



Association of Minnesota Counties

April 6, 2022

RE: Health Provisions in HF 4706 – A22

Dear Chair Liebling and Members of the Committee:

The Local Public Health Association of Minnesota (LPHA) and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) appreciate your continued support of local public health departments throughout our state who work to protect and promote the health of all Minnesotans. LPHA and AMC would like to highlight several items in HF 4706 that would help local public health departments best serve their communities and address local public health priorities:

- **Public Health System Transformation**

Thank you for the investment of \$23.5 million per year to support local and tribal public health through direct grants and additional state level support. Foundational public health responsibilities are skills that need to be available in health departments so the public health system can work as a whole. Currently, the capacity of Minnesota's local health departments varies widely across the state. Foundational capabilities need to be in place in each health department, so they are always ready to serve their community and achieve equitable health outcomes. (*Article 1, Section 48 and Article 10, Section 3*)

- **Public Health Emergency Preparedness**

Thank you for the investment in local and tribal public health emergency preparedness and response. Responding to disasters and emergencies—whether health focused or not—is a core responsibility of Minnesota's local public health departments. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the need to have a strong infrastructure that can support a robust response to emergencies, both through planning and response. Currently, Minnesota's Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) activities are funded by grants from the federal government, with no state-level investment. Past proposals to redistribute emergency preparedness funds and a series of funding cuts have compromised local public health's ability to respond to emergencies such as COVID-19. This investment will be key in stabilizing our system and ensuring strong future response. (*Article 10, Section 3*)

- **Addressing Workforce Challenges in Public Health Careers**

We appreciate the inclusion of provisions that address workforce challenges in local public health. Thank you for funding the Public Health AmeriCorps program (*Article 1, Section 45*), which will be a valuable tool in recruiting new individuals into the public health workforce. We also appreciate the expansion of the role of Community Health Workers (*Article 1, Section 43*). These workers play a crucial role in health departments across the state in addressing health equity. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed gaps in Minnesota's public health workforce. Since 2008 local health departments across the United States have lost more than 20% of their workforce, more than 50,000 jobs. A significant investment in the public health workforce is needed to ensure we can continue to provide strong public health services into the future.

- **Supporting Children and Families**

We appreciate the inclusion of numerous provisions that support healthy children and families in Minnesota. The path to a healthy, prosperous, and equitable society is largely determined in the first three years of a child's life with 85% of a child's brain growth occurring before age

three. Children who meet healthy physical and cognitive development benchmarks during the first three years are more likely to be prepared for school, have stronger relationships, and ultimately have healthier, more stable, and prosperous lives. The following provisions will be critical in improving the health of children and families:

- *Universal, Voluntary Family Home Visiting* – Thank you for inclusion of significant investments in prevention-focused family home visiting services. Reaching a point where we can provide all Minnesota families universal, voluntary home visiting services will ensure all children born in Minnesota get a healthy start. (*Article 1, Section 38*)
- *Community Solutions for Healthy Child Development Grant Program* – This proposal will address critical child development in children of color and American Indian children to ensure healthy development of children from prenatal to grade 3 and their families. (*Article 1, Section 40*)
- *Healthy Beginnings, Healthy Families Act* – This program will provide significant investment to address disparities in children and their families, ensuring our youngest residents are ready for school. (*Article 1, Section 46*)

- **Additional Provisions that Support Community Health**

LPHA and AMC support the inclusion of various prevention-related provisions in the bill including the numerous provisions that address lead exposure and ensure safe access to drinking water in homes and school settings; grants to prevent drug and substance abuse (*Article 1, Section 31*); addressing the impacts of long COVID (*Article 1, Section 34*); reducing health disparities among those with disabilities (*Article 1, Section 44*); Medical Assistance coverage for tobacco and nicotine cessation (*Article 3, Section 25*); addressing food insecurity (*Article 10, Section 2*); strengthening the role of school health (*Article 1, Section 47*); and, grants to local public health departments for public health response related to defining elevated blood lead level as 3.5 micrograms (*Article 10, Section 3*).

Local public health agencies are on the front lines every day to protect and promote the health of our communities. Thank you for your continued support of prevention focused-programming and critical sources of public health funding that will improve the health of our state. We look forward to continuing to work with you to advance prevention strategies that promote the public's health.

Sincerely,



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