

2017 State Legislative Priorities

Government Relations

Vision

A vibrant community where all are valued and thrive.

Mission

A county of excellence working with you to enhance our quality of life.

Goals



WELL-BEING

Strengthen individual, family and community health, safety and well-being

through effective safety-net services, innovative programming, prevention and early intervention, and environmental stewardship.



PROSPERITY

Cultivate economic prosperity and invest in neighborhoods with concentrated financial poverty

through proactive leadership and inclusive initiatives that engage all communities in decisions about our future.



OPPORTUNITY

Enhance access to opportunity and mobility for all residents and businesses

through connections to education, employment and economic development throughout our region.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Model fiscal accountability, transparency and strategic investments

through professional operations and financial management.

Ramsey County's Vision, Mission and Goals

For information about how the county is pursuing its mission and goals, go to the County's Strategic Plan webpage: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/strategic-actions-build-prosperity>

For information about measuring progress toward the county's mission and goals, go to the County's Community Indicators webpage: <https://www.ramseycounty.us/communityindicators>

LEGISLATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These legislative guiding principles provide a foundation for the specific initiatives and support items that are included in the 2017 State Legislative platform. In a field as dynamic as the legislature, these basic tenants inform the County's response to legislative proposals as they are introduced and move through the process.

Responsible, Responsive Government

- Communicate openly with the public and operate transparently
- Observe good data practices to protect individual privacy and provide access to public data
- Equalize access to government resources, opportunity and services across all communities
- Responsive and preventative services to address the needs of vulnerable children and adults and at-risk families who are experiencing instability and difficulty in meeting basic needs
- Tend to ongoing maintenance and planning for future infrastructure needs
- Advance information/data technology and ongoing updates that support program integrity and efficient service delivery
- Increase citizen access to the polls and voting participation
- Engage in good stewardship of natural resources
- Encourage inter-governmental collaboration build on the goals to improve performance, increase efficiencies and build trust across programs, governmental agencies and communities
- Support local authority to define local priorities

Stable, Sufficient Funding:

- Allocate adequate state funding to counties to carry out state mandates
- Distribute funding equitably, based on fair and practical distribution formulas
- Acknowledge county costs for existing or new state mandates
- Support county innovations in the delivery of mandated service when efficiencies can be gained
- Respect local government control of their resources and budgetary processes
- Expend funds for the purposes for which they are collected or allocated

Practice-Based Policy:

- Use practice-based policies that include ongoing assessment and adjustments to improve effectiveness of services and to save tax dollars
- Emphasis on prevention and early intervention
- Promote stable families, safe neighborhoods, public safety, health and wellness by engaging individual and community strength
- Foster economic development, broad access to education and training and growth of living-wage jobs
- Pursue policy that is not impinged by excessive, unnecessary regulation

RAMSEY COUNTY 2017 STATE LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

BONDING REQUESTS

Ramsey County Requests

- I-694 and Rice Street Interchange, \$23.5 million
- Riverview Transit Corridor, \$2 million
- Rush Line Regional Transit Corridor, \$2 million
- UP/BNSF Rail Road Grade Separation Project, \$1 million
- Battle Creek Winter Recreation Construction, \$2 million

Bonding Support Items

- Catholic Charities, Phase II of the Dorothy Day Place Project, \$12 million
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety, State Emergency Operations Center at Rice Creek Commons, \$33.3 million
- Department of Natural Resources, Completion of the Trout Brook/Gateway Trail, \$600,000
- City of Saint Paul, Kellogg Street Bridge Replacement, \$48 million
- Metropolitan Council, Parks and Trails Capital Improvement Projects, \$10 million
- Minnesota Department of Transportation: Passenger Rail - \$23 million

FUNDING AND POLICY PRIORITIES

Strong Families

Support state investment in services that promote healthy families, that provide the essentials for early development and sufficient funding to provide prevention, early intervention and crisis services to protect at risk families, children and vulnerable adults.

