



Minnesota Inter-County Association

(651)222-8737 | www.mica.org

Sent Via Email

May 4, 2021

Senator Torrey Westrom
Senator Gene Dornink
Senator Michael Goggin
Senator Bruce Anderson
Senator Erin Murphy

Representative Mike Sundin
Representative Samantha Vang
Representative Gene Pelowski
Representative Todd Lippert
Representative Nathan Nelson

Chair Westrom, Chair Sundin, and SF958 Conferees:

On behalf of the Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA) and its 15 members, including four suburban and 11 Greater Minnesota counties, we encourage state funding for the Border-to-Border Broadband Grant Program above the amounts currently proposed by the House and Senate.

State Broadband Funding

Broadband funding remains a priority for counties. The Governor's Taskforce on Broadband recommended \$120 million was needed over the biennium to bring broadband service to 157,000 unserved households at the 50% state cost-share level. More is needed to improve access and internet speeds in under-served areas. We anticipate even greater local public participation will be needed to bring service to the remaining unserved households because the private investor ROI drops off dramatically in these harder to reach areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of expediting broadband investment, and the importance of universal, high-speed internet access to eliminating disparities and supporting small businesses. As more Minnesotans continue to work, learn, and receive health care from home, we urge the legislature to leverage one-time state and federal funds (ARPA) to make a multi-year funding commitment toward achieving the state's 2026 internet speed goals for all households.

Many counties are planning to use ARPA funds to supplement the state's 50% share in order to reduce the cost per household for harder to serve areas. Whether from state funds or ARPA resources, we encourage state appropriations closer to the \$120 million recommended by the Governor's Task Force.



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AgBMP Loan Program Funding

MICA also supports and encourages increased funding for the Agriculture Best Management Practices (AgBMP) Loan Program under Minn. Stats. 17.117. We thank both the House and the Senate prioritizing this program, which has been instrumental in protecting groundwater resources, including:

- *House Article 1, Section 2, subd. 5* appropriation of \$1.0 million each year for increased AgBMP loans; and
- *SF959, Article 1, Section 4*, appropriation of \$1.0 to the Board of Soil and Water Resources for rural landowners to replace failing septic systems that inadequately protect groundwater.

The AgBMP loan program promotes the installation and repair of private and cluster septic systems that directly impact water quality. To assist and encourage property owners to correct and/or replace faulty (non-compliant) septic systems, many counties are administering a septic low interest loan program funded through AgBMP's revolving loan program. However, loan demand regularly exceeds resources available for these loans. Specifically, we support the House funding level allocated to enhance groundwater protection through the replacement of non-compliant septic systems.

Thank you to all conferees for your commitment to achieve a biennial budget that works for Minnesota and funds these important programs.

Sincerely,

Matt Massman, *Executive Director*
Minnesota Inter-County Association

Cc: Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman
Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt
Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent