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May 7, 2019

Senator Mary Kiffmeyer
Senator Bruce Anderson
Senator Mark Koran
Senator Andrew Mathews
Senator Jim Carlson

Representative Michael Nelson
Representative Mike Freiberg
Representative Rob Ecklund
Representative Raymond Dehn
Representative Debra Kiel

Dear Members of the Conference Committee (SF 2227),

The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) is grateful for both chamber's work towards passing a comprehensive State Government Finance omnibus bill. Please find below a condensed list of the foremost provisions that we support, or with which we have concerns.

Moving forward on a transparent, statewide process for the appointment of technical county offices

(House Art. 2, secs. 70, 72-26) The Association of Minnesota Counties supports the House inclusion of an AMC priority to create a statewide process for the appointment of county "row" officers: auditor, treasurer, recorder. Whether it's for the sake of finding/retaining the best talent, creating efficiencies, or forming a "one stop shop" for customers/residents, elected county commissioners from across the state agree that local governments and citizens should be deciding what works best for their communities. ***It is important to note that more than 40 counties representing over 80% of the state's population have been granted specific legislative authority to combine and/or appoint one or more of their offices.*** The time has come for the legislature to create a uniform process that treats each county fairly, allows residents to provide input, and puts local communities in charge of their own operations. AMC has worked diligently with the Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO) and legislators to address concerns and create a true compromise proposal that includes the public in each step of the process and allows citizens to have the final say over approval. We appreciate the bipartisan support of over 20+ bipartisan authors and ask conferees to adopt the House's language.

Election Equipment Replacement Grants *(Senate Art. 1, sec. 6)*

AMC appreciates and supports the Senate's inclusion of additional election equipment funding via a \$13 million grant program. Just two years ago, this same committee made a major investment in election infrastructure by providing roughly one quarter (\$7 million) of the entire need of election equipment replacement (estimated in 2016 at \$28 million). An additional \$13 million is an important acknowledgment of the costs born to local governments play in administering the state's election system.

New mandate for county differential pay *(House Art. 8, sec. 8)*

Counties are proud to offer a variety of benefits to veterans during the employment process including preference points for hiring, protection from undue termination, leave protections, accrual of benefits, and compensation for 15 days paid leave. AMC has concerns about a recent addition to House language which would mandate county governments pay the salary differential to employees who are mobilized in the armed forces. In effect, this proposal would disproportionately impact the very counties that are doing the right thing by hiring active military personnel and veterans and paying them generous wages. Furthermore, the proposal would treat local governments differently while also not comparing similar benefit structures. AMC remains committed to working with interested legislators to make changes to the language to accommodate county concerns but cannot support the provision at this time.

Help America Vote Act (HAVA) Elections Security Funding *(House Art. 1, sec. 38)*

A functioning and secure election system is a cornerstone of a strong democracy. AMC joins MACO and other local government groups in supporting a full state match and access to HAVA funds to make critical investments in the Statewide Voter Registration System and other cybersecurity updates at both state and local levels.

Local Government Website Improvement/Accessibility Grant (*House Art. 2, sec.17*)

Counties support the \$200,000 in grant funding over the biennium to increase accessibility on local government websites, which will help counties better serve the unique needs and abilities of their community. We hope that this funding will not only enable counties to contract for website accessibility improvements, but also provide education on how to maintain ADA compliance with online resources. This grant program will be particularly helpful to counties in greater Minnesota where information technology budgets and staffing can be very limited.

Temporary appointment for vacant county commissioner seats (*House Art. 2, sec. 71*)

AMC supports the ability for counties to temporarily appoint a qualified person to fill a vacant county commissioner position until the next special election.

Information Technology user acceptance testing (*Senate Art. 3, sec. 4/House Art. 2, sec. 27*)

AMC supports the House and Senate's inclusion of language requiring field testing of any information technology project that includes the participation of both a state agency and unit of local government. Counties have seen firsthand the complications that arise when new, major technology systems are rolled out without proper input and local testing. We thank both chambers for their support of this initiative.

AMC supports the following elections provisions:

- **Changes to presidential primary process** (*House Art. 4, secs. 8-9, 26, 67-68, 70*): AMC joins the Minnesota Association of County Officers in supporting House language to restrict public access to a voter's political party choice as well as guarantee full reimbursement for local taxpayer expenses incurred during the operation of a new election.
- **Restoration of Felon Voting Rights** (*House Art. 4, secs. 5,7,11,39,73,75*): AMC joins the Minnesota Association of County Attorneys in supporting the full restoration of voting rights for individuals who have completed their term of incarceration.
- **Uniform mail balloting** (*House Art. 4, sec. 36*): AMC supports House language that would create a uniform standard for mail balloting thresholds by deleting the current prohibition banning cities and townships under 400 from using mail balloting if they are located in the metropolitan area.
- **Reimbursement for special election costs** (*House Art. 4, secs. 42-26*): While infrequent, the costs of running a special election—especially for a smaller community—can be quite impactful and can come at unexpected times or after a levy has been set. AMC appreciates the House's language supporting full reimbursement for the costs of running special elections for state and federal offices.

Census Administration Funding (*House Art. 1, sec. 11 & 82*)

Counties rely on updated and reliable census information for a plethora of business-related activities. Moreover, local governments are dependent on a successful and accurate census for several federal and state program requirements and reimbursements. To this extent, AMC asks members to properly fund the State Demographer's request for additional resources to guarantee the successful completion of the upcoming 2020 census.

The Association of Minnesota Counties appreciates your willingness to consider these positions going forward. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Matt Hilgart at mhilgart@mncounties.org / 651-789-4343.



Scott Schulte, Anoka County Commissioner
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