- **Support Additional Improvements and Funding in Child Protection** – Continue to update the state-directed /county-managed child protection system, including policy, practice, financing and staffing, with particular attention to racial disparities and early intervention efforts that recognize the primacy of early childhood development and the importance of stable, nurturing families. Lead: Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).
- **Expand Support for Adoptive Parents** – Extend the recently implemented financial enhancements provided to adoptive families of children over the age of 6 to those under the age of 6 as well. Adoption incentives are needed to help place children of all ages. Lead: **Ramsey County. NEW ITEM**
- **Provide Sufficient Funding to Enroll More Low-Income Working Families in Child Care Assistance Programs** – Currently, the prioritization of families on the waiting list for child care subsidies, disadvantages low-income, working families who have not used MFIP. This proposal would better utilize all child care subsidy funding streams and allow more families to receive

this essential work-related support. Lead: Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).

Health Care Access

Support continued funding for initiatives to ensure that all residents have access to health care services.

- **Continue to Improve Health Care Access for All Residents** –Insurance costs are surging, threatening access for many people, especially those who recently gained coverage as a result of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and expansion of Medical Assistance in Minnesota. Health care access needs to be maintained, and core elements of the ACA need to be preserved, including coverage for dependent to age 26 and the prohibition of denial of coverage for pre-existing conditions and life time caps for coverage. Lead: Association of Minnesota Counties. **NEW ITEM**
- **Support the Recommendations of the Governor’s Task Force on Mental Health** – In early 2016, the Governor appointed a Task Force on Mental Health to assess the current mental health system, which has some serious shortages of services, and to make recommendations for improvements. The Task Force issued their final report which includes nine recommendations to provide a comprehensive approach to treating and supporting those who have a mental illness. Lead: Governor. **NEW ITEM**
- **Increase Funding for Minnesota Eligibility and Technology Systems (METS)** – Increased funding is needed to adequately staff and improve the computer system that counties must use to assess eligibility for health care programs. The surge in recent years of enrollment and updates to eligibility, demands technology improvements to assist financial aid workers and to keep the system viable. Minnesota Association of Social Service Administrators (MACSSA).

Public Health

Provide adequate funding for core local public health services to prevent outbreaks of contagious diseases, minimize chronic health conditions, respond to environmental emergency and chronic environmental health threats.

- **Public Health Funding Priorities for 2017 are:**
 - **Increase State Funding for Local Public Health Grants**– Grants were increased last year for rural areas but not for metro area public health entities; increases are needed in the metro counties as well. Lead: Local Public Health Association (LPHA).
 - **Increase Overall Funding for Public Health Home Visiting** – Home visiting continues to be one of the most effective approaches to preventing child maltreatment and neglect, saving an estimated \$5 in government spending for every \$1 spent on home visiting. Home visiting funding needs to increase to meet the increased demand for preventative and support services within the child protection system. Lead: Local Public Health Association (LPHA).
 - **Support Full Funding for the State Health Improvement Program (SHIP)** - Improvements in community health indicators where residents are engaged in SHIP initiatives indicate the effectiveness of these preventative wellness programs. Funding needs to be maintained to retain recent gains. Lead: Local Public Health Association (LPHA).

- **Support Reimbursement for Healthy Homes Program** – The environmental presence of lead, radon and other hazardous substances continue to threaten the health of individuals, families and communities. Lead: Local Public Health Association (LPHA).

Safe Communities

Support local law enforcement, justice initiatives and corrections services that foster safe communities by investing in preventative, early intervention efforts and community-based correctional services.

- **Increase State Funding for County Delivered Community Supervision Services** – Funding to counties for these services is much lower than the actual cost to counties to provide the services, and is much lower than what the state allocates for the same services delivered by the state. Lead: Minnesota Association of Community Corrections Act Counties (MACCAC).
- **Enhance Funding for the Investigation and Prosecution of Technology-Aided Crimes** – Identity theft, financial theft and sex trafficking rely heavily on the use of the internet and other electronic technology. Funding is needed to help connect Minnesota’s local and state law enforcement agencies regionally and nationally to address this exploding field of crime. Lead: Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association (MPPOA).
- **Grant Permanent Status to the Ramsey County GPS Domestic Violence Prevention Pilot Project**– State authority for the operation of the Ramsey County domestic violence prevention program that employs the use of GPS tracking in cases where orders of protection have been issued and all parties have agreed to participate in the pilot, is expiring in 2017. The program has proven successful, and the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office should be permanent and available for other counties. Lead: **Ramsey County Attorney’s Office**.

