



Association of  
Minnesota Counties

## Legislative Policy Priorities

Adopted by AMC Board of Directors 12/7/20

# 2021

PRIORITIES

### ***Health and Human Services***

#### **COVID-19 Response**

Local public health agencies serve a critical role in responding to COVID-19. The pandemic will continue to impact Minnesotans in 2021. Local public health are front and center when it comes to planning and distributing the vaccine. Longer term issues, such as an increasing need for mental health services or housing stability will continue to emerge and put pressure on our local health and human services systems.

AMC supports adequate and flexible funding for public health and a continued statewide response to COVID-19, including vaccine distribution, community outreach and education.

### ***General Government***

#### **Supporting Pandemic Recovery Efforts**

AMC supports legislative efforts to ensure a speedy, equitable, and sustainable economic recovery that aims to alleviate stresses borne by business owners, employees, landlords, homeowners, renters, and those without access to housing during the pandemic. Priorities include:

Continued support for state and federal business assistance programs to help recovery during and after the pandemic focusing on industries most impacted by the pandemic.

Supporting continued investment in workforce solutions via employment/retraining programs, reducing workforce disparities, and supporting youth employment programs.

Reducing the homelessness crisis in Minnesota by direct investments in emergency shelters and increased assistance for prevention programs (rental assistance/foreclosure prevention programs).

AMC supports legislative efforts to ensure a speedy, equitable, and sustainable economic recovery that aims to alleviate stresses borne by business owners, employees, landlords, homeowners, renters, and those without access to housing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# POLICY PRIORITIES

2021

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## *Transportation & Infrastructure*

### **Broadband Funding**

AMC supports equity in broadband infrastructure in Minnesota, including legislation that would provide additional funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program.

The Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program is essential to reaching the state broadband goals and allowing providers to extend and improve networks in the hardest to reach places in Minnesota. In 2019, the grant program received a record investment of \$40 million from the Legislature to be used over the biennium. Without additional investment, the program will run out of funding after the 2020 grants are awarded. Significant portions of Minnesota, especially low-density rural areas, still lack broadband service. The COVID-19 pandemic has only highlighted the disparities in broadband access across the state and has created an even stronger need for investment. AMC supports additional funding for the grant program in order to continue the build-out of broadband infrastructure in Minnesota and help meet the state's broadband speed goals by 2026.

## *Health and Human Services*

### **Health and Human Services Waivers**

Program flexibilities granted by the Department of Human Services in 2020 allowed county staff to continue to provide health and human services during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These waivers were originally set to expire at the end of the peacetime emergency, but the Legislature temporarily extended the waivers through the 2021 session. The extension helped assure counties could continue to maintain programming while protecting the health and safety of staff and residents. In addition, the waivers allowed counties to deliver services differently, and in many cases improve outcomes and service. Therefore, counties are asking that some of those flexibilities continue to be extended to improve outcomes for residents and service delivery.

**AMC supports equity in broadband infrastructure in Minnesota, including legislation that would provide adequate and continuous funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program.**

**AMC supports continuing health and human services waivers and telehealth strategies that demonstrate administrative efficiency and improve outcomes and service delivery.**

## *General Government*

### **Protecting County Program Aid**

AMC supports maintaining and protecting gains made in recent years on County Program Aid (CPA), a critical property tax relief program.

County Program Aid (CPA) serves as the most important general purpose aid in managing the budget effects of state mandates and provides property tax relief to all Minnesota homeowners. With the combined economic stresses of COVID-19 and limited use of the CARES Act funds for purposes of government revenue replacement, counties are more dependent than ever on the use of CPA for property tax relief and budget stabilization. In such a space, AMC will be advocating for protecting the program from any raids, recognizing that any cuts will be shifted to homeowners and residents by way of property tax increases and/or service reductions. It should also be noted that this priority was voted as a top five priority in all ten AMC districts.

## *Public Safety*

### **Community Supervision**

**Community supervision funding should be allocated using a transparent model that ensures counties and the state are funded equitably and based on needs. AMC supports Community Corrections Act Subsidy and County Probation Officer Reimbursement funding increases in order to maintain core probation services and move toward restoring the 50/50 state/county partnership.**

Minnesota's county-based probation systems have been underfunded for nearly two decades and county leaders are questioning the funding model for the three probation systems in Minnesota. The Community Corrections Act subsidy and County Probation Officers reimbursement (county-run probation systems) were not increased for fiscal year 2020 or 2021 despite bipartisan support of the funding. Services provided by county probation agents are critical services for meeting the needs of our criminal justice system but are inequitably funded which can lead to disparate outcomes. A thorough evaluation of probation funding mechanisms in Minnesota is necessary to ensure that probation is funded in a way that provides the best return on investment and public safety outcomes. Increased funds are needed this session to support the basic functions of this system until a new funding method is established.

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## **Environment and Natural Resources**

### **Tax-Forfeited Property Costs**

When taxes go unpaid on a property in Minnesota, the land is turned over to the state and counties become responsible for administering a tax-forfeited land program to make the land productive again. Counties are seeing costs to cleanup these tax-forfeited parcels that are higher than revenues the land sales generate. AMC has long supported legislative efforts to help pay for the cleanup of these tax-forfeited properties.

**AMC supports legislation to address the expenses counties incur for the cleanup and maintenance requirements of blighted or environmentally contaminated tax forfeiture properties.**

## **Transportation & Infrastructure**

### **Transportation Funding**

AMC supports equity in transportation infrastructure through continued comprehensive transportation funding that includes new revenue for roads, bridges, and transit.

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AMC supports a statewide, integrated, multi-modal transportation system that keeps Minnesota competitive in a global marketplace with long-term, sustainable funding to ensure safe systems that efficiently move people and goods. With over 90% of Minnesota's road mileage under the local jurisdiction and about 80% of bridges on the local system, the gap between projected funding and the amount needed to adequately maintain and improve local roads and bridges is significant. A sustainable investment option from the Legislature would help counties plan for future projects and address the growing need at the local level. Through the AMC Bridging Divides Initiative, we have identified a \$1 billion annual need in new revenue just to maintain the current county road system. AMC continues to advocate for long-term funding; the solution should be comprehensive (multi-modal), balanced (regionally and between modes), sustainable (on-going funding), and dedicated (constitutionally for roads and statutorily for transit).

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