President Mike Slavik (Dakota) and Secretary/Treasurer Steve Schmitt (Meeker).

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National Association of Counties (NACo) Second Vice President Alisha Bell (center), a Wayne County, MI, County Commissioner, addressed attendees at the AMC Annual Conference in Bloomington - shown here with AMC's NACo board members, several executive committee members, and two of Minnesota's NACo past presidents.



14 of AMC's Past Presidents - dating back to presidents who served in the late 1990s - joined us at this year's annual conference!



Opening Session Keynote David Horsager delivered an inspiring and informative presentation on why "Trust Matters More Than Ever" in government. Our thanks to Sourcewell for sponsoring this session and starting the conference on a great note!



AMC's Tribal Relations Forum featured a panel of Tribal leaders and Ramsey County staff sharing insights and experiences of how local governments and Tribal Nations work together for the betterment of whole communities.



Clay County Commissioner Jenny Mongeau was elected AMC Second Vice President for 2026.



Closing Session Keynote Kim Lear delivered a funny and insightful look at how multiple generations interact in the workplace and how to leverage the strengths of each through understanding their differences.

Association of Minnesota Counties Annual Conference Snapshots

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AMC Honors Excellence With 2025 Annual Awards

2025 County Achievement Awards

AMC honored six innovative county programs with its 2025 County Achievement Awards, recognizing excellence and creativity in local government. Award recipients were nominated by their counties and selected by a committee of county officials.

Collaborative for Rural Public Health Innovation
Big Stone, Brown, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Faribault, Jackson, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon, Martin, McLeod, Meeker, Murray, Nicollet, Pipestone, Redwood, Renville, Rock, Sibley, Swift, Waseca, Watonwan, and Yellow Medicine Counties

In 2024, 25 counties partnered with Minnesota State University, Mankato to strengthen rural public health delivery through a \$530,000, two-year grant. The collaboration enhances core services such as communications, data analysis, and emergency preparedness while providing students with real-world experience through curriculum integration and paid internships. The first year exceeded expectations, creating a scalable model to address workforce shortages and improve public health outcomes statewide and beyond. ●

Community Corrections Evidence-Based Practices Unit
Dakota County

Dakota County's Community Corrections Evidence-Based Practices Unit demonstrates how data-driven strategies can improve outcomes for clients and communities alike. The program delivers measurable results, long-term sustainability, and a replicable framework that continues to inform corrections practices across Minnesota. ●

Enhancing Human Services Delivery Through Innovation and Accountability
Stearns County

Facing a 41% increase in public assistance applications after COVID, Stearns County Human Services modernized operations without adding staff. By leveraging digital tools, performance dashboards, and Results-Based Accountability, the department improved efficiency and transparency. Its AI-powered virtual assistant, EVA, has saved hundreds of staff hours while expanding client access to timely information. ●

Each year, the AMC Annual Conference brings together nearly 600 county officials and staff for three days of learning, policy discussion, association business, and networking, but it also allows us an opportunity to recognize outstanding programs and individuals advancing county government across Minnesota.

2025 AMC President and Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik presented the awards at the association's annual conference on December 9 in Bloomington. Read on to learn more about the people and initiatives making a meaningful difference in public service statewide.



Northern Warriors Outreach Program: Mobile Claims & Community Support
Beltrami County

Beltrami County's Veterans Service Office brings VA and state benefits directly to rural and tribal veterans through a custom Mobile Claims Unit. Since launching in May 2025, the program has served more than 950 veterans and family members at community events across northern Minnesota. Funded entirely through state grants, the program is a statewide model for accessible, mobile veteran services. ●



Southeast Minnesota Regional Population Health Data Model
Dodge, Fillmore, Freeborn, Goodhue, Houston, Mower, Olmsted, Rice, Steele, Wabasha, and Winona Counties

Led by Olmsted County, this regional data-sharing model helps smaller public health departments access, analyze, and apply population health data. Shared dashboards now allow counties to monitor trends such as overdoses and suicides in near real time, improving the timing and effectiveness of prevention efforts while building local data capacity. ●



West Wing Child Care & Rentals
Renville County

Renville County is addressing critical child care and housing shortages by repurposing a vacant assisted living facility into four child care units and seven workforce housing units. Supported by a \$345,000 state grant, the project will add at least 40 new child care slots while strengthening workforce stability. The initiative offers a cost-effective, sustainable model for meeting community needs through adaptive reuse. ●



2025 Economic Development Award



Otter Tail County's Empowered Workers Program received MAPCED's annual award for outstanding economic development. Central to the county's strategy, the program addresses workforce shortages by investing in local, underutilized talent. It supports residents facing barriers such as poverty, justice involvement, and limited English proficiency through a collaborative, person-centered approach across county departments. Individualized navigation services allow participants to guide their own workforce pathways, benefiting both workers and employers. ●



2025 County Conservation Award

Renville County's County Ditch 59 Project received the 2025 AMC-BWSR County Conservation Award, presented by BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke. Led jointly by the Renville County SWCD and Drainage Systems, the multiyear project integrates water storage into county drainage infrastructure, reducing erosion and nutrient loading, improving water quality, and lowering long-term costs. The project highlights the value of collaboration among counties, SWCDs, and landowners to address shared water challenges. ●

2025 AMC Outstanding Service Awards

Individuals from Lake, Olmsted and Chisago Counties received Association of Minnesota Counties' (AMC) 2025 Outstanding Service Awards for exhibiting excellence, innovation and dedication to their work in county government. The recipients were nominated by their counties and selected by a committee of county officials.



Lake County Commissioner Rick Goutermont (right) with 2025 AMC President and Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik.

Rick Goutermont Commissioner, Lake County Years of Service: 33

Born and raised in Silver Bay, Rick Goutermont has dedicated his life to serving Lake County and its residents. Prior to joining the county board, he served on the Silver Bay City Council, spent decades supervising operations at Northshore Mining, and volunteered as a firefighter for 35 years.

First elected to the Lake County Board of Commissioners in the early 1990s, Commissioner Goutermont is now in his 33rd consecutive year of service. He has played a central role in major county projects, including the Lake County Law Enforcement Center, the Lake County Service Center, and numerous infrastructure, public safety, and housing initiatives.

For more than three decades, Goutermont has worked to strengthen public safety, expand opportunities for residents, and protect the natural beauty of Minnesota's North Shore. Known for his steady leadership and collaborative approach, he has earned the trust and respect of residents, colleagues, and local leaders statewide. He has also served as a mentor and advocate, generously sharing his experience to support county leaders across Minnesota.

For his lifelong dedication, servant leadership, and lasting contributions to Lake County and beyond, Commissioner Rick Goutermont exemplifies the spirit of the AMC Outstanding Service Award. ●



Olmsted County Administrator Travis Gransee, Commissioner Gregg Wright, Deputy County Administrator Pete Giesen, Commissioner Dave Senjem, and Commissioner Brian Mueller.

Pete Giesen Deputy County Administrator, Olmsted County Years of Service: 42

Since beginning his career in Olmsted County as an environmental health sanitarian in 1983, Giesen has served in numerous leadership roles, including Director of Public Health, Deputy County Administrator since 2018, and Interim County Administrator in 2024.

As Director of Public Health, Giesen led the department to national accreditation, launched a collaborative community health assessment process, and secured long-term investments in health promotion. In county administration, Giesen has overseen both General Government administrative departments and the Physical Development division, which includes Parks and Trails, Public Works, and Property Records and Licensing. His leadership has advanced environmental sustainability, responsible growth, and strong community partnerships.

Known for his integrity, adaptability, and person-centered leadership, Giesen fostered trust through open communication and steady mentorship. Colleagues consistently describe him as a thoughtful, collaborative, and principled leader whose impact reaches across the organization and community. ●

Nancy Hoffman Executive Director, HRA/EDA, Chisago County Years of Service: 13

Nancy Hoffman has provided exceptional leadership and innovation in economic development as Executive Director of the Chisago County HRA/EDA since 2012. Her work has driven major improvements through initiatives that addressed broadband access, housing needs, and business growth.

Hoffman's strategic vision is reflected in efforts like the Highway 8 Framework and the Chisago County Labor Assessment, which guide long-term development and workforce planning. She has also strengthened collaboration among cities, townships, and small businesses through enhanced communication and expanded support services.

Her work has positioned Chisago County for sustained success and serves as a model for community-driven, cooperative economic development. ●



Chisago County HRA/EDA Executive Director Nancy Hoffman (right) with 2025 AMC President and Dakota County Commissioner Mike Slavik.

Slavik Presents 2025 AMC President's Awards

Goodhue County Commissioner Brad Anderson and Kandiyohi County Commissioner Roger Imdieke received the Association of Minnesota Counties' (AMC) 2025 President's Awards from AMC President Mike Slavik (Dakota County) in recognition of their exceptional leadership and long-standing service in county government at the AMC Annual Conference in early December in Bloomington.

The AMC President's Award honors individuals with a deep commitment to public service and a lasting impact on their communities and counties.

Commissioner Anderson was recognized as a trusted, forward-thinking leader whose thoughtful decision-making strengthens county work across Goodhue County, the region, and the state.

"Brad sees the big picture and weighs decisions with future generations in mind, not just the political moment," said Slavik.

Commissioner Imdieke was honored for his leadership as a small business owner, community advocate, and strong voice for counties. His work has drawn statewide attention, including recognition from the *Minnesota Star Tribune*, where he serves as a regular columnist sharing county perspectives.

"Roger is a passionate and determined leader who believes thriving communities require active participation," Slavik said.

Recipients of the President's Award are selected confidentially, with families notified in advance and often present to surprise honorees at the awards ceremony. Congratulations to Commissioners Anderson and Imdieke for demonstrating exemplary leadership and a dedication to public service that earned these well-deserved honors! ●



Goodhue County Commissioner Brad Anderson was surprised by his family who were able to join him onstage to accept his award.



Kandiyohi County Commissioner Roger Imdieke with his family who surprised him at the awards banquet in Bloomington.

AMC Sharpens 2026 Advocacy Agenda

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) Board of Directors adopted the 2026 State and Federal Priorities at this year’s AMC Annual Conference in early December—marking a strategic shift in how AMC will engage at the Capitol during the upcoming legislative session. In 2026, AMC will concentrate its state advocacy on three core initiatives: **Technology Modernization; SNAP and Medicaid Impacts;** and **Successful Implementation of the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act (MAAFPCWDA).**

This narrowed focus reflects the extraordinary pressures counties face in human services, the urgency of federal changes now taking effect, and the need to strategically align advocacy to protect county operations and Minnesota residents.



A New Approach: Narrowed Scope, Deep Focus

For decades, AMC’s state legislative priorities have been intentionally broad to reflect the full range of county responsibilities. This year, county leaders recognized that the moment calls for a different strategy. Major federal policy changes (particularly those stemming from the July 2025 reconciliation bill - H.R. 1) are rapidly reshaping county operations. At the same time, decades-old human services technology, rising costs, and workforce shortages have created cascading operational and fiscal challenges with real impacts on communities.

In 2026, AMC’s legislative priorities will focus on the areas where system-level pressures are greatest, state partnership is essential, and inaction would carry significant fiscal and service consequences.