Transportation and Transit

Support investment in building and maintaining a transportation and transit system that provides stable, efficient access to all communities, especially where a current lack of transit limits options for employment, housing, educational and recreational opportunities.

- **Support Statewide Comprehensive Transportation and Transit Plan that Includes Adequate Funding** – In order to stay competitive in today’s world market, Minnesota needs a long-range plan for investment in a multi-model system. Transit is a lifeline for many Minnesotans, with more than 90 million passenger trips in the Metro area and, approximately 12 million in Greater Minnesota. Deferral of routine maintenance on roads and bridges had compromised the quality of the system and now demands significant investment to bring the system up to standards. Securing stable, dedicated funding is essential. Lead: Transportation Alliance.
- **Revise Eminent Domain Process** – Require that owners submit their basic property valuation 45 days (currently 5 days) before an eminent domain-related commission hearing date, giving counties time to amend their initial offers. Additionally, to contain public costs, tie the interest rate for awards to the U.S. Treasury Bill secondary market and establish parameters for attorney fees. Lead: Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).

- **Give Counties Municipal Consent Authority for Certain MnDOT Highway Projects –** Counties should, but currently don't, have the same preview opportunities as other municipalities under state law when certain MNDOT projects are being considered within their jurisdiction. **Lead: Ramsey County.**
- **Include Hennepin and Ramsey Counties as Recipients of Revenue Derived from the Leased Vehicle Sales Tax–** Currently, all metro-area counties receive funding for transportation projects through the leased vehicle tax, except Ramsey and Hennepin Counties, even though the majority of these funds are collected in these 2 counties. **Lead: Ramsey and Hennepin Counties.**
- **Support Safety Initiatives for Rail Systems -** The increase in the number of trains moving through the rail system in Minnesota increases the interaction of trains, motor vehicles and pedestrians in residential areas. Additional crossing safety measures need to be available for crossings where prominent safety risks are evident. **Lead: Regional Rail Authority.**

Property Taxes

Counties are responsible for property tax administration for all local units of government. With approximately 50% of counties' revenue coming from property taxes, flexibility and local control are important elements of maintaining stable local budgets.

- **Support County Program Aid (CPA) Increase and Formula Change –** The amount of CPA provided to counties has fluctuated drastically over the last 20 years, and on a per capita basis, counties receive far less state aid than cities do under Local Government Aid. An Association of Minnesota Counties task force developed a new funding distribution formula that guarantees a funding floor for all counties of \$350,000 and requires a funding increase from the state of \$40 million to ensure no county loses funding. **Lead: Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).**
- **Allow Interest Rate Flexibility for Tax Forfeited Properties Purchased Using Contract for Deed Financing –** Under current law, the county is allowed to sell tax-forfeited properties for contract for deed. The law requires that the interest rate on the contract be set at the same rate that is charged for late payment of property taxes, which is currently 10%. This proposal would allow the county to set the contract for deed interest rate at a lower rate and help make home ownership more affordable. **Lead: Ramsey County.**

General Government

Support state laws and regulation that contribute to the efficient, transparent operation of government and the encouragement of civic engagement by the citizens it serves

- **Update Ramsey County Personnel Statute –** The statute governing the operations of Ramsey County needs updates in the personnel section to address job postings, retirement age and outdated nomenclature. **Lead: Ramsey County.**
- **Stabilize PERA Funding –** In Minnesota, public pension benefit levels and contribution requirements are set by the state. State funding is typically not provided for increased costs and must be paid by increased contributions from local government employers and employees. Any changes to the public pension system should be reasonable for both employers and employees, should help stabilize the financial condition of the pension funds, and be adopted with adequate notice to allow proper budget planning by local governments. **Lead: Minnesota InterCounty Association (MICA). NEW ITEM**

Achievement and Employment

Support educational, training and job-related services that provide opportunities for all residents to develop the skills necessary to build viable careers with wages that support self sufficiency

