



Association of
Minnesota Counties

FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

2020

PRIORITIES

Transportation and Infrastructure Funding

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

Jail Healthcare

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

AMC supports congressional and executive branch efforts to pass a comprehensive infrastructure bill that increases funding for county-owned highways, bridges and transit.

AMC urges Congress to pass legislation that would differentiate between pre-trial and post-conviction incarceration and restore pre-trial detainee access to federal health benefits.



ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

AMC thanks Congress for passing the repeal of the 40% “Cadillac Tax” on certain high value employer sponsored health plans.

ACA “Cadillac Tax”

The 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) included a provision—nicknamed the “Cadillac Tax”—which would have instituted a 40% tax on certain high value employer sponsored health plans. While the tax implementation date had been delayed several times (in a bipartisan fashion), it was still set to take effect in 2022 and would have impacted many of Minnesota’s counties along with all employer-sponsored health plans who would choose to invest in high quality health benefits. Aside from impacting county budgets, the tax provided a disincentive to employers who were trying to create better health outcomes in an era of increasing premiums and deductibles. AMC is appreciative of the bipartisan and bicameral support to permanently repeal this tax as part of the 2019 budget deal.

AMC supports federal efforts to assist states and counties to make the needed reforms related to the federal Family First Prevention Services Act.

Child Welfare

AMC supports federal efforts to assist states and counties to make the needed reforms related to the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). Counties are on the front lines when it comes to working with families to prevent or respond to abuse and neglect and look forward to doing more to support families in preventing children from entering foster care. The FFPSA helps pave the way for needed transformation of child welfare systems. As states and counties continue to work toward implementing child welfare reforms, AMC supports administrative flexibility as well as additional funding aimed at assisting counties making the transition.



ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

Broadband

AMC supports the need for border-to-border broadband infrastructure across the state. National efforts that provide tax credits to telecommunication providers and other funding mechanisms that support expanded broadband service help Minnesotans get closer to our statewide goal, particularly in underserved and unserved areas.

Preemption

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

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

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

Support for Individuals & Families

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

Vital Communities

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

Census Bureau Funding

Federal funds currently allocated for the Census Bureau are insufficient in providing for the resources needed to ensure an accurate count in the next census. Population counts that are obtained from the census greatly impact federal funding allocations that go to states and counties based on formulas that use population data. As such, AMC supports an increase in funding for the Census Bureau so that an accurate, effective population count is obtained during the 2020 census.



ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA COUNTIES FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

ISSUE HIGHLIGHTS

2020

Rural Healthcare

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

Waters of the US (WOTUS)

Given our unique and diverse natural environment, Minnesota Counties are significantly invested in rules and regulations that impact our state's natural resources. AMC shares the belief of NACo that local streets, gutters and human-made ditches should be excluded from the definition of "Waters of the US" under the federal Clean Water Act. As WOTUS is being reexamined, AMC urges Congress and the Administration along with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to rewrite this rule in consultation and collaboration with state and local governments.

Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG)

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

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

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

For more information, please contact:

**Matt Hilgart, AMC Government Relations Manager and Federal Liaison,
at 651-789-4343 or mhilgart@mncounties.org.**