

Community Legislative Engagement 101 Town Hall

Government Relations

December 9, 2020

Disclaimers

- This Community Townhall is being recorded and we are live on Facebook.
- We are recording for documentation purposes.
- Closed Captioning is available and in use during this town hall.

Townhall Agreements

- Keep your phone and/or device on mute if you are not speaking.
- Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
- Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability -- our growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- The goal is not to agree -- it is to gain a deeper understanding.
- Step up and Step Back!

Legislative Engagement 101

Melissa Finnegan & Jennifer O'Rourke

What We Will Review

- The Legislature: Who, When, How
- Ramsey County Platform Process
- How to Get Engaged

Legislative Members (Who)

- 201 Legislators
 - 31 are new this year
- House (134 total)
 - 70 DFL members
 - 64 Republicans
- Senate (67 total)
 - 34 Republican members
 - 31 DFL
 - 2 Independent



- Minnesota has the only split legislature in the country.
 - Recipe for compromise or gridlock?

The Legislative Session (When)

- MN has a biennial (2 year) session structure
- The first year sets the budget for the state
- The 2nd year is focused on funding building projects (bonding)
- Session begins in January or February and ends in May



The Legislative Process (How)

- Bills Are introduced by a Senator or Representative as the author.
 - Bill Introductions are Easy to Find!
 - House:
<https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/cco/introductions.asp>
 - Senate:
https://www.senate.mn/orders/intros/intro_list_from_db.html
- After a bill is introduced it sent to a committee for discussion.
 - Each body has approximately 30 committees and divisions



The Committee Process

- The Committee Chair decides which bills get a hearing
- The Chief Author explains the bill and supporters and opponents are given a chance to speak
- Then the committee members debate and vote



The Floor Session

- Once a bill has been voted on by all necessary committees it is returned to the full body.
- The bill is placed on the “Calendar for the Day” and is debated.
 - Amendments can still be offered at this point.
- The bill is then voted on by the whole body and if passed, is sent to the other body.



Omnibus Bills

- Similar bills, often bills that spend public money, are grouped together into larger packages called Omnibus Bills.
- Forces legislators to vote for or against the entire package – even if they don't like everything that's included.
- These bills can be LARGE. Some are over 400 legal-sized pages and spend over \$1billion.

Conference Committee

Conference Committees are 3 – 5 legislators selected from each body to debate the bill and come up with a single document they can all agree to.



Photo Credit: Senate Media Services

Sign or Veto?

- After the Conference Committee has come to an agreement the bill will be presented one more time before each body for a final vote.
- Once the bill is approved by both the House and the Senate it is sent on to the Governor for a signature or a veto.
- The Legislature can override a veto with a two-thirds majority vote.



But Wait – There's a Pandemic!

- 2020 Legislature convened remotely starting in March and most bills were put on hold
- House has already committed to acting remotely in 2021
 - Lots of hearings via Zoom
 - Public engagement is being worked out
- Senate is doing a hybrid process. Details TBD.



Why Do We Care?

- Many Ramsey County programs & services are established and funded by the legislature.
- Legislative action has a direct impact on the lives and well-being of our citizens.

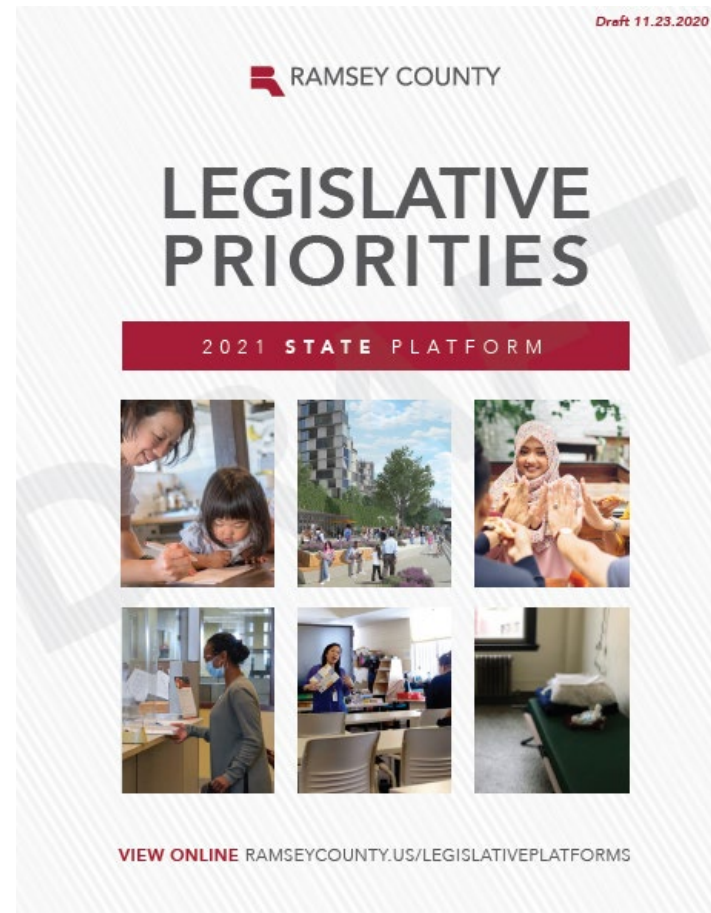


At The Legislature

- In Committee:
 - Ramsey County supplies testimony and support for its own bills.
 - Ramsey County can also supply testimony, information and support on other bills that are part of our platform.
- With Legislators:
 - Informational meetings to discuss our many programs and initiatives.
 - We meet regularly with the Legislators who represent Ramsey County (our delegation).
- Coalitions
 - AMC, MACSSA, MACCAC, MICA, and more!

Ramsey County Platform

- Set by the County Board each year.
- Sets forward the legislative priorities for the coming session.
- Two categories:
 - Support
 - Lead



Timeline

Summer – Ideas for addition developed within Ramsey County

Fall – Ideas reviewed by Directors and County Leadership and submitted for inclusion in the platform.

December – Platform is discussed and approved by the Board.

Proposed 2021 Platform Priorities

- Funding Ramsey County's COVID public health emergency response, economic recovery and waivers
- Investing in housing stability – affordability and homelessness
- Addressing racial disparities in out-of-home displacements
- Funding transportation, including new revenue for transit, roads and bridges
- Improving mental and behavioral health systems and supports

How To Engage with Ramsey County

- Reach out to your County Commissioner
 - <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/leadership/board-commissioners>
- Consider joining an Advisory Committee
 - <https://www.ramseycounty.us/your-government/leadership/advisory-boards-committees>



Our Roles as Citizens

- You can reach out to your Senators and Representatives on the topics that you care about.
- It's our duty as citizens to be engaged in the decisions that affect our lives.
- Find out who represents you here:
<https://www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/>



Tips for Engaging with Legislators

- Have a plan – know what you want to talk about and/or ask for
- Be brief! Most meetings last 15 minutes or less
- Think about what information you can bring to leave behind
- Be nice to the staff

Data + Human Stories = Success!

How To Stay Engaged

- Twitter, #mnleg
- MN has an award-winning legislative Web site where you can find schedules, bill introductions, legislator info, etc.
 - <https://www.leg.mn.gov/>

Questions?

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