- **Development and Expansion of High School Technical Track Programs** – For a significant number of post-high school graduates, technical training is a more viable option than college. Additionally, Minnesota industry needs additional workers with technical skills. State funding to local workforce programs is needed to support access to technical training options. Lead: Minnesota Workforce Council Association (MWCA).
- **Support Flexible Use of TANF for Education and Racial Equity Initiatives** – Current TANF restrictions limit the use of these funds for education. Using TANF to help young people finish high school or the equivalent are particularly important for some minority students living in concentrated areas of financial poverty. Lead: Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACCSA).

Economic Development

Support economic development initiatives that increase opportunities for prosperity across all communities

- **Amend State Condominium Liability Provisions** – Under current state law, condominium developers and contractors are broadly exposed to lawsuits for construction defects for up to 10 years after the completion of a project. As a result, construction of new condo housing units is significantly suppressed, despite growing demand for this often-times moderately priced option. Lead: Builders Association of the Twin Cities. **NEW ITEM**
- **Reclassify CERT Application Information as Non-Public** – CERT, the small business support program operated by Ramsey and Hennepin Counties and Saint Paul, requires that applicants provide financial information to prove they meet program eligibility. Under current law, this information is public, creating a disincentive for enrollment. Lead: **Ramsey County**.

Parks and Recreation and Libraries

Support investment in public facilities and programs that enhance the quality of life for all communities.

- **Priorities for Ramsey County Parks and Recreation include:**
 - **Retain Current Funding Level and Distribution Formula for Parks and Trails Legacy Funds** – In recent years, rural counties have pushed for a funding distribution formula that directs a larger share of the funds to them and away from metro and suburban parks, which does not reflect the use of parks and trails. Ramsey County has \$1.3 million worth of projects in 2018 and \$1.4 million in 2019 that are eligible for these funds. Lead: Metropolitan Council.
 - **Support State Funding for Local Parks Operation and Maintenance** – Since 1985, the state has provided supplemental funding for the Metropolitan Regional Parks System. Although Minnesota statute directs the state to provide 40% of the cost to operate and maintain the metro parks, the allocation for fiscal year 2016 provided for only 3% of these costs. Counties support an increase to \$20 million per year, which is more in keeping with current statutory requirements. Lead: Metropolitan Council.

- **Allocate State Funding for Local Public Skating, Skiing and Ski Jump Facilities** – By 2020, all skating arenas must update their ice coolant systems. The cost for Ramsey County to comply with these changes is over \$7 million. Additionally, public access to skiing and ski jump facilities are in demand in public parks, for recreational activities of residents, schools, sporting clubs and tourists. Lead: Amateur Sports Commission.
- **Fund Emerald Ash Borer Containment Efforts and Tree Replacement**– The Ash Borer infestation is killing trees throughout the state, many of them in parks. In Ramsey County Parks, the cost to replace all 2,000 dead and infected Ash trees is over \$1 million. Parks need funding support from the state to protect these trees, which are an essential element of public recreational spaces across the state. Lead: Minnesota Shade Tree Advisory Committee and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture.
- **Support Library Funding Increases and a Distribution Formula Change** – The use of local libraries has increased and diversified in recent years to include access to job, health care and social services information, cultural, historical and neighborhood events. The regional library grants need to be increased. Library groups support an increase of \$3 million statewide. If this funding increase is allocated, they support adoption of a distribution formula that is based on population and local tax base. Lead: Metropolitan Library Services Association and the Minnesota Library Association. **NEW ITEM**

Additions to the Ramsey County Platform

In addition to the initiatives contained in this platform, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners generally supports the legislative recommendations of the local units of government within the county and organizations in which it holds membership, including, but not limited to:

- The Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and its associated professional organizations
- County Transit Improvement Board (CTIB)
- Solid Waste Management Coordinating Board (SWMCB)
- Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM)
- Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA)
- Governor’s Clean Water Council

The Board reserves the option to oppose individual items in these platforms that are contrary to the interest of the County.

The Board may also consider additional positions in response to issues that emerge during the legislative session.

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