State Priorities

Technology Modernization

Minnesota counties administer dozens of state and federal programs using systems that in many cases are more than 30 years old. Platforms such as MAXIS and components of the Medical Assistance eligibility system cannot support modern program rules, federal changes, or today’s caseload complexity. As a result, counties rely heavily on manual processes, leading to backlogs, higher error rates, and rising staffing costs.

Building on last year’s bipartisan support to replace SSIS, AMC is seeking near-term investments to stabilize existing systems alongside long-term commitments to fully modernize human services technology. Reliable, modern systems are foundational to accurate, efficient, and timely service delivery.

SNAP and Medicaid Impacts

The federal reconciliation bill (H.R. 1) significantly alters SNAP and Medicaid administration, creating new financial and operational burdens for states and, potentially, counties. SNAP changes include reduced federal administrative funding, new state cost-sharing tied to payment error rates and expanded work requirements. Medicaid changes require more frequent eligibility checks, new work requirements, and adjustments to coverage and tax provisions.

Minnesota’s outdated eligibility systems are not equipped to automate these requirements, ensuring counties will face extensive manual processing and increased risk of costly errors. Without state assumption of new costs, property tax impacts could be severe. AMC is advocating for state coverage of these obligations, efficient implementation, and system improvements that prevent penalties while protecting access to essential food and health care programs.

Successful Implementation of MAAFPCWDA

Successful implementation of the Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act requires clear definitions, adequate workforce capacity, and sustained state investment in prevention and family support. Counties are committed to reducing longstanding disparities in Minnesota’s child welfare system, but doing so requires statewide training, community-based services, and a phased, quality-driven implementation timeline.

AMC supports state responsibility for case audits and centralized administrative functions to ensure consistency and reduce county burden. Counties also emphasize the need for community resource centers, collaborative safety approaches, and stable funding to support effective and equitable implementation by 2027.

Federal Priorities

While AMC’s state agenda is intentionally focused, our federal priorities document is a bit broader in scope with new heightened prioritization for removing the 16 bed cap for Medicaid reimbursements at Institutions for Mental Disease (IMD) along with continued focus on jail healthcare reform and passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.



Mental Health Treatment Expansion

Advancing reforms to the Medicaid IMD Exclusion to expand access to inpatient and community-based treatment amid severe workforce shortages.

Jail Health Care

Restoring Medicaid coverage during pre-trial detention and prior to release to improve outcomes and reduce recidivism.

Simplified MnCHOICES Reassessments

Allowing streamlined federal reassessments for individuals with stable conditions to reduce workload and delays.

SNAP and Medicaid Implementation

Ensuring federal rulemaking protects counties from penalties or costs tied to delayed guidance or outdated state systems.

WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) Reauthorization

Supporting renewed investment in workforce development to address labor shortages and strengthen local economies.

A Strategic, Systems-Focused Year Ahead

Please remember that while AMC’s formal priorities are more focused this year, policy staff will continue to advocate on a wide range of issues critical to counties, including bonding, solid waste, emergency response systems, long-term services and supports, community supervision funding, drainage management, data practices and more.

Minnesota’s counties stand ready to partner with state and federal leaders to modernize essential systems, implement transformational legislation, and protect vital services for millions of Minnesotans. The year ahead will demand focus, discipline, and collaboration—precisely the approach embraced by the AMC Board as it charted the course for 2026.

The AMC policy team looks forward to working on your behalf this session and engaging with you in a variety of ways from Monday morning session updates and webinars to pre-session legislator meetings and the Day at the Capitol in February! As always, do not hesitate to reach out to any member of the Government Relations team with any questions, policy analysis requests, or legislator outreach ideas. ●

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A SYSTEM ON THE EDGE

The State's Antiquated Technology Puts the Human Services Safety Net at Risk and Helps Push Property Tax Levies to the Brink.

Error messages like those shown above are the daily reality for thousands of county workers administering public benefits and verifying eligibility status through outdated, fragmented, and archaic IT systems. Minnesota counties are held accountable for accuracy and compliance using tools they didn't build and can't fix—like being asked to run a modern airport from a 35-year-old control room. We're responsible for safe landings, but the radar is obsolete.

Many of these clients have already waited several months and are desperately seeking a status update or determination on their case or application, confused as to why something that took an average of 17 minutes to complete online is somehow taking months for someone to review. What's missing from this understanding is a behind-the-curtain look at county-level Human Services, where workers are forced to manually enter application information into truly antiquated computer systems—frequently reentering duplicative information, performing constant workarounds due to system inefficiencies and temperamental functionality, and working with software that can take 15–30 minutes to complete something as simple as an address change.



By Matt Hilgart, AMC Deputy Director of Government Relations
With thanks to special contributors:

- Marti Fischbach, Dakota County Director of Community Services
 - Dan Jensen, Olmsted County Associate Director for Family Support and Assistance
 - Barbara Dahl, Scott County Health and Human Services Director
 - Angela Youngerberg, AMC/MACSSA Consultant
 - Paul Verrette, AMC Human Services Policy Analyst
- ...and everyone else who helped to tell this important story!

A Day in the Life of a County Human Services Worker

Every Monday, Kathleen Walls arrives at the Dakota County Service Center to begin training new financial workers on how to process Medical Assistance, SNAP, Cash, and Emergency Assistance. On a typical day, Kathleen helps new financial workers navigate a perplexing world of complex policies, tough conversations with clients, and ancient software—all in the name of helping Dakota County residents meet their needs for food, health care, and basic living expenses.



Kathleen Walls, center left, discussing a day in the life of a MAXIS user to an engaged Senate delegation during a modernization site visit and meeting in Dakota County.

Kathleen didn't set out to be a county financial worker. Just five years ago, she was in Washington, D.C., serving with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as a trained geodesist. For those unfamiliar with geodesy, it is the science of measuring the Earth's geometric shape, its orientation in space, its gravity field, and changes in these properties over time. Driven by a desire to help others connect to the services they need, Kathleen returned home to Minnesota from D.C. and began working as a financial worker in 2021.

She now works as a public assistance program trainer, coaching new financial workers, but says the financial worker role is exceptionally challenging. "When I look back on my career and where I'm at now, the financial worker position is by far the hardest job I've ever had—and I was a geodesist!" Her training took nearly an entire year just to become familiar with the technology systems she is required to use. "It takes about two years to become a proficient financial worker, but if we brought our technology into the twenty-first century, we could significantly decrease that time to just a couple of months," Kathleen said.

"We're asking people to do incredibly complex work with broken tools, and without immediate modernization, I am deeply fearful of the consequences of inaction—the strain on our workforce and communities will only intensify."

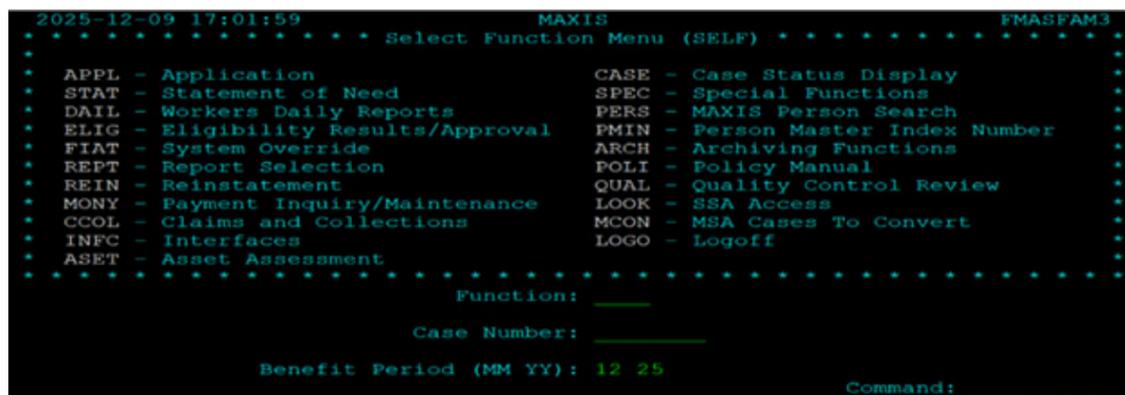
-Barb Dahl, Scott County Human Services Director

Barb Dahl, Scott County Human Services Director, noted that technology challenges compound other existing pressures.

"Counties are facing severe staffing shortages and competing for a shrinking pool of candidates, yet outdated technology is compounding the crisis," Dahl explained. "These inefficiencies don't just slow down training and overwhelm staff—they erode morale and drive talented workers away, which ultimately harms the quality of service our residents receive."

"We're asking people to do incredibly complex work with broken tools," Dahl continued, "and without immediate modernization, I am deeply fearful of the consequences of inaction—the strain on our workforce and communities will only intensify."

Without immediate action, county officials are left wondering how they can continue to manage a broken system while facing workforce and budget pressures that are only worsened by ongoing neglect of technology.



Snapshot of a MAXIS interface screen where caseworkers use Function keys rather than a mouse to navigate 1980s technology.

Where Did These Systems Come From?

When we consider how quickly technology, policies, best practices, and resident needs change, it is hard to fathom our reliance on decades-old systems—some more than 35 years old. Where did these systems come from? In short, some came from vendors, some were custom-built by the state, and others were recycled from other states.

Regardless of their origin, all of these systems have undergone significant modifications to fit Minnesota’s unique policies, procedures, programs, and state-supervised/county-administered structure. While Minnesota’s uniqueness is often a strength, it can also be a significant weakness.

For example, the core METS system does not allow county workers to add multiple pregnancies to a household. Other states using the same core system do not have this limitation and can enter as many pregnancies as required. Similarly, Minnesota is the only state that uses MFIP (called TANF in other states) as a combined cash and food family program instead of the federal model. This requires Minnesota to extensively modify its eligibility systems to support this unique structure. These customizations make it far more difficult to upgrade or replace systems, as new versions cannot be adopted without additional rounds of specialized programming.

Because these systems have evolved independently to meet the unique demands of the programs they support, there has been no unifying approach among them, aside from a few manually built interfaces. In essence, it’s a parking lot of neglected vehicles—hard to start, riddled with flat tires, cracked windshields, and faded paint. Each system functions independently and requires individual maintenance and workarounds.

MAXIS 1989
Public Assistance Eligibility (12 distinct programs)
Health Care Eligibility (5+ distinct programs)

MnCHOICES 2013
LTSS: Long-Term Services & Supports (Assessment & Support Planning)
REVISED 2023

MEC² 2007
Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Delivery

MMIS 1994
MN Health Care Program Payment Processing (Claims & Capitation Payments)

PRISM 1997
MN Child Support Enforcement Program.

SSIS 1994
Case Records for Social Services Program Clients

A sampling of the state-run technology systems counties depend on and their dates of inception.

"Because these systems have evolved independently to meet the unique demands of the programs they support, there has been no unifying approach among them, aside from a few manually built interfaces.

In essence, it’s a parking lot of neglected vehicles—hard to start, riddled with flat tires, cracked windshields, and faded paint."

