



HF1822: Human services programs temporary modifications establishment as permanent changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, counties pivoted to change the way human services were delivered. Many of the changes were aimed at protecting the health and safety of staff and clients during the pandemic. In addition, there were a number of changes that had a broader impact in service delivery. Counties have identified a short list of the administrative changes that helped improve or streamline service or provide a lasting benefit for clients. Counties are asking for the following flexibilities to continue permanently with passage of House File 1822.

Background: Last year the Association of Minnesota Counties convened a Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government Operations that reviewed, in real time, changes in county operations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to examine the lessons learned about county government operations during the COVID-19 emergency and recommend permanent changes in federal, state, and county operations to provide more effective and efficient service to Minnesotans.

Early in the committee's work, we focused on changes in human services operations, examining the more than 60 waivers or changes in processes that were adopted by executive order. Our committee recommended a list of waivers that should be extended beyond the peacetime emergency, both for transition time and to allow study the effectiveness of the new processes. In the months since, we have further refined our list of proposed permanent process changes to the four included in HF 1822.

Our human services directors in MACSSA identified a prioritized list of process changes that showed promise for long term effectiveness – they improved efficiency, protected program integrity, improved access, and protected the health of our staff and clients. We worked with Representative Liebling to extend a number of these waivers through the end of the 2021 session so that counties, DHS, and the legislature had time to explore these waivers more fully outside of the time constraints and pressure of a special session.

The four process improvements in Representative Wolgamott's bill focus specifically on the unique County role in human services and are the ones prioritized in conjunction with a vetting process by AMC's human services affiliate, MACSSA. Counties are asking for the following flexibilities to continue permanently.

The four flexibilities in HF 1822:

- Allow individuals to apply & attend orientation remotely for Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP).
- Allow certain MnChoices reassessments to be conducted remotely.
- Allow for certain targeted case management visits to be conducted remotely.
- Extend absence policy for individuals receiving housing supports to make sure individuals don't lose housing because of a hospitalization.

Proposed Flexibility	
<p>Allow for application and orientation process to be conducted remotely for the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)</p>	<p>Completing applications over the phone means major time savings for residents, as well as savings in transportation time and cost. This is a chance to provide the most efficient and effective services for Minnesotans who are most impacted by the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Approvals can happen right away, rather than having to wait for paperwork, allowing them to fulfill important responsibilities, such as staying up to date with rent payments.</p> <p>If an individual's previously received assistance and is re-applying, counties have identity verification on file. For new applicants, identification must be verified. Individuals can submit this at the time of application (sending a copy of an ID), or at any time during the 30 days following while the application is pending. A signature in and of itself does not verify the identity.</p> <p>Allowing counties to be able to offer orientation remotely would align these with other economic assistance programs such as SNAP.</p>
<p>Allow certain reassessments for long-term services to be conducted remotely</p>	<p>County staff look forward to returning to face to face and in most cases, staff and clients need the face to face interaction to be able to properly observe the environment and needs.</p> <p>However, in cases where the documentation, case manager, guardian and client all make clear that that there is no need for a change in service, a reassessment could be conducted remotely. This not only maintains important contact time but also gives choice to clients and makes it easier for guardian or others to participate in contact. Counties are also able to serve more people with same amount of staff.</p>
<p>Allow for certain Targeted Case Management visits to be conducted remotely</p>	<p>The option would be available to conduct a case management visit remotely on certain occasions or under certain situations. Recipients of services have responded positively to the increased flexibility in fulfilling their assessment requirements and service delivery. Post the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the people that counties serve and staff are looking forward to resuming face-to-face visits, but also believe that allowance of some use of phone and videoconferencing, within an agreed upon standard of care, should be available to improve accessibility and efficiencies.</p>
<p>Allow for certain exceptions to the absence policy in housing supports</p>	<p>This waiver helped guarantee individuals didn't lose access to housing if hospitalized because of COVID. Allowing this flexibility is critical for individuals who face medical treatment in order not to lose their homes.</p>