



Association of Minnesota Counties

May 7, 2019

Respected Members of State Government Finance Conference Committee:

The Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO) and Association of Minnesota Counties ask for your support and inclusion of HF 968 (Nelson) and SF 1731 (Dahms) into the final conference committee report. This language provides a transparent and statewide process allowing counties to move to a system of appointed county officers (auditor, treasurer, and recorder) IF there is agreement with the incumbent officer and IF the county goes through a public process that includes the opportunity for voters to reverse the board's decision.

For decades, Minnesota counties have been coming to the capitol to ask legislators to pass individual bills allowing their counties to appoint one or more of their elected "row" officers (auditor, treasurer, and recorder). While the inefficiency of this process has been clear to both legislators and the counties involved, there was not always a clear consensus on a practical and fair solution. Four years ago, this changed when the Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO) and Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) came to an agreement on language which would provide a smooth, transparent, and citizen-involved process that would eliminate the need for future legislation while also protecting current elected officers and guaranteeing strong public input at each step of the process. This compromise language is included in the House omnibus bill and has garnered the support of both of our associations. Below, please find some background which may help dispel the myths surrounding this confusing, but important local control topic.

What this provision IS about:

- **Providing local control.** HF 968/SF 1731 would take the routine, yet challenging, process of asking for legislative approval for individual county administrative structure decisions out of Saint Paul and back to local communities where elected County Board commissioners will make the decision that best reflects what their local communities need.
- **Protecting the current elected incumbent.** This language both protects and honors the current elected officer by limiting a change in structure to: 1) a vacancy or 2) requiring county boards to enter into a signed contract/agreement with the incumbent guaranteeing tenure, pay, and equal benefits.
- **Modernizing an archaic system.** Minnesota once had over 20 positions ranging from superintendent to county coroner directly elected by the people. Now, more than 80% of Minnesotans are represented by an appointed county officer. Today, more than ever, counties and local governments are being forced to do more with less and to creatively approach how they offer services. Many counties have successfully passed individual pieces of legislation to redefine the rolls of traditional offices by increasing their capacities or reformatting offices to meet the unique needs of their residents. While no county is the same, this bill would allow local governments to make decisions based on a model that suits them best.
- **Preserving democracy and promoting public discussion and vetting of an important county decision.** HF 968/SF 1731 would guarantee citizens a voice and role in the process by requiring double the regular notice period for county board agendas; requiring public testimony be made available during the board meeting; and most importantly, providing a venue for citizens to overturn the county board's decision by gathering a simple petition of 10% of county eligible voters.

What this provision is NOT about:

- **A usurping of voter control.** Some critics may argue that this bill usurps citizen control by taking a decision away from voters. *This bill is about local control and allowing directly-elected county board commissioners—who are accountable to their constituencies—the right to choose what system works best for their constituents and their taxpayers.* Moreover, the language in HF 968/SF 1731 guarantees citizens will have an active role in these decisions as well as the ultimate authority of overriding a board's decision by submitting a petition with only 10% of registered voters in the county.
- **An attack on current auditor/treasurer/recorders.** *The Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO), a group representing county officers, supports this bill as it honors the currently serving elected officers while guaranteeing that the good work of these same officials continues as appointed officers.*
- **A uniform mandate for all counties to change to an appointed system of county officers.** Not all counties will choose to appoint officers under this system. This bill would simply provide a consistent and transparent statewide mechanism to allow counties to make the decision locally.

MACO and AMC are grateful for your consideration and support of HF 968/SF 1731 and respectfully ask conferees to adopt the House language into their final conference committee report (House Article 2, Secs. 70, 72-76). Please find attached a brief fact sheet as well as corresponding maps indicating the over 40 counties who have already been granted this authority through special legislation.