As new needs arise, each program designs its own program-specific solution. A recent assessment uncovered 25 separate client portals either in use or under development. These disconnected, program-specific platforms—with inconsistent design and functionality—confuse residents and drive higher support costs for staff.

When it comes to data, there is no unifying data standard. One system may label a field “Client ID,” while another uses “Person_Number,” even though both refer to the same concept. This lack of shared standards makes data sharing and integration extremely challenging. As a result, basic questions—such as “What is the unique client count for an agency?” or “How many programs are the same clients using?”—are currently out of reach.

For system practitioners, the goal is a modern, integrated ecosystem of state systems built on shared data standards. In this vision, common data is stored once in a central repository and used across modular systems, supported by shared reporting tools, a single client portal, and unified document storage so clients are not required to submit the

same information repeatedly.

Equally important is a core state commitment to provide local staff with consistent, reliable access to information. Modular system design would also allow individual components to be updated or improved without repeated rounds of specialized programming.



Federal Changes Heighten Impacts

In late spring of 2025, the United States Congress passed H.R. 1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act.” This legislation was consequential for all states and local governments, but counties were arguably hit the hardest.

Minnesota is a “state-supervised, county-administered” state, meaning the state sets policy while counties hire staff and deliver services locally. In some states, the state bears the full cost and responsibility for service delivery. While the overarching impacts of H.R. 1 are similar nationwide, its effect on county budgets varies depending on how human services are structured.

In Minnesota, it remains unclear who will be responsible for the millions of dollars in federal cost shifts under H.R. 1—the state, counties, or both. What is undisputed, however, is that counties will bear the brunt of the day-to-day workload associated with these changes, particularly given the need to implement new requirements using outdated technology.

H.R. 1 introduces significant changes to Medicaid and SNAP. Minnesota’s systems will need to be reprogrammed to implement new Medicaid work requirements and expanded SNAP work requirements. New eligibility policies for certain non-citizen applicants must be added, and many Medical Assistance enrollees will now require eligibility redeterminations every six months instead of annually—essentially doubling the workload for county staff.

While some changes may be incorporated into MAXIS and METS, many cannot be implemented in these legacy systems, forcing county staff to rely on manual processing and workarounds to comply with federal rules.

One of the most concerning provisions of H.R. 1 is a new penalty for states with SNAP or Medicaid error rates above a newly established threshold. Errors typically stem from the application of complex and sometimes contradictory policy or from incomplete or incorrect applicant information. Most states exceed the new threshold, and Minnesota currently hovers just above it for SNAP—meaning the state will likely incur penalties. For SNAP alone, Minnesotans could face an estimated \$88 million cost. If Medicaid errors rise above the threshold, penalties could reach hundreds of millions annually. Reducing error rates may sound simple, but most solutions depend on changes to 36-year-old technology systems that cannot be implemented quickly. For policies that cannot be automated, already-overburdened county workers must continue to rely on manual processes.

Communicating these technical policy nuances to the public is difficult, yet counties are increasingly concerned that 2025 budget pressures will extend well into the future. County commissioners are searching for new ways to explain the limits of their authority and the implications for property taxes if nothing changes. Some counties, including Carver County, have gone so far as to include a “legislative impacts” line item on property tax notices, highlighting how federal policy changes and outdated IT systems affect local budgets.

Legislators Speak Up

Counties have raised concerns about these systems for years, often encountering apathy, intransigence, or a lack of prioritization. That calculus is beginning to change as more legislators become engaged—and increasingly frustrated—by client delays, inefficiencies, fraud detection challenges, and levy impacts.

Historic county preliminary levies this fall—averaging over 8 percent statewide—have intensified scrutiny, with counties citing technology inefficiencies as a significant driver of staffing needs and long-term levy pressures amid increased mandates, reduced revenues, and new policy requirements.

Rep. Mohamud Noor, who previously worked as a county financial worker in Hennepin County, brings firsthand experience to the issue. Now chair of the House Human Services Finance and Policy Committee, Rep. Noor has emerged as one of the most knowledgeable voices on modernization.

“With firsthand experience working within these systems, I know the challenges all too well,” Noor said. “It’s time to modernize our outdated legacy systems once and for all.”

Rep. Jim Nash, chair of the House State Government Finance and Policy Committee, has long been a leader on IT and cybersecurity issues. His background and direct communication style have helped elevate local government concerns and pave the way for recent legislative successes. “Having worked in the private sector on cybersecurity and IT issues for decades, it’s hard for me to believe this state has been so derelict in its management of these systems,” Nash said. “It’s no wonder counties are starting to ask whether they should even be doing this work at all.”



Rep. Bianca Virnig has met regularly with Dakota County staff over several years to hear frustrations and observe system demonstrations firsthand. Along with Reps. Nash and Torkelson, she led bipartisan efforts to address SSIS, Minnesota’s child protection system. Their advocacy resulted in a \$40 million investment to replace SSIS. Rep. Virnig noted, “Past attempts to implement real solutions haven’t panned out, and it’s negatively impacting people’s lives.”



Dakota County Commissioner Laurie Halverson, a former House Commerce Committee chair and Health and Human Services Finance Committee lead, sees a similar need for action. “Rarely is there an issue that crosses all political lines to speak to the heart of every legislator’s interest area,” Halverson said. “Modernizing human services systems is a matter of good fiscal stewardship and delivering services that work for our residents. Minnesotans deserve investments to create an efficient and effective system.”

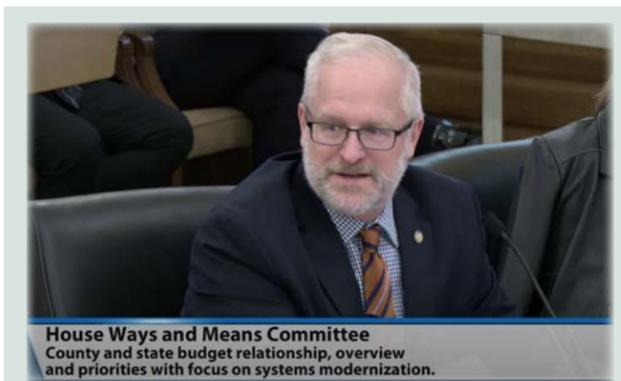


In the Senate, Health and Human Services Finance Chair **Sen. Melissa Wiklund** combines her 13 years’ worth of Senate experience on health and human services-related committees and professional background as an electrical engineer to approach the problem in a calculated and rational way. “Longer systems reform must be on the table and we should take into account the multi-year strategic funding put in place in the 2023 session. But it is urgent now, due to many pressures facing counties, to see what we can do this year, to move items and solutions that are ready to go and will provide immediate or near-term relief to casework inefficiencies and budgeting issues.”



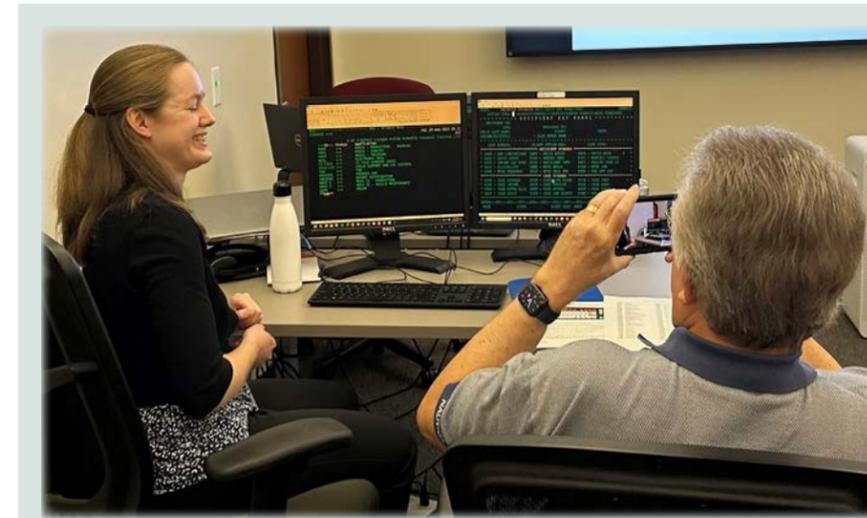
House Ways and Means Committee
County and state budget relationship, overview and priorities with focus on systems modernization.

Rep. Mohamud Noor discussing during a county presentation on modernization last year how important systems modernization is and specifically how important MAXIS is for connecting the dots between all the systems and stating “we need to start somewhere.”



House Ways and Means Committee
County and state budget relationship, overview and priorities with focus on systems modernization.

“The underlying language of these applications are susceptible to cyber attacks and hold a lot of proprietary information,” Rep. Jim Nash said during a March 2025 House Ways and Means hearing. “I would point out to membership that if there were to be a major problem with the underlying code, you’d have to bring someone out of retirement to fix the code.”



Rep. Steve Elkins, with 25 years of information architecture experience, summed up his reaction after seeing MAXIS firsthand: “I knew it was bad, but I didn’t know it was this bad!” He has since worked with DHS and MNIT to identify improvements, including data sharing and identity verification through LoginMN.

A recent legislator modernization demonstration showing Rep. Elkins taking a “screenshot of the screen,” in disbelief of what he is seeing.

Time to Solve This Problem Once and For All

Counties across Minnesota are rallying behind these stories, recognizing that modernization resonates across government and political lines. Whether the focus is technology performance, client outcomes, fraud prevention, or property tax relief, modernization is the solution.

Meanwhile, counties continue to elevate the message through town halls, public meetings, budget notices, and community outreach—delivering one unified plea: we cannot sustain this system without help.

Burcum: Tears, workarounds and 1990s screens push county staff to the limit

Policymakers know that the operating systems used for Minnesota public assistance programs are antiquated. But I was still startled to see them up close.

By **Jill Burcum**
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Snapshot of a recent editorial by *Minnesota Star Tribune* columnist Jill Burcum.

“These challenges didn’t emerge overnight, and they won’t be solved in isolation. I’m committed to working together on both near-term improvements and long-term modernization to improve the way counties and the state partner to deliver critical services to Minnesota’s most vulnerable.”

—MNIT Commissioner Tarek Tomes

Commissioners across the state are stepping up. **St. Louis County Commissioner Paul McDonald**, for example, meets regularly with **MNIT Commissioner Tarek Tomes**.



“These systems long predate his tenure, but it’s encouraging to have leadership committed to real solutions,” McDonald said.

“These challenges didn’t emerge overnight, and they won’t be solved in isolation,” Tomes said. “Progress depends on trusted partnerships and sustained collaboration across all levels of government. I value the ongoing conversations, and more importantly, relationships with leaders like Commissioner McDonald, and I’m committed to working together on both near-term improvements and long-term modernization to improve the way counties and the state partner to deliver critical services to Minnesota’s most vulnerable.”



As the 2026 legislative session approaches, counties will need continued, candid conversations. Counties have always been strong partners in delivering Minnesota’s lifeline benefits, but we cannot continue to do so with failing tools. As MAXIS approaches its 50th year, the question is no longer whether the system is strained—it’s whether it can function at all. Minnesota needs a modern, reliable system worthy of the people it serves. ●

Minnesota Paid Leave: "Hold My Coffee..."

