



# Association of Minnesota Counties

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May 4, 2021

Senator Torrey Westrom  
Senator Gene Dornink  
Senator Michael Goggin  
Senator Bruce Anderson  
Senator Erin Murphy

Representative Mike Sundin  
Representative Samantha Vang  
Representative Gene Pelowski  
Representative Todd Lippert  
Representative Nathan Nelson

## **Re: SF958 Provisions**

Dear Members of the Conference Committee:

**On behalf of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), a voluntary association representing all 87 counties, we want to thank you for your work on the Omnibus Agriculture and Broadband Finance Bill.** As you begin to confer on the provisions contained in SF958, we ask that you consider AMC's positions on the following items:

### **BROADBAND FUNDING**

Broadband funding has been a top priority at AMC for several years and we want to thank both sides for including funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program as well as funding to staff the Office of Broadband Development. As the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, more and more Minnesotans are working, learning, and receiving health care from home and the disparities in broadband access across the state means that too many Minnesotans are unable to access critical, reliable, and affordable internet access. The need for increased and sustained investment in broadband is greater now than ever before.

The Governor's Task Force on Broadband identified a need of \$120 million over the biennium for the state grant program in order to bring service to the unserved and underserved areas of the state and to help meet the state's 2026 speed goals. The Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program continues to be a success and each year applications far exceed the amount of grant money available. Securing biennial funding for the grant program will allow for better project planning in order to bring service to more households. AMC encourages you to fully fund the grant program over the biennium to address the significant unmet needs across the state and to help meet the state's speed goals.

### **AGRICULTURE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (AgBMP) LOAN PROGRAM**

AMC supports the additional investment, \$1 million each year, in the AgBMP Loan Program included in the House Language UES0958-1, Article 1, Section 2. The AgBMP Loan Program has been an effective tool to achieve positive water quality outcomes across the state. The availability of these low-interest loans for landowners and other local stakeholders encourages investment of private dollars to prevent pollution and reduce runoff. The program has the additional benefit of being operated and coordinated by local governments and financed with local lenders. Unfortunately, the funds available have routinely fallen well

below the requests. 2021 work plans sought \$9.33 million more than was available for loans. This additional funding will result in improved water quality by helping finance private investment.

**Again, we sincerely appreciate your consideration of our perspective.** Should you have any questions about the information provided above, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local county commissioners or AMC's Transportation & Infrastructure Policy Analyst, Emily Murray, at (952) 994-8816 and AMC's Environment & Natural Resources Policy Analyst, Brian Martinson, at (651) 246-4156.

Sincerely,



Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner  
*President, Association of Minnesota Counties*



Emily Murray, Policy Analyst  
*Association of Minnesota Counties*



Brian Martinson, Policy Analyst  
*Association of Minnesota Counties*