



# Association of Minnesota Counties

May 7, 2020

Governor Tim Walz  
Speaker of the House Melissa Hortman  
Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka  
House Minority Leader Kurt Daudt  
Senate Minority Leader Susan Kent

RE: Continuation of State and Federal Program Waivers

Governor Walz and Legislative Leaders:

On behalf of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), an organization representing Minnesota's 87 counties, we want to thank you all for your diligent work to address the COVID-19 public health emergency. Counties highly regard our partnership with the state.

As we have moved through this public health emergency, counties have adapted our services to protect our employees and our communities, while at the same time balancing the need of residents to access services. We appreciate the flexibility we received in numerous program areas as a result of legislative action and the Governor's Executive Orders. Using this new flexibility, we tailored services to ensure that we were able to meet our residents' needs. These flexibilities will be critically important for months into the future as we continue to respond to the pandemic, even as more businesses and services begin to reopen.

**It is not in the best interest of Minnesotans to simply “flip a switch” and return to county business as usual when the peacetime emergency declaration ends.** As we transition to the end of the peacetime emergency, county staff will also be required to reduce backlogs in a number of program areas that were rightfully delayed during the emergency. We ask for thoughtful planning to incorporate an extension of all waivers during this transition. Most urgently, we ask that you maintain the waivers in public health and human services.

**We see an important opportunity to learn from this experience and provide more effective and efficient services to Minnesotans into the future.** We believe these new flexibilities should be carefully examined and some be made permanent. We ask for your partnership in the weeks and months ahead to allow counties to continue operating under these waivers, and then work with us to make the appropriate ones permanent through statute change, rule change, or changes in administrative process. In some cases, we will need your partnership to seek permanent federal waivers.

To this end, AMC has convened a Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government Operations that is reviewing the waivers and other changes in county operations. We will share our recommendations with you on a rolling basis, as we work quickly toward a final report. I have included more information about this committee as an attachment.

We look forward to your ongoing partnership as we all work to provide efficient and effective public services to Minnesotans. Please contact me at 218-343-6153 or rich.sve@co.lake.mn.us or AMC Executive Director Julie Ring at 651-247-9418 or ring@mncounties.org if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rich Sve", with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Rich Sve, Lake County Commissioner  
*President, Association of Minnesota Counties*



## **Blue Ribbon Committee on County Government Operations**

### **Charge**

Examine the lessons learned about county government operations during the COVID-19 emergency and recommend continuation of state and federal waivers and county operational changes that provide more effective and efficient service to Minnesotans.

### **Key Questions**

1. What new processes did counties try? What worked and should continue? What didn't work?
2. What work didn't get done during the emergency? What were the ramifications of not doing that work? Are there things counties could/should stop doing because they weren't critical during the pandemic?
3. What did we learn about emergency operations? What can we improve in our emergency plans?
4. Who has authority to make any recommended changes permanent? Do we need state or federal waivers or law changes and/or best practice recommendations for county boards?

### **Work Plan**

The Blue Ribbon Committee will ask AMC's affiliate organizations to review their area of practice and bring lessons learned to the committee for discussion and consideration. The Blue Ribbon Committee will meet one to two times per week through May using video meeting technology to develop a preliminary list of recommendations and actions to accomplish them. The committee's workplan will be organized to first address the most urgent issues that require continuation of state and federal waivers. The committee may continue to meet throughout the summer on a less frequent basis.

### **Blue Ribbon Committee Members**

Rich Sve, AMC President & Lake County Commissioner, Chair  
Ben DeNucci, Itasca County Commissioner  
Lisa Fobbe, Sherburne County Commissioner  
Marion Greene, Hennepin County Commissioner  
Stephen Hallan, Pine County Commissioner  
Gary Hendrickx, Swift County Commissioner  
Sheila Kiscaden, Olmsted County Commissioner  
Colleen Landkamer, Blue Earth County Commissioner  
Jim McDonough, Ramsey County Commissioner  
Susan Morris, Isanti County Commissioner  
Lee Rogness, Otter Tail County Commissioner  
Scott Schulte, Anoka County Commissioner  
Mike Slavik, Dakota County Commissioner  
Jack Swanson, Roseau County Commissioner  
Dan Wildermuth, Pipestone County Commissioner

### **Staff Support**

Julie Ring, Executive Director  
Ryan Erdmann, Member Engagement Coordinator  
Becky Accettura, Project Manager