By Melanie Ault, DDA Consultant

Minnesota employers are preparing for one of the biggest workplace changes in recent years: the launch of Minnesota Paid Leave (MNPL) in January 2026. Posters are up, employees have been notified that 0.44% will be deducted from their wages to pay for MNPL premiums, and questions are already rolling in.



This new statewide benefit is significant, and like any major change, it comes with both opportunities and complications. Here's what to know as counties begin implementation.

Coordinating MNPL With Other Leave Laws Isn't Always Simple

A common question is whether MNPL can run at the same time as federal or state leave laws, such as:

- Federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) – 12 weeks
- Minnesota Pregnancy and Parenting Leave (MPPL) – 12 weeks

Short answer: Yes—if the employer's policy states it, the employee qualifies for the leaves at the same time, and the leaves are used for the same purpose.

But in practice, it's easy for these benefits to fall out of sync with each other. Here are three common reasons why coordination may fail:

1. Different Ways of Measuring a "Benefit Year"

FMLA allows an employer to choose among four different methods to measure a 12-month period. Whereas MNPL, when administered by the State plan, allows only a 12-month look forward from the first day of leave.

If the benefit years don't match, it's easier for an employee to become eligible for different leaves at different times, making it impossible to run them concurrently.

2. Different Eligibility Rules

- MNPL and MPPL are available immediately upon hire.
- FMLA requires 12 months of employment before an employee can qualify.

This means a fairly new employee could take 12 weeks of

MNPL early in the year, then become eligible for another 12 weeks of FMLA later in the year—for the same reason.

3. The Sequence of Leave Reasons Matters

Even when benefit-year methods align, the reason for leave can disrupt potential coordination.

Example:

- If an employee first uses 12 weeks of MNPL Family leave to care for a grandmother, FMLA cannot run concurrently because "grandparent" is not a covered family member under FMLA.
- Later, the employee could use 12 weeks of FMLA to care for a child, spouse, or parent.
- They then still have 8 weeks of MNPL Medical leave available for their own health needs later that year.

In this scenario, the employee could be away from work for 32 weeks, and none of the leave could run concurrently because of the order in which the reasons for the leaves occurred.

Managing Pay While MNPL Applications Are Pending

Another challenge: The state may take up to 14 days to process MNPL applications. For employers with a biweekly payroll, the pending period may easily cross two pay periods.

If the employer wants the employee to stay at full pay—by allowing the employee to use their own accrued leave while the state's application is pending—questions arise:

- What happens if the employee uses 100% paid time off and the State later approves benefits for the same period?
- Should the employee reimburse the employer?
- Can the employer recover funds directly from the state?

The state provided this guidance:

If an employer pays wages for weeks that MN Paid Leave should cover, the department may reimburse the employer directly for those weeks.

The state is still working on a system to do this. In the meantime, employers should create their own policies. The State suggests three options:

1. Not paying employees for the time they expect MNPL to cover, to avoid the need for reimbursement;
2. Paying employees now and establishing procedures for employees to reimburse the employer directly; or
3. Allowing employees to use their own accrued leave (such as PTO) while the application is pending (but employers cannot require them to use PTO).

Important note: If choosing Option #1, not paying employees during the application pending period, it is anticipated that MNPL will be treated like FMLA, and not cause an exempt (salaried) employee to lose exempt status

if going unpaid for part of a workweek, even during an MNPL application pending period. The federal Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division admits there is no published guidance yet, but it can foresee treating State leave programs similarly to how it acknowledges FMLA leaves. Otherwise, employers must still comply with the salary-basis rules for exempt (salaried) employees.

A Developing Landscape

MNPL is entirely new for everyone—employers, employees, HR and payroll teams, and the State itself. As the program rolls out, expect additional guidance, revised procedures, and unexpected scenarios that will require retooling existing policies.

County leaders should keep in mind that administration will be complex, especially as some employees may be on leave for significantly longer periods of time. These challenges, combined with already difficult staffing and budgeting conditions, make overall workforce management even harder and particularly so when a county's ability to deliver services relies heavily on predictability and specialized expertise.

This is a dynamic area of law, and staying informed will be essential as Minnesota enters a new era of paid family and medical leave. ●

Our Knowledge Base has a sample Minnesota Paid Leave Policy to spark ideas or to lift and use. Look under the "Policies & Programs – UPDATED" heading at www.amcddahrsupport.com.



Minnesota Paid Leave makes time for the moments that matter



Minnesotans take care of one another. Starting in January 2026, Paid Leave will ensure Minnesotans can take the time they need to be there for some of life's most important moments—like welcoming a child, recovering from a serious illness, or caring for a loved one.

Paid Leave coverage

Paid Leave will provide payments and job protection for:

Medical Leave

1-12 weeks



Someone's own serious health condition

Family Leave

1-12 weeks



Bonding with a new child



Caring for a loved one



Managing military leave



Certain personal safety issues

Maximum of 20 weeks combined in one year if someone qualifies for both medical and family leave.

Almost all employers and individuals that work in Minnesota will be covered by Paid Leave.

Paid Leave payments

Benefit payments will cover a portion of an individual's usual pay during a qualified leave. Eligibility for payments will be based on earnings in the previous year.

Paid Leave job protection

Paid Leave will ensure that employees are able to return to their job after taking leave. If someone has worked at their job for at least 90 days, their job will be protected when they return from leave.

Paid Leave funding

Paid Leave is a social insurance program. Both employers and employees will contribute premiums to the fund.

Learn more about Paid Leave eligibility, coverage, premiums and more at info.paidleave.mn.gov



mi MINNESOTA
PAID LEAVE

info.paidleave.mn.gov

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
180 E 5th St Suite 1200 | Saint Paul, MN 55101

1/2025



Building Leadership Depth: Why Retaining County Leaders at All Levels Matters

By Kevin Corbid,
Washington County Administrator



Retaining senior executives remains an important component to the continued success of county government operations. However, retaining leaders at all levels is equally critical – especially as we enter a period of uncertainty including likely state and federal cost-shifts and reduced revenues.

Failing to hold on to talented managers and supervisors is not only costly from a recruitment and training perspective but also disruptive to operational efficiency and staff morale. Studies have consistently found that turnover reduces productivity, strains remaining staff, and increases organizational risk. For counties – which rely on experienced leaders to manage service delivery, budgeting, and personnel challenges – these impacts are magnified.

A recent article in ICMA’s Public Management magazine examined what motivates local government leaders to remain in their roles. Written by Dr. Corrin Spiegel, president and CEO of Arete Strategic, the piece highlights how public service motivation and the development of resilience, optimism, hope, and efficacy are central to keeping leaders engaged. While Dr. Spiegel focuses on senior executives, these same attributes are essential for supervisors, managers, division managers, and department heads who guide workgroups and deliver services daily.

It is incumbent on us as county administrators and coordinators to help leaders across our organizations strengthen these core skills. Dr. Spiegel encourages recognizing accomplishments, sharing decision-making, providing coaching and support, and offering ongoing leadership training. Elected officials also play an important role by reinforcing these practices and ensuring administrators, coordinators and managers have the resources, support and encouragement needed to succeed.

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and its affiliate organizations, including the Minnesota Association of County Administrators (MACA), are key partners in supporting county leadership. AMC’s Pathways Program offers newly appointed administrators and coordinators a chance to build foundational skills, learn from peers, and receive professional and technical training.

When I was appointed administrator in 2020, after nearly 20 years with Washington County, I still had much to learn about the role. The Pathways Program, then led by Gary Weiers, helped me understand new challenges, connect with colleagues across the state, and build relationships I continue to rely on today. With Gary’s retirement, the program remains in capable hands under former Dakota County Manager Matt Smith, and I encourage all new county administrators and coordinators to participate.

Collectively, these efforts help leaders cultivate the adaptability and confidence needed to guide their teams through changing circumstances. Leadership continuity supports organizational stability, preserves institutional knowledge, and strengthens our ability to navigate uncertainty. As counties prepare for the challenges ahead, investing in leadership development at every level will benefit our organizations and the communities we serve. ●



Business Identity Recovery – A Important New Process for Minnesota Businesses

By Steve Simon, Minnesota Secretary of State

When I was elected to be your Secretary of State, I promised to make it as easy as possible for Minnesotans to set up and run their businesses. I want businesses to thrive in our state, and as the state office responsible for business filing and registration, my office has many opportunities to make that process even better. I am always seeking input from the business community, from one-person shops to our largest corporations and everything in between. The entrepreneurial spirit in Minnesota is a great source of pride for our state, even as it contributes to our prosperity and advancement.

Over the past few years, our Business Services team has heard from business owners who’ve been victims of a new type of scheme. While many people have heard of identity theft – where someone’s personal information is stolen to make purchases or open lines of credit – a similar threat has now targeted business owners. Victims of business identity theft have reported discovering companies created in their names without permission, inactive business entities reactivated without their knowledge, or their home addresses listed on filings they had never seen.

These victims often faced debts, collection calls, or damaged credit histories - all without a clear path to resolution. Previously, the only options were costly court actions or law enforcement intervention.

Over the past several years, our office has worked to find a solution – meeting with our counterparts across the country to see how they are handling this new challenge. We found few states had policies and procedures in place to address this problem. We got to work with the few that did and developed a legislative proposal to allow our office to take action.

I’m proud to say that proposal passed into law with broad bipartisan support and will take effect starting January 1, 2026.

This law gives the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State new authority to quickly investigate and correct deceitful business filings through the Business Identity Recovery process. For the first time, individuals will have a direct, accessible path to report wrongful filings and have them reviewed by our Business Services division.

The process is simple: An impacted business owner may file a Declaration of Wrongful Filing with the Secretary of State’s office if they believe their business records have been tampered with. Our office then sends notice to the affected parties. If no response is received within 21 days, we accept the complaint and declare the filing fraudulent. The business record will either be removed or details redacted, depending on the case.

Correcting the record for the business and stopping this crime in its tracks will prevent so many of the damaging outcomes for business owners. Making sure our business community isn’t spending time and money dealing with these effects will allow them to concentrate on what they do best, contributing to their communities, growing and prospering.

This problem isn’t limited to Minnesota. In speaking with secretaries of state from around the country, it’s clear that it affects businesses in all fifty states. But I know that our new authority will act as a significant deterrent to bad actors who would attempt business identity theft in Minnesota – making us unfriendly ground for those who would commit this crime.

If you have any questions about this process, please contact my office or visit our website at sos.mn.gov. ●



Local Public Health Responses to Infectious Disease Outbreaks



By Meghan Sickel, MPH, CIC, Metro District Epidemiologist

Cortney Gillum, Dakota County Public Health Supervisor

Liz Auch, Countryside Public Health Administrator

When infectious diseases strike, the speed and precision of local response can mean the difference between a contained incident and a community-wide crisis. The examples highlighted below show how swift action helped curb the spread of measles and tuberculosis, reducing the likelihood of additional cases both within the affected settings and in the close-knit communities surrounding them. It is difficult to estimate the number of cases prevented from response efforts due to the nature of various infectious diseases and their level of infectiousness. However, response can be compared to putting out a fire; the quicker the response, the less it spreads and results in more cases. As Minnesota continues to experience declining vaccination rates, the likelihood of future infectious disease outbreaks leading to sustained transmission increases substantially. Lower vaccination coverage decreases the level of immunity within a population. For example, the recent measles outbreak situation demonstrates the risk measles poses to under vaccinated, tight-knit communities in Minnesota and across the United States. While large outbreaks have been recorded in other states across the country, it is important to highlight that no jurisdictions, including Minnesota, are exempt from measles outbreaks.

