



May 3, 2021

Dear Chairs Kiffmeyer and Nelson, and Members of the omnibus State Government Finance Conference Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the omnibus State Government Finance bill and for the partnership and input your chambers have provided to counties and staff throughout session. Please find below a condensed list of the foremost items of interest for our membership on relevant House and Senate provisions. As always, do not hesitate to reach out for additional information, member feedback, or questions.

- **Sensory accessibility grants** (*House Article 1 & 2*): AMC supports language included by the House that would provide an appropriation for sensory accessibility accommodations grants to improve accessibility for individuals who have autism or a related disability.
- **Competitive bidding updates** (*House Article 6*): AMC supports bipartisan efforts to increase the dollar threshold for county contracts made by sealed bids/direct negotiation only when entering into a contract with a county certified small business enterprise, or a state certified business that is owned and operated by a veteran or service-disabled veteran. We believe the threshold expansion included in the House bill is reasonable, recognizes increased building material and labor costs, and will still allow for healthy competition on a majority of county-initiated projects/contracts. If passed, this provision will allow counties to better redirect some of their contracting (office materials, smaller construction/rehabilitation, specialized repair jobs) to smaller, local businesses within the community and in turn tangibly benefit the local economy.
- **Mail balloting changes** (*House Article 3*). Counties are supportive of the following mail balloting-related provisions:
 - Creating uniformity in access to mail balloting across the state by eliminating language restricting metro area counties from implementing mail balloting for municipalities under 400 population.
 - Election staff have expressed support for the House provision extending the number of days for in person voting and ballot processing to 14 days prior to an election. These changes respond to a growing interest and demand for early voting. Additional processing time allows election officials to better manage the workload and complete all necessary steps to ensure the timely reporting of accurate election results at the conclusion of Election Day.
- **Restoration of felon voting rights** (*House Article 3*): AMC membership has long had a position supporting the restoration of felon voting rights after an individual completes their period of incarceration.

- **Polling place hours uniformity** (*Senate Article 4*): Counties have concerns about the language included in the Senate’s election article that would require all in-person absentee polling place locations to be open the same hours and days as the main county office and for the entirety of the in-person absentee ballot voting period. We understand and appreciate the Senate’s desire for uniformity but worry that some counties may feel that due to their staffing levels, geographic size, or budget, they may end up having to offer fewer locations for eligible Minnesotans to vote.
- **Provisional balloting** (*Senate Article 4*): While AMC does not have a platform proposal regarding the policy idea of provisional ballots, county administration and election staff have expressed concerns regarding increased personnel and logistical efforts during an already work intensive and time limited period. AMC would request that, should this proposal move forward, the Legislature acknowledge the potential staffing burden and costs to local governments by providing an open and on-going appropriation for any additional municipal and county costs for materials and staff time necessary to meet this policy change. In addition, this proposal condenses an already tight schedule between the Primary and General Election. Staff suggest that the calendar for required events should be reviewed considering this proposal to be sure officials can conduct a successful elections cycle.
- **In-person marriage certificate license waiver:** AMC is grateful for the bipartisan work to expand the pandemic waiver to allow counties to issue marriage licenses remotely. Of all the county functions that have been updated to reflect the needs of the pandemic and constituents, this one has been most popular. The current waiver—passed into law in January—expires at the end of May. While there is currently no language in the bill to address this issue, we would request to expand this option for counties permanently to reflect the desires of the residents and customers we serve, who are increasingly relying on remote means to complete transactions.
- **Open Meeting Law changes:** AMC thanks both Chairs and members of the Senate and House for their overwhelming, bipartisan support of Open Meeting Law changes most recently passed off the House floor and awaiting the Governor’s signature. Counties would like to continue exploring innovative and cost-effective approaches along these lines in future years.

Thank you again for your time and work on behalf of Minnesota,

Sincerely,



Matt Hilgart
Government Relations Manager
Association of Minnesota Counties