

# 2020 STATE Legislative Priorities



CAPITAL INVESTMENTS



STRONG FAMILIES



HEALTH CARE



SAFE COMMUNITIES



ACHIEVEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT



MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION



GENERAL GOVERNMENT



PARKS AND LIBRARIES



## Vision

A vibrant community where all are valued and thrive.

## Mission

A county of excellence working with you to enhance our quality of life.

## Goals



WELL-BEING

### **Strengthen individual, family and community health, safety and well-being**

through effective safety-net services, innovative programming, prevention and early intervention, and environmental stewardship.



PROSPERITY

### **Cultivate economic prosperity and invest in neighborhoods with concentrated financial poverty**

through proactive leadership and inclusive initiatives that engage all communities in decisions about our future.



OPPORTUNITY

### **Enhance access to opportunity and mobility for all residents and businesses**

through connections to education, employment and economic development throughout our region.



ACCOUNTABILITY

### **Model fiscal accountability, transparency and strategic investments**

through professional operations and financial management.

Information about how the county is pursuing its mission and goals is available in the county's Strategic Plan at [ramseycounty.us/strategicplan](https://ramseycounty.us/strategicplan)

Information about performance measures related to the county's mission and goals is available in the county's Open Data Portal at [opendata.ramseycounty.us](https://opendata.ramseycounty.us)

## Legislative guiding principles

These legislative guiding principles provide a foundation for the specific initiatives and support items that are included in the 2020 State Legislative platform. In a field as dynamic as the legislative session, these basic tenets inform Ramsey County's response to legislative proposals as they are introduced and move through the process.

### Residents-First Focus

- Prioritize support for legislative proposals that clearly improve how government works with and serves Ramsey County residents.
- Evaluate the impact of legislative proposals on residents and provide opportunities for affected communities to publicly discuss and influence legislation.

### Responsible, Responsive Government

- Communicate openly with the public and operate transparently.
- Observe good data practices to protect individual privacy and provide access to public data.
- Equalize access to government resources, opportunity and services across all communities.
- Respond proactively to address the needs of vulnerable children and adults and at-risk families who are experiencing instability and difficulty in meeting basic needs.
- Tend to ongoing maintenance and planning for future infrastructure needs.
- Advance information/data technology and ongoing updates that support program integrity and efficient service delivery.
- Increase citizen access to the polls and voting participation.
- Engage in good stewardship of natural resources.
- Encourage inter-governmental collaboration built on the goals of improving performance, increasing efficiencies and building trust across programs, governmental agencies and communities.
- Support local authority to define local priorities.

### Stable, Sufficient Funding

- Allocate adequate state funding to counties to carry out state mandates.
- Distribute funding equitably, based on fair and practical distribution formulas.
- Acknowledge county costs for existing or new state mandates.
- Support county innovations in the delivery of mandated service when efficiencies can be gained.
- Respect local government control of their resources and budgetary processes.
- Expend funds for the purposes for which they are collected or allocated.

### Practice-Based Policy

- Invest in practice-based policies that include ongoing assessment and adjustments to improve effectiveness of services and to save tax dollars.
- Emphasize prevention and early intervention.
- Promote stable families, safe neighborhoods, public safety, health and wellness by engaging individual and community strength.
- Foster economic development, broad access to education and training, and growth of living-wage jobs.
- Pursue policy that is not impinged by excessive, unnecessary regulation.

## Top 2020 Ramsey County Legislative Priorities

- Funding Ramsey County bonding requests.
- Investing in housing stability – affordability and homelessness.
- Updating MN Statute 383A.404 – community correction administrative alignment.
- Addressing racial disparities in out-of-home displacements.
- Supporting transportation funding, including new revenue for roads, bridges and transit.



### Capital Improvement Requests

#### RAMSEY COUNTY REQUESTS

1.	Riversedge Deck	\$40M
2.	Ramsey and Washington County Recycling and Energy Center Next Generation Technology Upgrades	\$21M
3.	Battle Creek Winter Recreation Area	\$2.127M
4.	Interstate Highway 35E and County Road J Interchange	\$1.5M
5.	Rush Line Bus Rapid Transit	\$2.5M
6.	Riverview Corridor	\$2.5M

#### SUPPORT OTHER BONDING REQUESTS

- Kellogg-Third Street Bridge Replacement, City of Saint Paul \$55M
- Twin Cities to Milwaukee/Chicago Second Train, MnDOT \$10M
- Gibbs Farm – Pathways to Dakota and Pioneer Life Program Extension, Ramsey County Historical Society \$7.13M
- Lake Links Trail Connection \$1.1M



## Funding and Policy Priorities



### Strong Families

Support state investment in services that promote healthy families and provide the essentials for early development. Support sufficient funding to provide prevention, early intervention and crisis services to protect at-risk families, children and vulnerable adults.