Dakota County Public Health Highlight: Response efforts to a measles outbreak

Background

On September 22, 2025, Dakota County Public Health was notified by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) of two lab-confirmed measles cases within the county. Because measles is one of the most infectious diseases in the world, the team had to move quickly.

Over the following weeks, the number of confirmed cases reached 10. Throughout the response, staff worked closely with the affected families, MDH, and impacted schools and organizations. Dakota County Public Health staff provided information to help people understand how to protect themselves and prevent further spreading of the disease. The response concluded when the last impacted person completed their recommended stay-at-home period and no additional cases were detected.

Local Public Health Response Efforts

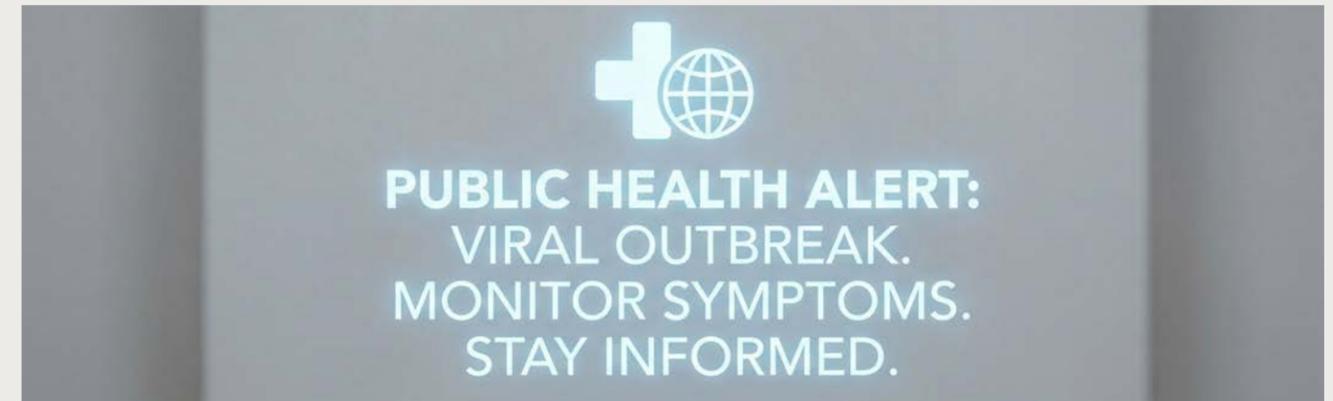
After learning about the first two cases, Dakota County Public Health launched an Incident Command System (ICS) to respond to the outbreak. The ICS team conducted weekly meetings to share situational updates. Initial interviews with the first two confirmed cases helped to quickly identify eight additional individuals who were confirmed to have measles and identify 75 other individuals who were exposed to measles. Anyone who was exposed and lacked immunity (including those who didn't have the MMR vaccine) was required to stay home for up to three weeks. Staff regularly called everyone or family to check for symptoms, answer questions, and offer support—over three weeks staff made over 400 phone calls.

Dakota County Public Health is made up of 137 staff across 15 units, five of those units were directly involved with the response: Disease Prevention and Control, Emergency Preparedness, Environmental Health, Health Strategy, and Administration.

Collaboration Across Departments and Organizations

Strong partnerships were essential for containing the outbreak. A public health staff member worked as the primary liaison between Dakota County and the impacted schools. The schools alerted families affected by the situation and followed recommended safety guidance such as having non-vaccinated students and staff stay home for three weeks from their last exposure date. Public health staff conducted contact interviews and monitoring with the impacted individuals and families to assess health and to share resources. MDH provided talking points that included situation specific messages, as well as general measles information. Dakota County Public Health worked with Dakota County Communications and MDH on responding to any media inquiries. Public Health leadership shared several situational overviews with all Public Health staff to keep them informed, safe, and aware when working with community.

Resources and lives were saved by acting quickly and effectively. An estimated 75 cases were prevented based off the known contacts of individuals with measles. Even



in previously healthy children, measles can cause serious complications, including hospitalization, ear infections, pneumonia, encephalitis, and death.

The swift, coordinated response to this measles outbreak demonstrates the essential role of a strong local public health system. By rapidly identifying cases, supporting affected families, and working closely with schools, MDH, and county partners, Dakota County Public Health prevented a far larger outbreak and protected vulnerable residents. This event underscores the value of continued investment in public health infrastructure and partnerships that enable our teams to respond effectively when the community needs us most.

Countryside Public Health Highlight: Response efforts for Tuberculosis

Countryside Public Health (CPH) comprised of Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift, and Yellow Medicine counties have witnessed an increase in tuberculosis cases in our rural counties. In small rural counties, even one positive tuberculosis case will stretch the bandwidth of staff capacity and fiscal resources.

In the last five years, CPH has cared for 43 Latent and Active Tuberculosis cases. An active Tuberculosis case requires a direct observed treatment plan to prevent the spread to others. A Latent tuberculosis case requires medication and education as the disease is not active in the person's body.

When CPH receives notification of an Active Tuberculosis case, it immediately activates the Disease Prevention and Control (DPC) staff to perform an assessment of the client. The DPC staff must determine the infectious period, educate on the importance of completing lengthy treatment, and conduct contact investigation. Contact investigation is meeting with all close contacts

and completing an assessment. Contact investigation includes performing a Mantoux test to all household members and other close personal contacts with the highest priority being children under the age of 5 and immunocompromised individuals. If a positive Mantoux test occurs, then a "second ring" of contact investigation is completed. Furthermore, if a client has a positive Mantoux result, the DPC staff must arrange for a follow-up x-ray and medical exam with health care provider. Also, education must be done on isolation arrangements and scheduling of direct observed treatment. A diagnosed Latent Tuberculosis client receives education, monthly allocation of medications and assessment for side effects.

CPH has spent \$64,287,99 in the last five years caring for Tuberculosis clients in our five counties. We utilized Environmental Health Specialists, Interpreters, Public Health Nurses, Emergency Preparedness, Fiscal, and Program staff to coordinate and provide care. Environmental Health Specialists and Emergency Preparedness staff activated the emergency response system to complete contact investigation at our industrial work site. DPC staff were activated to provide direct observed treatment to 19 Active Tuberculosis cases. Direct observed treatment is meeting with the positive tuberculosis client daily for to administer medications and education. DPC staff also completed assessments with latent Tuberculosis clients. Public Health Nurses completed the health assessments and Interpreters were activated for non-English speaking clients. The fiscal staff tracked all costs related to Tuberculosis care.

It's imperative to track the cost of care coordination for Tuberculosis. County Commissioners want healthy communities. So, providing the fiscal cost and staff capacity needed for even one case of Tuberculosis is critical. The goal is a healthy community and prevent the spread of Tuberculosis. ●

Preparing for a Successful

Audit

 By Julie Blaha, Minnesota State Auditor



The fiscal year may be over, but the real work is just beginning. This is the time of year when counties begin preparing for their annual audits. The following steps will ensure a more efficient audit process and help avoid unnecessary – and potentially costly – delays.

1. Finalize Accounting Records

For most counties, county staff have entered transactions in the general ledger and reconciled bank accounts throughout the year. At the start of the year, the county may only need to enter adjusting journal entries, determine accruals, and complete the December bank reconciliations before starting work on the financial statements.

However, the county should try to complete other data entry or reconciliation tasks prior to the start of the audit. For example, the county should enter additions and disposals into their capital asset systems if the county didn't update those systems during the year. Similarly, the county will need to reconcile the tax and penalty fund to verify the accuracy of tax settlements.

2. Follow Audit Schedule and Checklists

At the start of the audit, the county and the auditors should discuss the planned audit schedule. The auditors will present the county with a list of items needed to complete the audit. The county will respond with a target completion date for each of the requested items.

In determining the target dates, the county should remain realistic in staff's ability to complete audit items on schedule. County staff members carry many responsibilities outside of audit preparation. Both planned (e.g., software implementation) and unplanned (e.g., covering

staff vacancies) events often take time away from audit preparation. The auditors may have limited flexibility in their schedule, so significant delays on the county's side may require the auditors to reschedule their work.

One effective method of adhering to planned timelines is to schedule progress meetings between county staff and the auditors. These meetings can occur every few weeks throughout the audit period and ensure consistent communication between the auditors and the county. The meetings also provide an opportunity for staff and auditors to ask questions.

3. Compile Information

Prior to the audit, county officials should work with all departments to identify any new grant agreements, leases, technology subscriptions, or other contracts for the fiscal year. The county should also document significant internal control or policy changes that occurred during the year. If this information is readily available at the start of the audit, the auditors can minimize delays in their work.

4. Make the Audit a Priority

While most of the audit communication occurs between the auditor and the department responsible for preparing the financial statements (usually the finance office or the county auditor-treasurer), the auditors will need information from other departments, including health and human services, highway, and IT. County management can help the audit process by stressing the importance of the audit to all staff and encouraging staff to respond to the auditors' requests promptly.

The county's financial staff should focus on the financial statements and supporting schedules early in the year, even if the audit work does not begin for several months. If the county's work is completed, the auditors may have staff available earlier than expected to start testing. ●

Stronger collaboration. Stronger communities.



Across five counties, sixty organizations came together under the initiative of Community Bridgemakers to create a united strategic plan for lasting mental wellness.



Scan to hear their story



Sourcewell 

mn.sourcewell.org



Nelson Promoted to Executive Director

After a national search, the board of directors promoted Steve Nelson from MCIT deputy director to executive director in September. He had served as the deputy director since 2009.

Nelson officially began in his new capacity Sept. 22, giving him a one week overlap with retiring Executive Director Gerd Clabaugh. Clabaugh announced last April that he would retire from MCIT Sept. 30.

"We are pleased to have found our new leader from within our own staff," MCIT Board Chair Ron Antony said. "Steve's lengthy experience at MCIT, both in claims handling, as well as leadership, is an ideal fit to lead MCIT and guide the services we provide to our members."

31 Years Working for MCIT Program

Nelson began his involvement with the MCIT program in 1994, when he worked as a property/casualty claims adjuster on the program for MCIT's primary service provider. Over the next 15 years, he held several positions before moving into the role of program manager in 2006, where he was responsible for the oversight and delivery of several MCIT services including underwriting, property/casualty claims administration and field services.

As MCIT deputy director, a newly formed role for the organization in 2009, Nelson was responsible for:

- Overseeing the MCIT Coverage Document, working with the board of directors to adjust coverage to meet the needs of members as their operations evolve.
- Leading the annual reinsurance renewals, analyzing quotes from reinsurers to provide the board details about how the proposals would affect coverage and the financial resilience of the MCIT program.
- Having four departments report directly to him.

