

2017 Legislative Priorities

December 2016

For more than 100 years, the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) has assisted the state's 87 counties in providing effective governance for all citizens.

Legislative Principles

- **AMC strives** to preserve local control so that counties have the flexibility to address the most pressing needs of their communities.
- **AMC supports** state budget solutions that avoid adding or shifting a disproportionate burden to counties through cost shifts, cost shares and unfunded mandates.
- **AMC believes** that funding for county-administered services should be commensurate with the level of service or results deemed acceptable.

2017 Legislative Action Items

County Program Aid

AMC supports legislation that strengthens county program aid (CPA) in a sustainable way and provides relief for counties experiencing dramatic reductions in tax-base equalization aid.

The total appropriation counties receive in state aid has fluctuated drastically over the past twenty years, and is significantly depressed in real dollar value. AMC convened a work group to study the CPA formula and recommend improvements. The work group included leadership from over twenty counties along with input from the Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA) and the Minnesota Rural Counties Caucus (MRCC). After more than a year of work, the work group developed recommendations that reduce volatility and protect counties from losing significant funding when there is a sudden shift in their demographics.

Transportation Funding

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

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).

Mental Health in Jails and the Community

AMC supports county initiatives that reduce the incarceration of those with mental illness in local jails and redirects the existing county cost share dollars to efforts that increase mental health system capacity.

Many counties are already developing initiatives to reduce the number of mentally ill Minnesotans in jail. Some efforts are state supported and others are county financed. The legislature should support expansion of existing programs and create incentives for new programs aimed at this goal. Also, a significant portion of the mental health infrastructure is funded by county cost shares. While counties would prefer the elimination of these cost shares, as long as they are in place, this revenue should be used in ways that meet county needs in delivering these services.

Buffer Aid

AMC supports ongoing state funding for counties that opt to implement and enforce the requirements of the Minnesota buffer law.

County officials agree that local implementation and enforcement of the new buffer law may be best, however, these responsibilities will require additional staff time and resources, and ultimately leave counties with an unfunded mandate. State funding will help ensure the program is implemented and enforced locally and on a statewide basis.

Determining Fiscal Impact on Counties

AMC supports legislation that would require bills to include county investment as a line item of funding to encourage transparency in taxation, and consideration of the property tax impact of cost shifts.

In recent legislative sessions there have been increased requirements for county investment in areas of child protection and mental health. These mandated cost shifts have become crippling for county budgets across the state. This bill would require that the cost of a legislative proposal take into account county investment to accurately reflect taxpayer investment.

METS Funding

AMC supports legislation that would provide increased funding to the Minnesota Eligibility Technology System (METS).

Counties are responsible for determining eligibility for assistance programs. The METS system is the computer program that county workers use to assist in this determination. The system is still new, and requires additional programming investment so that county workers are able to efficiently and accurately navigate the system to ensure integrity of eligibility determinations.

Local Road Wetland Replacement

AMC supports the immediate need for short-term cash funding for the Local Road Wetland Replacement Program (LRWRP) and long-term continued funding of the program.

The LRWRP has been an integral part of the “no net loss” policy under the Wetlands Conservation Act. Recently, the state has not been meeting its funding obligation. As a result of underfunding, BWSR has closed two of the ten Wetland Bank Service Areas (BSAs). Since local governments have not budgeted to step in to meet the state’s legal obligation to replace the lost wetlands, the Legislature needs to act immediately to meet the state’s legal obligation to fund the replacement of the affected wetlands. BWSR will need approximately \$6 million in cash to buy wetland credits from private wetland banks to meet immediate LRWRP obligations, as well as \$10 million in bonding authorization for BWSR to recapitalize its wetland banks to meet LRWRP obligations in future years.

Broadband Development Funding

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

The legislature approved \$35 million be designated for the grant program last year, and Gov. Dayton recommended another \$30 million over the next two years. Continued funding for this program is necessary to support the infrastructure needed.

AMC Intergovernmental Services Staff

Executive Director

Julie Ring
Office: 651-789-4330, Cell: 651-247-9418
ring@mncounties.org

Legislative Coordinator

Anne Kilzer
Office: 651-789-4323, Cell: 651-303-4858
akilzer@mncounties.org

Environment & Natural Resources

Jennifer Berquam
Office: 651-789-4322, Cell: 651-308-8266
jberquam@mncounties.org

General Government, Taxes & County Operations

Matt Hilgart
Office: 651-789-4343, Cell: 612-805-5088
mhilgart@mncounties.org

Health & Human Services

Rochelle Westlund
Office: 651-789-4325, Cell: 651-341-8487
rwestlund@mncounties.org

Public Safety & Corrections

Ryan Erdmann
Office: 651-789-4345, Cell: 612-581-0026
erdmann@maccac.org

Transportation & Infrastructure

Emily Pugh
Office: 651-789-4339, Cell: 952-994-8816
epugh@mncounties.org

Policy Liaison

Ben Baglio
Office: 651-789-4321
bbaglio@mncounties.org

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