#### Child Well-Being

Continue to update the state-directed/county-managed child protection system, including policy, practice, financing and staffing, with attention to racial disparities and early intervention efforts that recognize the primacy of early childhood development and the importance of stable, nurturing families.

- **Support Families First Investments and Approach to Child Well-Being.**  
 While the number of out-of-home placements and the financial costs for the state and counties has received considerable attention in recent years, continued examination, reforms and funding are needed. In Ramsey County, 1,785 children were placed in out-of-home care (2017), out of a total 16,593 statewide. Children’s safety from harm is paramount, but out-of-home placements should be reserved for those cases when alternatives cannot be quickly put in place and long-term recovery is not possible. Families First, which will allow states and counties to use federal Title IV-E funds to focus child protection efforts on engaging families, building support networks and providing culturally-informed services, will help avoid the compounding trauma that out-of-home displacements often cause. Through Family First investments, families can address challenges and build enduring environments that foster sound child development.  
**LEAD:** Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administration (MACSSA).
- **Support the African American Family Preservation Act.**  
 Compared to white children, American Indian and African American children are significantly more likely to be placed in out-of-home care. County social services supervise most of these placements. Case management and support services need to accommodate cultural differences, address challenges and build on strengths to remedy the disproportionate placements of children of color into foster care and other out-of-home displacements. These efforts are at the forefront of the Families First initiative being developed in Minnesota with the additional Title IV-E funds provided by the federal government to refocus child protective services.  
**LEAD:** Ramsey County and the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA).
- **Mandate Court-Appointment of Counsel for Eligible Parents and Other Caretakers Involved in CHIPs Cases.**  
 Under current law, judges may appoint counsel to parents and other caretakers involved in child protection cases when they meet income guidelines for being defined as low-income. Counties are responsible for covering these costs for counsel. A proposal is being introduced that would require that judges appoint counsel in all cases. This will increase costs for counties, although the rights of parents and the stability of at-risk families would be enhanced in court proceedings with this change. In Ramsey County, the court most often makes these appointments, so cost would be minimal. This is not the case in all counties, where costs could be a consideration for making the appointment of counsel mandatory in all cases.  
**LEAD:** Institute to Transform Child Protection, Mitchell/Hamline School of Law.

## Child Care

- **Support Child Care Licensing Practice Improvements.**

During the 2019 state legislative session, the health and human services committees considered family child care licensing and oversight changes in response to provider complaints alleging uneven interpretation of rules by state and county licensing staff. Legislators have indicated they will continue to pursue licensing changes to clarify and simplify rules and promote improved relations between child care providers and regulators. The Department of Human Services and counties support training refinements, county liability insurance reforms and other changes that foster best practices in all child care settings.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA) and the Department of Human Services.

- **Support State Compliance with Requirements of the Federal Child Care Block Grant Act of 2014.**

Federal funding sent to states to support child care services and programs come with regulations focused on child safety, quality of services, fraud prevention, provider standards and stabilization of the industry to ensure provider viability and a sufficient number of child care slots to meet local needs. Currently, Minnesota is not fully compliant with federal regulations, most notably regarding background studies and minimum provider rates, which results in the lost federal funding. At a time of significant shortage of child care slots, drawing down every available federal dollar is essential.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Department of Human Services.

- **Maximize the Use of All Available Child Care Subsidy Funds through Strategic Wait-List Changes.**

The current prioritization of families on the waiting list for child care subsidies puts low-income, working families who have not used Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) at a disadvantage in securing a subsidy. This proposal would better utilize all child care subsidy funding streams and allow more families to receive this essential work-related support.

**LEAD:** Ramsey County and Hennepin County.

## Housing – Affordability and Stability

The gap between the need for affordable housing and the availability is growing rapidly in communities across the state. The shortage increases costs, compounding the problem and pricing more low-income families and individuals out of the market and into unsafe, substandard housing or worse yet, into homelessness. Broad government and community investments are needed to address this urgent issue.

- **Increase Funding for Affordable Housing and for Housing Programs Focused on Specific Populations.**

In communities across the state, there are critical shortages of affordable housing. While the current housing market makes it very difficult for a significant number of individuals and families to secure safe, adequate housing, there are additional barriers for some populations, particularly low-income families and individuals. Additionally, people experiencing mental illness, or other disabilities, individuals with criminal records, large families, veterans and those who are homeless often need a hand in obtaining and keeping housing. Funding for traditional government housing programs needs to be increased and creative housing solutions should be further explored. Without these further investments, homelessness will continue to rise steeply across Minnesota and the cost of housing will continue to climb.