During his time with MCIT, Nelson was significantly involved in bringing the underwriting and property/casualty claims operations in house, converting the claims handling system to the online system currently in use, and managing several outside contracts including the Employee Assistance Program contract with AllOne Health.

Nelson attributes his longevity with MCIT to the organization's commitment to excellence, saying, "There is a culture of service within MCIT from the board of directors to every staff member that creates an energy to assist our membership that is second to none."



Upon taking on the role of executive director, Nelson says, "I am looking forward to working with our board, staff and partners to further MCIT's 46-year tradition of providing our membership with meaningful and relevant coverage and risk management services." ●

Reinsurance Premiums Drop After Years of Hard Markets

Both the property and liability programs received good news from reinsurers for 2026 after several years of hard markets. The premiums for each program decreased for 2026. During its meeting Nov. 14, the MCIT Board of Directors approved renewals for next year.

MCIT purchases reinsurance for all major lines of coverage to protect the financial integrity of the MCIT pool, insulating it and its members from the potential of catastrophic loss.

Property Reinsurance Rate Drops 15 Percent

MCIT's property reinsurance broker, Guy Carpenter, presented the results of its aggressive marketing efforts. The broker again approached reinsurers worldwide. In contrast to recent years, market capacity has improved, leading to three carriers providing quotes to cover MCIT's per occurrence coverage limit of \$200 million associated with program total insured values.

The value of member property covered by MCIT continues to grow, now in excess of \$10.2 billion, an 11 percent increase from 2025 values, or \$1.1 billion.

Travelers, Great American and Lloyds of London each quoted renewal pricing at the current retention level of \$1.5 million (the amount MCIT pays for each claim before reinsurance participation) along with pricing at a \$2 million retention.

The competition proved advantageous for MCIT, as Travelers decreased its original quote and offered additional incentive with a \$500,000 credit for adding a \$500,000 annual aggregate deductible to the program in an effort to retain MCIT's business.

Ultimately the board voted to renew with Travelers at the existing retention level with the annual aggregate deductible, reflecting a rate decrease of 15 percent. Even factoring in MCIT's increased exposure base, 2026 premium equates to \$4.03 million, which is \$769,000 lower than 2025, assuming 2026 losses do not pierce the annual aggregate deductible.

Liability Premium Decreases \$378,000

MCIT is in its fifth year of membership in County Reinsurance Limited (CRL), an organization that provides reinsurance exclusively to county governmental risk sharing pools like MCIT across the country. With its homogeneous membership, CRL has a deep understanding of liability issues and exposures that are common to most of its public entity members.

For 2026, MCIT marketed its liability program to commercial reinsurers, in addition to requesting renewal quotes from CRL to ensure the best value for the trust. Guy Carpenter handled the marketing efforts for MCIT and approached 25 carriers. It received declinations from nearly all providers based on the type of exposures and retentions of the MCIT program.

Primarily, commercial reinsurers continue to be wary of law enforcement exposures for public entities.

The board voted to renew with CRL that, in contrast, provided a decrease in premium for MCIT to renew at its existing \$2 million per claim coverage limit subject to a \$1 million per claim retention for a premium cost of \$2.02 million. This is a \$378,000 reduction from 2025.

New Cyber Reinsurance Partner to Come

MCIT has purchased the program's cyber reinsurance coverage through CRL since 2023 and was aware of its decision to exit the cyber market in 2026. MCIT has been working to identify alternate reinsurance options and has found that the market in this area has softened, offering MCIT a number of options to explore.

The board considered several options, including MCIT's ability to self-insure the existing program into 2026 while program structure is refined and presented for further discussion in 2026.

MCIT will continue its cyber program in 2026 under 2025 limits, terms, conditions and exclusions until a new reinsurance partner is secured. MCIT will provide details to members about any coverage program changes required by the reinsurer at that time.

Generally, MCIT anticipates that the change in carrier will provide enhanced coverage for members. ●

MCIT Members Recognized for Risk Management

MCIT Board Chair Ron Antony announced the recipients of MCIT's annual awards during the 2025 Minnesota Counties Intergovernmental Trust Annual Membership Meeting Dec. 8 in Bloomington. Every year MCIT recognizes three counties that excel at risk management and loss control. When members work to prevent losses and minimize risk exposures, they contribute to the overall resilience of MCIT.

Criteria used for the awards include:

- Performance in risk management and loss control efforts
- Responsiveness to MCIT program initiatives
- Improvement in property/casualty claims experience and administration over the past four coverage years (2021-2024)
- Improvement in workers' compensation claims experience and administration over the past four coverage years (2021-2024)

Carver, Murray, Carlton Counties Recognized

Carver County earned the **2025 County of the Year** award. This award honors the county that has set the standard of excellence in risk management and loss control for the year.

The other two awards recognize improvement in the specific areas of property and casualty (liability) and workers' compensation risk management and loss control. **Murray County** received the **Outstanding Performance in the Property and Casualty Division** award and **Carlton County** earned the **Outstanding Performance in the Workers' Compensation Division** award.

These division awards are presented to counties that demonstrate consistent improvement in the areas during the assessment period. For property and casualty, that means improvements in the county's loss ratio through commitment to implementing better loss control and risk management methods, as well as a dedication to protecting county property and citizens.

For workers' compensation, the award recognizes improvement in the county's experience modification factor and reduced claims in the areas of workplace injury and illness, as well as a commitment to reducing employee injuries and improving loss control efforts.

On behalf of the entire board, Antony congratulated the winners on their accomplishments. ●

MAIN ST CONVERSATIONS

Voices of Local Leadership



By Jessica Seibert,
AMC Learning & Member Programs Manager

This article is part of an ongoing series highlighting county commissioners from across Minnesota. Each installment lifts up the lived experiences of commissioners while exploring a topic that unites all Minnesota counties.

This month, we spoke with **Nicollet County Commissioner Nicole Helget** (pop. 34,500) and **St. Louis County Commissioner Patrick Boyle** (pop. 200,970) about one of the most pressing challenges facing counties today: the growing need for high-acuity mental health services. From the prairie potholes of south-central Minnesota to the vast north woods and urban centers of the northeast, counties of every size are grappling with the same crisis—limited inpatient beds, growing complexity of needs, and a system struggling to keep pace.

Let's Talk About the Shared Challenges of... High-Acuity Mental Health Services

Minnesota counties have been raising alarm about the growing need for high-acuity mental health care—particularly the shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds. Both Helget and Boyle say the issue touches every corner of their counties, affecting not only individuals and families but hospitals, law enforcement, housing providers, the courts, and county budgets.

Meeting Needs with Limited Tools: Nicollet County

Nicollet County relies heavily on early engagement and behavioral health case management to support individuals with acute mental health needs. Case managers build support networks, connect clients to psychiatry, therapy, housing, and crisis services, and maintain close communication with local clinics to track referrals and waitlists.

But those waitlists are long. Very long.

The gaps Helget and her team see every day include:

- Extended delays for psychiatric and therapy appointments
- Lack of step-down options between hospital and home
- Limited locked or supportive facilities for stabilization
- Barriers created by insurance gaps
- A severe shortage of high-acuity and forensic mental health beds

The impacts are serious. “We’ve had individuals spend nearly a year in a local hospital or jail waiting for treatment,” Helget shared—an example echoed by counties statewide.

Nicollet County collaborates closely with Mayo Clinic Health System—Mankato, South Central Crisis Center, law enforcement, and jail medical staff. Still, when beds aren’t available locally, clients are transported hours away to Fargo or Duluth, complicating family support, case management, and discharge planning.

To meet rising demand, Nicollet County invests in community-based supports including:

- The Lighthouse on Marshall, a clubhouse providing peer connection, case management, and mental health support
- A dedicated housing case manager to help clients secure stable housing
- Integrated chemical health services, with two licensed alcohol and drug counselors embedded on the behavioral health team

Already in 2025, the county has worked with 32 individuals requiring civil commitment, ranging from time-limited treatment to Mentally Ill and Dangerous (MI&D) commitments.

Expanding Crisis Supports: St. Louis County

In St. Louis County—a regional medical hub serving a vast geography—the shortage of inpatient beds is felt daily. People in crisis are frequently transported hours from home, adding hardship for families and making discharge coordination difficult.

Boyle noted the progress the county has made through strong partnerships:

- Doubling crisis stabilization beds in Duluth
- Improved mental health and substance use care in the county jail through its partnership with Aspirus St. Luke’s to better address co-occurring conditions
- Supporting five Specialty Courts focused on mental health, substance use, and veterans

St. Louis County has also led innovative collaborations with law enforcement. It was the first in Minnesota to embed a county social worker within the Duluth Police Department, a model now expanding across the county. Similar partnerships with Range Mental Health and the Virginia Police Department improve crisis response and reduce unnecessary criminal justice involvement.

A major milestone arrived in the summer of 2024 with the opening of a walk-in mental health crisis clinic in Duluth—an urgent-care style model that provides immediate care and alleviates pressure on emergency rooms and the jail. St. Louis County contributed \$2 million in federal relief funds to help bring the project to life.

The need remains staggering: the county screens roughly 280 people per year for civil commitment, with about 175 commitments annually, the highest per capita rate in the state.

How Counties Can Move Forward Together

Both commissioners emphasized the importance of working across county lines.

Helget called for a full continuum of care, including more high-acuity beds, supportive housing, and step-down services. “Without these options, people stay in higher levels of care longer than necessary—or return to unstable environments,” she said. She also highlighted the value of regional adult mental health initiatives and the need for consistent statewide advocacy.

Boyle echoed that message and praised efforts like AMC’s recent Behavioral Health System Transformation Summit. “We need system simplification and expansion of beds,” he said. “But we also can’t lose sight of the humanity in all of this. These are human beings, and we need solutions that address the whole person.”

Beyond Policy: What Makes Your County Shine?

Both commissioners also spoke proudly of what makes their counties unique. Helget highlighted Nicollet County’s celebrated natural treasure: the 10,000-acre Swan Lake—the largest prairie pothole system in North America—recently named one of Minnesota’s healthiest lakes. Boyle pointed to the breathtaking landmass and cultural variety of St. Louis County. “We are a microcosm of Minnesota,” he said. “Half urban, half rural—3,000 miles of roads, 600 bridges. I appreciate the beauty of all of it.”

Conclusion

From Nicollet County’s prairie lake ecosystems to St. Louis County’s expansive mix of urban and rural communities, Minnesota’s counties are confronting the same complicated mental health landscape—strained systems, rising acuity, and too few beds. Yet commissioners like Nicole Helget and Patrick Boyle remind us that while the challenges are significant, counties are leading with innovation, collaboration, and care for their residents.

Their stories reflect a shared truth: Minnesota’s counties are strongest when they face hard problems together. ●

Introducing the Commissioners

Nicole Helget, who joined the **Nicollet County Board** 11 months ago, brings a background in writing, teaching, and deep community engagement to her role. She and her husband, musician Erik Koskinen, share a blended family of six adult children and four grandchildren.

Helget says she most enjoys connecting with residents. “Rural districts like mine represent the circulatory system of America,” she explained. “Our people, our environment, and our economy all have to function harmoniously. I love meeting with individuals and groups who care deeply about Nicollet County.”



