



Association of
Minnesota Counties

Legislative Policy Priorities

Adopted by AMC Board of Directors 12/2/2018

2019

PRIORITIES

Transportation & Infrastructure

Transportation Funding

The Legislature passed a comprehensive transportation funding bill during the 2017 session, which included general fund revenue from the sales tax on auto parts, general obligation bonding money, and transfer of the entire amount of the Motor Vehicle Lease Sales Tax (MVLST) money to transportation. The bill included \$235 million in new revenue for roads and bridges and an additional \$71 million in general fund dollars for Metropolitan Area Transit. In addition to the 2017 transportation bill, both the 2017 and 2018 bonding bills included considerable funding for transportation projects statewide. Despite this additional funding in recent years, there has not been a substantial increase in funding from any constitutionally dedicated sources. AMC must continue to advocate for long-term funding; The solution should be comprehensive (multi-modal), balanced (regionally and between modes), sustainable (on-going funding), and dedicated (constitutionally for roads and statutorily for transit).

AMC supports continued comprehensive transportation funding that includes new revenue for roads, bridges, and transit.

Health & Human Services

Sustaining the Health Care Access Fund

Minnesota's gross revenue tax on health care goods and services is the primary revenue source for the state's Health Care Access Fund and is scheduled to sunset at the end of 2019. The tax was passed in 1992 to help pay for MinnesotaCare and the state currently relies on the fund to support the Medical Assistance program, physician training, and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership. Counties urge the Legislature to prevent the loss of health care coverage and other critical health care initiatives and help avoid a potential cost shift to counties.

AMC supports maintaining the state's provider tax to sustain the Health Care Access Fund (HCAF).

Public Safety/Health & Human Services

Opioid and Substance Abuse Prevention

The increase in substance use disorders and overdose deaths has a devastating effect on county-operated systems, including child welfare, public safety, the courts, and chemical dependency treatment. A statewide response to reduce the burden of substance abuse must be aimed at prevention, assessment, and treatment. Funding for initiatives to respond to addiction should include counties.

General Government

Preserving Tax Base

A recent Minnesota Tax Court decision (Enbridge v. Minnesota) found that the Department of Revenue over assessed Enbridge Utility Company by more than \$2 billion from tax years 2013-2015. If the Minnesota Supreme Court upholds the Tax Court decision, counties and local governments will be on the hook for hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions, in tax refunds—forcing counties to spend reserves or levy residents for a DOR-issued assessment. In addition, counties are witnessing a surge of contested property tax appeals by big box retailers using questionable comparables and assessment theories. Both developments threaten county budgets and erode tax bases, causing potential shifts to small businesses and residents.

Health & Human Services

Mental Health Services

Counties continue to advocate for a stronger mental health system, one in which individuals have access to appropriate treatment services and settings, close to home. Moreover, counties continue to pay 100% of the cost of care for individuals in state operated facilities when those individuals do not need that level of care. In 2019, counties are asking for state leadership and resources to continue to strengthen the continuum of care, especially related to intensive services for children. State leadership and resources are needed to support children's residential services and further develop a system that meets the needs of children who need intensive mental health services. In addition, counties want to reduce the barriers that exist for adults being discharged from state operated facilities to transition to community-based mental health treatment.

AMC supports county funding as part of a comprehensive approach to reverse the impact of opioids and substance abuse in our communities.

AMC supports promoting legislation that preserves tax base in response to increased property tax appeals, utility tax refunds, and potential “dark store” assessing practices.

AMC supports state support for mental health programming and reducing the cost burden for counties.

AMC supports increasing funds for community supervision, including core county probation functions as well as the community supports, like mental health and CD treatment resources, that are needed to help justice involved individuals succeed.

AMC supports state assumption, in collaboration with local government, of the federal section 404 permit program to increase efficiencies associated with local infrastructure projects.

AMC supports the build-out of broadband infrastructure in Minnesota, including legislation that would provide adequate and continuous funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program.

Public Safety

Community Supervision

Minnesota's county-based probation systems have been underfunded for nearly two decades. Increased funds are needed to support basic functions. In addition, policy changes related to pre-trial assessment and supervised released supervision are likely to increase caseload pressure for local agencies as well as demanding additional community supports for justice involved individuals. The supports, like CD treatment and appropriate mental health care, are in short supply all over the state and non-existent in some places. These are critical services for meeting the needs of our criminal justice system.

Environment & Natural Resources

State Assumption Of 404 Permitting Process

In 2015 AMC supported, and the Legislature passed, a provision to study the feasibility of the state taking on implementation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Section 404 waters and wetlands dredge/fill regulatory program (aka “404 assumption”). The results of the study were not favorable to assumption due to limitations on the scope of a state-assumed program, however, a recent change of interpretation by the Corps has now made assumption of the 404 program a meaningful and worthwhile option in Minnesota. Counties believe the time is now to proactively advocate for and pursue state assumption of this program which would provide a more efficient and timely permitting process for local infrastructure projects and individual landowners.

Transportation & Infrastructure

Broadband

In 2018, the Legislature included \$15 million in funding for the broadband grant program in its Omnibus Supplemental Finance Bill that was ultimately vetoed by the governor. It was the first time since the grant program has been in place that it did not receive any funding. Many counties have been recipients of this funding in the past and there are others that would likely benefit from future grant cycles. AMC supports adequate and continuous funding for the grant program in order to continue the build-out of broadband infrastructure in Minnesota and meet the state's broadband speed goals by 2026.

AMC supports promoting a sustainable approach to Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) funding that includes proposals to address instability in PILT payments for acquired acres lands.

AMC supports statewide legislation to allow counties to appoint elected row officer positions of auditor, treasurer and recorder without having to seek special legislation at the Capitol.

General Government

Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Sustainability

PILT is a vital funding resource for counties with large amounts of state/federally-owned land that are tax exempt. While a certain subset of PILT payments have received increases in funding, two important PILT categories (DNR-administered and county-administered) have remained stagnant, not keeping up with inflation or properly reimbursing local governments for lost tax base. In addition, a recently mandated re-assessment of acquired acres land values has caused dramatic swings in PILT appropriations. Counties are asking for both increased and consistent funding.

General Government

Appointment Authority For County ROW Officers (Auditor/Treasurer/Recorder)

Modern day county governance requires counties to react to service needs in a timely fashion while also making sure internal operations are efficient and responsive to constituent needs. More than a third of all Minnesota counties have authority to appoint one or more of their row officer positions. Every Minnesota county should have the ability to decide what governance and row officer structure works best for their county and citizens.

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