**LEAD:** Homes for All and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).

- **Create a Dedicated Fund for the Development of Affordable Housing.**  
 The cost to build affordable housing under current state and federal programs is increasing. Tax credits and other incentives and funding are needed to attract private developers. The Minnesota Housing Partnership is working with other advocates to advance the creation of the Minnesota Tax Credit Contribution Fund. The Fund enrolls private investors into the production of affordable housing. In addition to providing financial benefit to investors, the new housing benefits local businesses, creates jobs and contributes to the overall growth of the economy.  
**LEAD:** Minnesota Housing Partnership and the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).
- **Expand Housing Support Demonstration Capacity to Include Seven Twin Cities Metro Counties.**  
 The Housing Support Demonstration project under Minnesota Statute 256I.04 subd. 3(a)(3) allows for the use of Housing Support as traditional rental assistance (30% of income toward rent) and support services for persons experiencing homelessness. State statute currently limits this use of Housing Support to Anoka, Dakota, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties and to 226 total people or “supportive housing units”. This has been in place since 1997 and has been successful providing housing stability for individuals enrolled in the program. This proposal would include three additional metro counties including Carver, Scott and Washington Counties. Additionally, it would increase the number of people who could be served to 300. With the involvement of all seven metro counties, the program would have broader reach and would serve more homeless people.  
**LEAD:** Dakota County.

### Child Support

- **Clarify Ambiguity and Correct Error in Child Support Reforms Adopted in 2016.**  
 After the 2016 state legislature updated the child support/parenting expense adjustment (PEA) statutes, it was discovered that several clarifications need to be made:
 
  1. Minnesota case law and statute relating to child support modification are inconsistent. Clarifications are necessary to help families get their child support orders modified to fit the new PEA law.
  2. The language related to one-parent support when a child is not living with either parent, but is living with another caretaker, contains unintentional errors and needs to be aligned with the intent of what was passed by the legislature.**LEAD: Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.**
- **Update Basic Child Support Table.**  
 The state child support guidelines the courts must use to establish child support obligations has not been significantly updated since legislative changes were implemented in 2007. Changes are needed to recognize underlying societal economic changes and to address inequities in current guidelines that result in lower-income obligors ordered to pay higher percentages of their earnings than those with higher incomes. A 2016 Legislative Child Support Guideline Task Force Report included recommended changes that would make the guideline more equitable and workable for low-income parents.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.**

- **Eliminate Interest on Past-Due Child Support.**  
 Under current state law, child support arrears are assessed interest, which is calculated at the same rate as all other civil judgements. Adding interest to past-due payments makes it even more difficult for a parent to catch up on support. The collection of interest also complicates the automated child support enforcement system because of added complexity in calculating fluctuating monthly payments. Obligor with no or very low incomes (\$10,000 per year) make up 70 percent of those with arrears. Charging interest does not improve timely support and places strain on families.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.**
  
- **Allow Discretion in Making Reports of Arrears to the Credit Bureau.**  
 Under current state law, past-due child support must be reported to consumer reporting agencies when a parent has not paid current monthly support for three months. The credit bureau handling of this information is difficult to keep timely when arrears are met, and other factors can result in inaccuracies. When an obligor is struggling to pay child support, a poor credit rating may contribute to ongoing financial difficulties. Providing discretion to child support workers in reporting or not reporting would address the problems that can arise with this current mandate.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.**
  
- **Provide Flexibility in the Collection of Child Support and Other Cost-of-Care Funds When a Child is in Foster Care.**  
 Under current state law, when a child is placed in foster care, the state must order counties to collect the cost of care for the child from the parent(s). This includes collection from all income and resources attributable to the child, such as child support and social security. Additionally, child support payments must be established and imposed based on the child support guidelines and parental income. Federal rule does not require mandated collection for cost of care. The current state mandate imposes additional burdens on families involved in crisis. Intensified financial instability leads to increased homelessness, unemployment and other major disruptive factors, particularly for families that are already financially stressed. The efforts to collect funding under this mandate far exceeds any money collected. Allowing the courts to consider the specifics in each case would reduce the needless disruptions for these low-income families who maybe experiencing multiple challenges.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.**


**Health Care**
**Health Care Access**

- **Continue to Improve Health Care Access for All Residents.**  
 Insurance costs are surging, threatening access for many people, especially those who recently gained coverage because of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and expansion of Medical Assistance in Minnesota. Health care access needs to be maintained and core elements of the ACA need to be preserved, including coverage for dependents up to age 26, the prohibition of denial of coverage for pre-existing conditions and the prohibition of lifetime caps for coverage. Additionally, the gap between all health care indicators for people of color and white Minnesota residents is the largest in the nation. These sharp racial disparities in health care access, quality and outcomes continue to demand remedy.  
**LEAD: Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).**