Yet she is candid about the challenges: “The cost shifts from the fed have been terribly difficult and painful to our county.”

Across the state, Commissioner **Patrick Boyle** has represented **St. Louis County** for 12 years while also



serving as a nurse practitioner for the Fond du Lac Band of Ojibwe. He and his wife, Jennifer, are raising two daughters in one of the most geographically and culturally diverse counties in Minnesota.

What does he enjoy most about the county commissioner role? “There is never repetition,” Boyle said. “I am always learning, and with that knowledge I can help guide constituents through services.”

The hardest part? “Two words the county never wants to hear: unfunded mandates,” he noted. “Not knowing revenue sources from the state and federal level has made budgeting especially challenging in recent years.”



Olmsted County Takes Big Steps Toward Digital Accessibility

By Gretchen Williamson, Olmsted County Communications Manager

In 2024, Olmsted County and other counties learned about a new U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) rule. Essentially, the rule says government websites and digital tools must be easier for people with disabilities to use. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is being updated with the new requirements. Due to our county's size, our compliance deadline is April 24, 2026, earlier than we initially thought.

Also, in 2024, the county completed a four-year strategic plan. One of the five strategic priorities in the plan is Community Trust and Engagement. We are working together to ensure our community knows they can count on us to make our services accessible. Our goal: Do our very best to make sure our county residents can access what they need from us.

The Olmsted County Communications team and our Information Technology Solutions (ITS) department have partnered to build a strong plan and consult regularly with our executive leaders and County Attorney's Office. We have also been fortunate to learn from and share information with other counties, cities, and the State of Minnesota.

What we've done so far

Throughout 2025, we've made big progress:

- **Updated our Digital Accessibility Policy** for all staff to guide our work.
- **Trained all staff** on the importance of accessibility and how to make digital content accessible.
- **Sent regular emails** to staff who manage our website and documents, with tips and training, as well as an inventory of PDFs on our website needing remediation.
- **Held quarterly meetings** with department accessibility liaisons to share updates and answer questions.
- **Worked with our website vendor** to fix other accessibility issues on our site.
- **Reviewed links to outside websites** and began contacting outside vendors to determine their compliance with accessibility rules.
- **Worked with our Purchasing team** to assess and improve our procedures and documents when working with outside vendors.
- **Developing training for social media managers** to help them post accessible content.

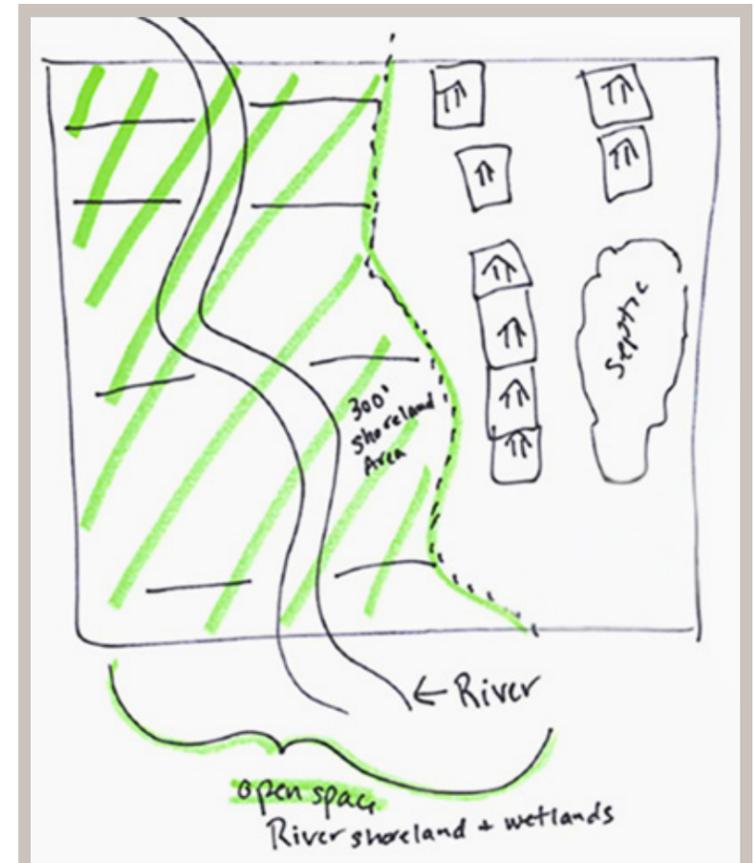
What's next

We know this work won't stop in April 2026. Accessibility is not a one-time project ... it's something we'll keep working on, every day. Olmsted County is proud to continue providing clear, accessible content for our residents and to prioritize community trust and engagement. ●

Cook County's Residential Open Space Overlay (ROSO): A Model for Rural Housing Solutions

By Ann Sullivan, Cook County Commissioner

Cook County's Residential Open Space Overlay (ROSO) emerged from efforts to address a significant shortage of affordable homes in our remote, rural county. Unanimously approved by the County Board in May 2025, ROSO provides a flexible zoning tool that allows small, clustered homes with shared infrastructure while preserving at least half of a parcel as open space. The overlay offers a balanced approach to housing and landscape protection, giving property owners in certain designated rural zone districts the option to pursue more compact development with public input, clear design standards, and limits that prevent speculative, oversized construction. Vacation rentals are prohibited, ensuring that ROSO remains focused on housing for local residents.



ROSO Concept Example:
 20 acre parcel = 10 acres of undevelopable open space
 FAR-3 zone district typically requires a 5 acre lot minimum
 20 acres/5 acres = 4 lots with standard subdivision rules
 ROSO allows for a 2x lot density bonus (maximum), which may allow 8 residential lots.

Implementation work is now underway to ensure ROSO is applied consistently and transparently. The overlay supports higher-density development only when open space is meaningfully preserved, encouraging subdivision designs that concentrate homes on suitable land, reduce infrastructure costs, and protect environmentally sensitive areas. Once a property is rezoned into ROSO, it becomes eligible for an open-space subdivision with up to double the typical lot density, though septic capacity and site conditions ultimately shape what is feasible. Broad land-use issues are evaluated during rezoning, with technical details addressed later in the subdivision review process.

Community meetings held across the county underscored the public's desire for clear, written criteria defining when and where ROSO is appropriate. In response, Cook County drafted ROSO-specific rezone suitability criteria to improve predictability and ensure that rezonings serve community-wide interests. These amendments are now under Planning Commission review, with a public hearing scheduled for early 2026 before being forwarded to the County Board.

Cook County's approach offers a practical model for other rural counties working to expand housing options while preserving open space. By pairing density with conservation, grounding decisions in local context, and shaping policy through community engagement, ROSO demonstrates how rural jurisdictions can introduce affordable housing without sacrificing the character of their landscapes. ●



Implementing Minnesota's New Judicial Security Law: Masking Real Property Records

By MACO Staff

Minnesota counties are preparing for a major change in land records management as a new judicial security law takes effect January 1, 2026. The statute offers judges and their families important new privacy protections.

What the Law Does

Judicial officers and their families may request that their real property records be masked from public view. To support this process, the statute authorizes counties to collect a service fee of up to \$75 per property. Each county sets its own fee schedule within that cap. The fee is intended to offset administrative costs, including staff time, system adjustments, and the processing of notice, consent, release, and termination forms required to manage masked records.

Role of County Recorders

This law applies to all government entities with real property records. Members of the Minnesota County Recorders Association (MCRA) played a vital role in shaping the statute's language. Our members worked extensively to ensure that the provisions remained administrable at the county level, balancing judicial security with the practical realities of land records management. MCRA would like to thank members from the Minnesota Association of County Auditors, Treasurers, and Finance Officers (MACATFO), MACO, Minnesota Land Title

Association (MLTA), Minnesota State Bar Association (MSBA), and AMC, who also contributed to shaping the statute.

How This Differs from Safe at Home

It's worth noting that this new law is separate from Minnesota's existing address confidentiality program, Safe at Home, which is administered by the Office of the Secretary of State, and only applies prospectively.

This new law applies retroactively to all online and digital real property records. Judicial officials and their families can request masking of records that already exist in county systems.

Conclusion

Minnesota's Personal Information in Real Property Records statute was strongly championed by judicial officials seeking greater privacy protections. County Recorders recognize the importance of this effort and are committed to implementing the law as required. At the same time, retroactive masking of property records presents real administrative challenges for counties. While we recognize its importance, we also acknowledge the significant effort required to adapt existing systems and workflows.

As the program grows to include more protected groups, we remain hopeful that a state agency will eventually assume responsibility for its administration, providing consistency and relieving counties of the most difficult aspects of implementation. Until then, recorders across Minnesota will continue collaborate to uphold judicial security while maintaining the integrity of our land records. ●

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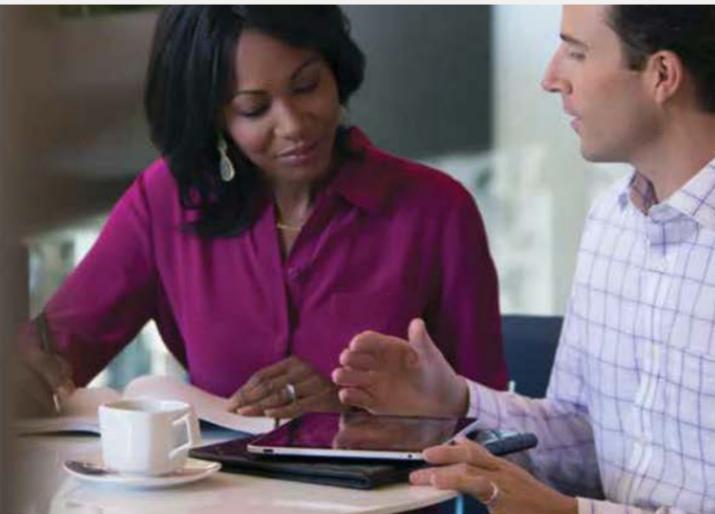
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AMC and Savi Partnership Continues to Trailblaze in the Student Debt Landscape

savi By Tony Raffa, Director of Business Development,
Savi

MINNESOTA IMPACT

With default rates skyrocketing and new repayment plans being ushered in the coming year, there is increased urgency for borrowers to have access to the necessary information to take control of their student loan debt. Through AMC's partnership with Savi, Minnesota county employees can have access to a state of the art tool and loan guidance support, allowing them to take steps to gain clarity in the murkiness of the student debt landscape.

"I wish SAVI would have been around for the last ten years! The support makes me feel less anxious and frozen when managing my student loan debt/forgiveness and understanding legislative updates, etc. that impact individuals working towards and qualifying for PSLF. I'm very grateful."

- Anonymous, Hennepin County

In just over a year of partnership, AMC and Savi have been able to reach countless Minnesota county employees addressing the information gap that has been holding back too many borrowers from financial security.

Already serving almost a dozen counties in Minnesota, Savi has identified around \$34 million in projected forgiveness for county employees. With just under 800,000 borrowers in Minnesota and \$31.2 billion in outstanding debt, there are even more county employees and residents that could use much needed financial relief and assistance.