Sincerely,



Randy Schreifels, Elected Stearns County Auditor
President, Minnesota Association of County Officers

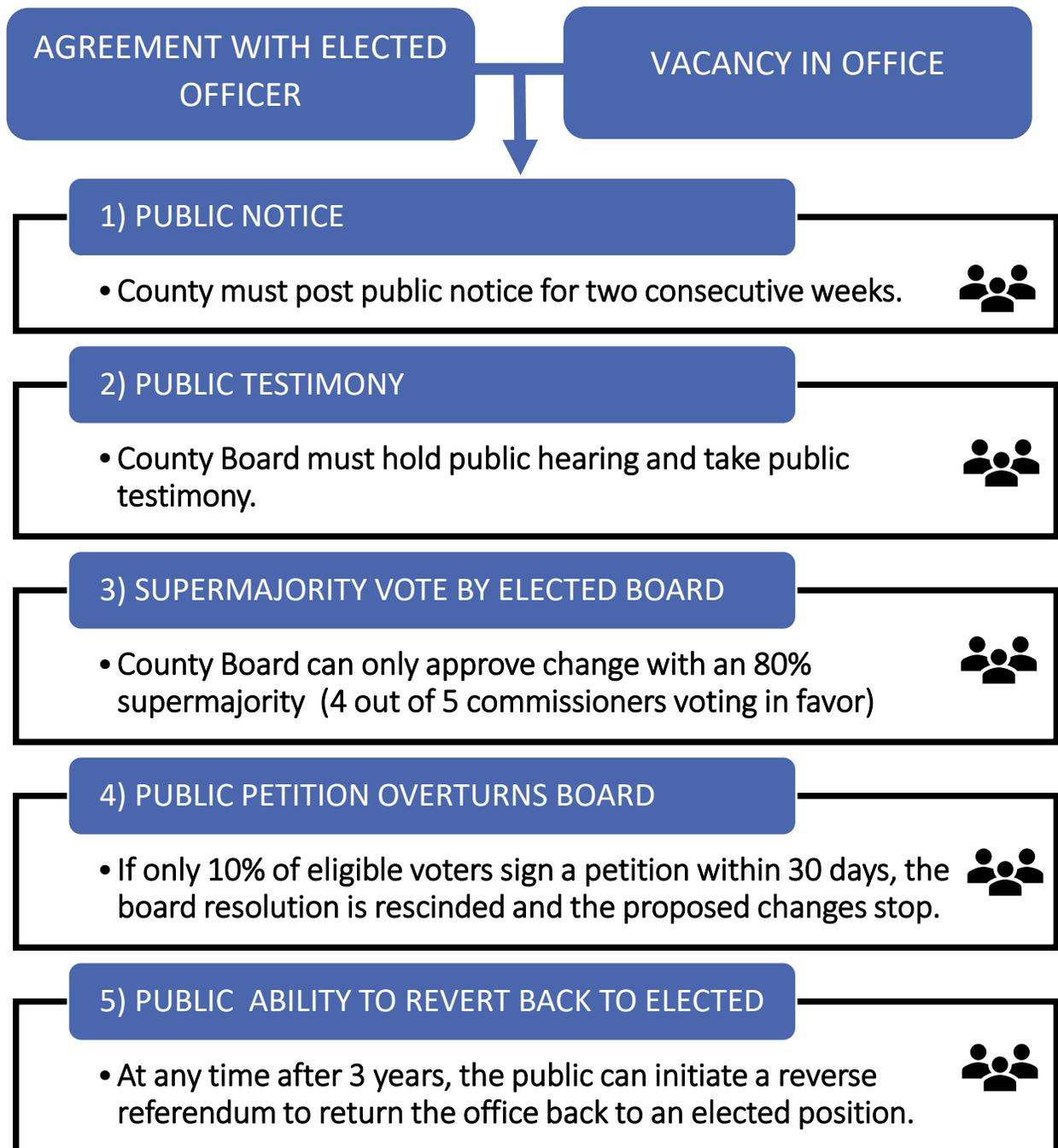


Julie Ring, Executive Director
Association of Minnesota Counties

Cc: Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
House Speaker Melissa Hortman

SF 1731 / HF 968

SF 1731 is permissive language proposing to allow elected county boards to start a public process to appoint the offices of recorder, treasurer, and auditor *if, and only if*, there is an agreement with the current officeholder OR there is a vacancy in office.





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