



MACSSA

Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators

March 8, 2023

Chair Peter Fischer
House Human Services Policy Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives

RE: HF2141 (Norris) Allowing counties to provide in-house training for certain training and technical assistance programs.

Dear Chair Fischer and Committee members,

The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) supports HF2141, creating a pilot allowing counties to provide in-house training for certain training and technical assistance programs. Making these trainings available in a county setting will improve access to trainings for new county staff and will support the efficient hiring and onboarding of much needed new workers. Counties would use this new opportunity to more easily onboard and train staff to respond to record numbers of public assistance cases and respond to the workforce turnover demands we are currently experiencing.

Public assistance policy and procedures are complex and not streamlined between programs. State systems are old and require many workarounds. Eligibility for public assistance programs relies on a worker to properly input a client's information into a system based on the policy for each program. The training to become an eligibility specialist takes at least one year for a worker to become fully trained and competent in their work. Counties have long been in conversations with DHS about challenges in accessing a limited number of slots for mandatory trainings from the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) – counties bring forward this bill with the goal of addressing this training bottleneck.

With the current rigid DHS training requirements linked to access to required applications, counties currently aren't able to onboard staff efficiently in our eligibility areas. Numerous counties have expressed they are constantly falling behind with their eligibility staffing complements and may never be able to hire the staff needed due to constraints of the current training access. Training cohorts have been consistently limited to 20 slots statewide monthly, with individual counties limited in the number of slots they can reserve. The current system is requiring counties to limit their hiring of new employees based on DHS training dates and available slots secured, rather than based on when quality new staff are available. Hiring and retention has been a concern for many years, but this concern is exacerbated with the increase in work counties have experienced during the pandemic.

The opportunity for counties to pilot the required training within their own county, with appropriate approvals, is not outside of the scope of current work at counties. Counties currently provide training for a variety of programs including General Assistance, Minnesota Supplemental Assistance, Minnesota Family Investment Program, and Diversionary Work Program, as well as county trainers conducting trainings for medical assistance and the METS system. These trainings are high quality and have proven positive outcomes. Counties also provide additional training following the state training that is more in-depth and pertinent to their job.

With that said, **it remains an ongoing state responsibility to fully fund training staff needs and for DHS to conduct these trainings with the frequency and to the degree needed by counties.** That is why it is

appropriate for this proposal to be a pilot – to address a current shortcoming of our system and give counties an additional training option to relieve this bottleneck. If this proposal were to expand beyond a pilot, counties would implore the legislature to ensure all counties have the capacity to do these trainings and are allocated state funding for the cost of conducting these trainings on behalf of the state.

MACSSA asks the legislature to support this bill and allow DHS to collaborate with counties on this solution to a backlog in training access for county eligibility workers. **Short of significant changes in the training requirements and structures from DHS, solutions like this are the only way for counties to be able to staff up, onboard, and train staff to meet the current eligibility workload.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Freeman", written in a cursive style.

Matt Freeman
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators

Cc: Rep. Norris