With plans tailored to county size and budgetary constraints, Savi has been able to reach borrowers in rural and urban counties from Hennepin to Lac qui Parle, and help them manage nearly \$60 million in debt.

SAVI SOLUTION

In today's challenging economic climate, financial security feels increasingly out of reach for many professionals, especially those burdened by student loan debt. For county employees, this burden can significantly impact their ability to save for retirement and build a stable future. Fortunately, nearly all county employees qualify for valuable loan forgiveness programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF), but navigating these systems can be daunting.

AMC, committed to supporting its county employees' financial well-being, continues its strategic partnership with Savi, a leading student loan benefits provider. Savi simplifies the process of maximizing savings through federal and state forgiveness programs. Offering tiered service levels, including a free option and deeply discounted comprehensive support for AMC members and their staff, Savi provides crucial clarity and assistance in a landscape of ever-changing student loan policies.

Savi has already identified over \$5 billion in projected loan forgiveness for its users, with an average yearly savings of \$2,244 in student loan payments. This translates to tangible relief for individuals and families. Moreover, while only 2.3% of processed PSLF applications have been accepted since November 2020, Savi's streamlined forms and expert debt navigators boast an impressive 99% application acceptance rate.

"Savi did everything for me. I simply gave them access to my loan account and permission to contact my employer. They did everything else! I have been hearing about the PSLF updates but haven't had the time or energy to figure it out. My work offered this for free so I signed up and it was the best thing I did this year and it was practically effortless!"

- Anonymous, Hennepin County

CALL TO ACTION:

For County Leaders: To enhance your employee benefits package and foster financial well-being, contact John Nelson, Business Development Representative at Savi, at johnnelson@bysavi.com.

For County Employees: To access this valuable benefit, please reach out to your organization's Department Head or Human Resources office.

ABOUT SAVI

Savi is a social impact technology startup in Washington, D.C. working to solve the student debt crisis affecting 46 million borrowers by helping them discover new repayment and loan forgiveness options. Founded by long-time student loan experts and advocates, Savi is a public benefit corporation that works with employers, membership organizations, and financial institutions to provide our service as a unique student loan benefit. ●

1. Hanson, Melanie. "Student Loan Forgiveness Statistics" EducationData.org, August 28, 2024, <https://educationdata.org/student-loan-forgiveness-statistics>

Extension Thanks Counties for Their Continued Partnership



By Bev Durgan - Dean, University of
Minnesota Extension

At University of Minnesota Extension, we are grateful to have the support of all 87 Minnesota counties. Because of our partnerships with you, Extension brings meaningful educational programming to every corner of the state.

Extension's county-based programs deliver research-based, practical information in areas such as youth development and 4-H, agriculture, natural resource management, yard and garden, food safety and tourism.

Those topics evolve as the needs of counties change. This fall, Extension is completing its 5-year strategic roadmap, a plan that will set priorities for local, regional and statewide educational programs. A common theme through the planning process has been that Extension's strength is in its people and its deep connections to communities, and that those partnerships must remain a priority for Extension. As the plan is finalized, you will hear more about what it means for your county from your local educators and staff as well as your regional director.

Counties are facing some difficult decisions in the months and years ahead as you set priorities and address financial challenges. I appreciate your ongoing support of Extension programming and look forward to continuing our partnership in building a stronger Minnesota.

Thank you. ●

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Trio of New Grant Resources for Counties



By Marnie Sciamanda, AMC Grant Coordinator

AMC's Grant Program is launching three resources to support members applying for grants: the Grant Opportunity Hub, the Grant Writer's Directory, and a Template RFP for Grant Writing Services. We collected input from county staff throughout the state on the biggest barriers they face with grants and created these resources in response. Learn about the three projects below:

Grant Opportunity Hub

The Grant Opportunity Hub has been our most requested resource. It is a spreadsheet of past and current funding opportunities for counties and other closely affiliated organizations like SWCDs. The Hub includes grants from federal, state, private, and regional sources, along with project loan and financing programs.

Each listing covers information such as grant status (open/closed), a brief program description, award amounts, minimum match amount needed, and eligibility details. To help with planning efforts, previous solicitation periods and information on future rounds of funding are included. Where available, listings will also include which counties have received the grant previously.

The Hub is designed to be sortable so that counties can easily find funding opportunities that align with their timeline, eligibility and needs. It will be updated monthly to reflect new and closed funding opportunities.

Grant Writer Directory

The Grant Writer Directory is designed for counties to easily access contact information for grant writers, technical assistance providers, and project management firms. The directory is split into two lists; one includes for-profit grant writers and firms, and the other includes nonprofits with a greater focus on technical assistance. For each listing, users can see which services a contractor offers, their area(s) of expertise, and their previous grant work by granting agency and/or program.

Please note that neither list has been vetted by AMC staff. The directories are provided for informational purposes only, and inclusion in the directory does not indicate any recommendation or endorsement.

Template RFP for Grant Writing Services

The last resource is a Template Request for Proposal (RFP) for Grant Writing Services. This is a customizable template that counties can adapt to their specific needs when hiring a grant writer. The template is modeled on actual RFPs used by counties, and has five main sections: Introduction, General Requirements, Scope of Work, Format and Content for Proposal, and General Contract Requirements. Comprehensive language is included as a starting point and can be further adapted as little or as much as needed based on a county's needs. Areas where county staff need to fill in their own information are conveniently highlighted in the template; a one-page guide has also been developed to help users use the resource.

We welcome any feedback on these resources as counties begin to put them to use. You can email nknapp@mncounties.org or msciamanda@mncounties.org with any questions or feedback.



Grant Watch



By Noah Knapp, AMC Grant Coordinator

Counties recovering from recent natural disasters—and those advancing climate resilience or youth drug prevention—have several major funding opportunities on the horizon.

The U.S. Economic Development Administration has launched its FY 2025 Disaster Supplemental Grant Program, offering roughly \$1.45 billion to communities affected by federally declared disasters in 2023 and 2024. Funding is available for planning, construction, and regional economic transformation projects, with most awards covering up to 80% of costs and applications for Readiness and Implementation projects accepted on a rolling basis.

Separately, the Climate Smart Communities Initiative has opened its 2026 grant cycle, providing \$75,000–\$115,000 awards to partnerships between local governments, community-based organizations, and climate adaptation practitioners working to build resilience in historically vulnerable areas; applications are due March 12, 2026.

Finally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention plans to release the FY 2026 Drug-Free Communities Support Program notice in early 2026, with up to 50 awards of \$125,000 each available to coalitions working to reduce youth substance use.

Counties interested in any of these programs should prepare early, assemble required partnerships, and monitor agency updates as deadlines approach.



Le Sueur County Well Sealing Protects Drinking Water Sources

By BWSR Staff

Since 2019, Le Sueur County has sealed more than 35 private, commercial, and municipal wells to protect groundwater and drinking water quality. Working with landowners and local and state partners, the county targets unused or abandoned wells—common entry points for contaminants such as nitrates and bacteria, especially in vulnerable areas like shorelines and Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs).

“Well-sealing is a slam-dunk project,” said Holly Bushman, Le Sueur County water resources manager. “It benefits not just the landowner, but the entire community—protecting both environmental and public health.”

Projects begin by locating abandoned wells, which often aren't listed in property records, and sealing them with concrete. Costs vary by well size and condition, but residential projects are typically the simplest. The county offers up to \$3,000 per private well and often covers the full cost.

Le Sueur County's work is supported by three Clean Water Fund grants from the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), totaling more than \$268,000 since 2019, along with \$31,000 in Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF).

Larger municipal and industrial wells present greater challenges and risks. In partnership with the city of Le Center, the county sealed a municipal well drilled in 1923 after overcoming equipment failures and obstructions. The project was completed in June 2024 using a combination of Clean Water Funds, a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency grant, and local funding.

The county is now working with the city of Le Sueur to locate and seal two century-old industrial wells near the Minnesota River—both priorities due to their contamination risk. One well has been located and is being planned for sealing; the second was recently found beneath an electrical transformer, requiring additional coordination.

“While there have been hiccups, being proactive and having a plan is worth it,” Bushman said. “All groundwater is connected—it's a community-level concern.”



Le Sueur County and the city of Le Center leveraged state and local funding sources to locate and seal a municipal well in June 2025.

Photo Credit: Le Sueur County

Le Sueur County participates in three One Watershed, One Plan efforts, all of which identify groundwater protection as a priority. Bushman credits the success of the program to strong partnerships with landowners and local and state agencies.

“Without those relationships, none of this work would be possible,” she said.

Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners. This article first appeared in the November 2025 Snapshots edition.



Raising the Standard: Best Practices for Your Cash

Across Minnesota, counties and local governments are being asked to do more with limited resources while continuing to deliver essential services to their communities. Smart liquidity management is not just about moving money. It is about protecting public resources, strengthening financial positions, and making every dollar work harder for the residents they serve. With the right strategy, Minnesota public entities can increase earnings without raising taxes, cutting services, or adding strain to their already busy teams.

That is why more counties, cities, higher education institutions, and nonprofit organizations across the state and the nation are turning to cashVest by three+one. The platform uses data-backed insight and hands-on support to help public dollars reach their full potential while maintaining safety, transparency, and accountability.

Clearing Up Common Misunderstandings

Our cash is already fully optimized.

Traditional cash-flow accounting can create that impression. In reality, many funds remain idle or underperform because their precise timing is unclear. cashVest helps identify how long each dollar can safely be put to work, allowing Minnesota entities to generate new earnings without disrupting daily operations or jeopardizing liquidity.

Liquidity management is just forecasting.

Forecasting plays a crucial role, but it is only one piece of the larger picture. True liquidity management provides visibility into operating funds, reserves, and idle cash together so entities can make strategic decisions across all timeframes, not just the short term.

We do not have the staff for something like this.

That concern is exactly why cashVest was created. The platform and support team are designed to strengthen your staff, not stretch it. Through automation and guided analysis, finance teams across Minnesota can gain clarity and capacity without adding to the workload.

What Best Practice Looks Like in Liquidity Management

Strong liquidity strategies share a few essential traits:

- **Time Horizon Clarity**
Understanding how long each segment of cash can remain available allows you to confidently increase earnings while keeping an entity's critical services uninterrupted.
- **Peer and Market Benchmarking**
Comparing your performance to similar Minnesota counties and national peers helps uncover new opportunities and validates your strategy through real-world data.
- **Transparent Bank Fee Reviews**
Knowing what you are paying and why ensures your banking relationships are working the way you expect and are delivering full value.
- **Forward Looking Tools**
Forecasting and stress testing provide insight into potential scenarios so you are prepared for shifts in interest rates, economic conditions, or revenue cycles.

Why It Matters

Public entities using cashVest have already generated billions of dollars in additional value through stronger earnings, informed cash positioning, and greater financial confidence. For Minnesota counties, these added earnings translate directly into stronger reserves, increased flexibility, and an enhanced ability to serve residents without increasing the tax burden.

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Faribault County Ditch 62 received a \$332,000 BWSR Water Quality and Storage Grant to create a storage basin and 82-acre wetland.



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