



# Association of Minnesota Counties

March 24, 2022

**RE: HF 4398**

Dear Chair Liebling and Members of the Committee:

The Local Public Health Association of Minnesota (LPHA) and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) appreciates your continued support of local public health departments throughout our state who are fulfilling state-mandated services that protect and promote the health of all Minnesotans, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. LPHA and AMC would like to highlight several items of interest in HF 4398 that would help local public health departments to best serve their communities and address local public health priorities:

- **Public Health System Transformation**

The A1 Amendment to the bill includes significant investment in local and tribal public health system for foundational public health responsibilities. Specifically, it will direct \$23.5 million 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. Thank you for considering this investment which will help transform and improve our system.

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

We appreciate the inclusion of provisions that address workforce challenges in local public health. 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 crucial public health services into the future. Thank you for inclusion of the following provisions:

- *Public Health AmeriCorps Program* – The A1 Amendment includes investment in Minnesota's Public Health AmeriCorps program. This is a valuable tool to aide in recruiting new individuals into the governmental public health workforce.
- *Community Health Workers* – Community health workers play a critical role in local health departments. Further developing and expanding their role will ensure they can continue crucial work to address community health needs.

- **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. 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:

- *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, short-term, home visiting services will ensure all children born in Minnesota get a healthy start.
- *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.
- *Healthy Beginnings, Healthy Families Act* – This program will provide significant investment to address disparities in our youngest residents and their families, ensuring our youngest residents are ready for school.

- **Additional Provisions that Support Community Health**

LPHA and AMC support the inclusion of various prevention-related provisions in the bill including those that ensure safe access to drinking water in homes and school settings; grants to prevent drug and substance abuse; addressing the impacts of long COVID; preventing suicide; helping communities heal after COVID-19; reducing health disparities among those with disabilities; and, strengthening the role of school health. Further, thank you for including local public health as an eligible recipient of funding to increase public awareness on the health dangers associated with using skin-lightening creams and products that contain mercury.

Local public health agencies are on the front lines every day to protect and promote the health of our communities. To do so successfully requires stable and reliable funding. Thank you for your continued support of these critical sources of public health funding and other programs 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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