- **Enhance Medicaid Asthma Services for Children and Their Families.**  
 Statewide more than seven percent of all children have asthma. Of these, a quarter (25 percent) have asthma that is very poorly or not well controlled. Most children have their first asthma symptoms by age five, impacting early learning and health. Improved asthma management can reduce total asthma costs by 25 percent. By providing home assessment, allergen-reducing equipment, parental education and follow-up, costly emergency room visits can be avoided. The estimated return on investment is more than 4:1. This initiative seeks Medical Assistance coverage for home visits and educational efforts and durable medical equipment to address under-managed asthma in children.  
**LEAD:** City of Minneapolis Health Department and **Ramsey County**.
- **Increase Funding for the Minnesota Eligibility and Technology System (METS).**  
 Increased funding is needed to improve the computer system that counties must use to assess applicant eligibility for health care programs and to efficiently identify and correct errors. Technology improvements are needed to assist financial aid workers following eligibility updates, increased demands for services and the addition of state-mandated data matching activities.  
**LEAD:** Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA).

### **Mental and Chemical Health**

- **Develop Additional Community-Based Mental Health Placement Options and Services.**  
 When counties place an individual in a state-operated facility for mental health or competency restoration services, the county currently must pay an increasing portion of the costs for that individual's care after inpatient-level care is no longer deemed necessary. One of the main reasons for longer stays in state facilities is the critical shortage of appropriate community care settings to which people can be discharged. To begin to address this underlying problem, county payments should be specifically designated for the development of community alternatives.  
**LEAD:** Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).
- **Revise the Civil Commitment Statute to Improve the Response to Defendants Who Are Experiencing Mental Illness and Provide Funding for Competency Restoration.**  
 Under Minnesota's judicial system, the court procedures for determining competency to stand trial and for civil commitment are separate processes. In many cases, these separate processes create a gap in accessing services when a defendant is found incompetent to stand trial but not civilly committed, and therefore, not necessarily referred to services to address their ongoing mental health needs. This limits the response provided by the state and counties, which is not cost effective and fails to consider public safety. Another barrier occurs when jailed defendants who have a mental illness and are civilly committed are not transferred to a state facility within 48 hours. A critical shortage of treatment beds at state treatment facilities frequently delays these transfers. Reforming the civil commitment and competency processes and providing additional community-based services are essential components for improving the state's mental health system.  
**LEAD:** National Association of Mental Illness (NAMI-MN), Minnesota County Attorneys Association, Association of MN Counties (AMC).



## Safe Communities

Support local law enforcement, justice initiatives and corrections services that foster safe communities by investing in preventative, early intervention efforts and community-based correctional services.

### Community Corrections

- **Probation Reform: Limit the Length of Probation with Exceptions for Certain Crimes.**

Minnesota ranks fifth in the nation and percentage of resident per capita who are on probation. Currently, probation sentences can be 30 years or more. Additionally, there is significant inconsistency in probation lengths across jurisdictions. Research indicates that people are most likely to reoffend within 36 months of their initial release and that extended probation does not contribute to public safety generally. Lengthy probations perpetuate racial disparities in the criminal justice system as well. In Ramsey County, which has one of the highest rates of probation revocation, individuals of color are particularly hard-hit, as racial inequities and the hardships they create in housing and employment erode factors that contribute to successful completion of probation. Capping probation lengths – to five years or similar outcome-based time limits – offers offenders the best opportunity for positive community and family involvement. It also contributes to public safety, and it saves taxpayer dollars.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Association of County Correction Act Counties (MACCAC) and the Robina Institute at the University of Minnesota.

- **Support Extension of Post-Conviction Relief Time Limits.**

Under current state law, petitions to the court for post-conviction relief may only be filed for two years following conviction. Relief may be provided by the court when the original conviction violated the Constitution or laws of the United States or the state, or there is newly obtained evidence that establishes a person's actual innocence. An exemption to the two-year limit is needed to provide the opportunity for post-conviction relief to immigrants who have been placed in removal proceedings or who are otherwise unable to apply for an immigration benefit due to an improper or defective conviction. The conviction may involve a misdemeanor from many years ago, which may become the basis of a deportation proceeding, and which is only now recognized as unconstitutional. Judges are not allowed to provide relief in such cases even when the facts of a case clearly provide the basis for relief.

**LEAD:** Ramsey County Attorney's Office.

- **Clarify the Re-Establishment of Voting Rights Following Completion of Prison Time Served for Felonies.**

Current state law allows felons to vote only after all their sentence is completed, including any supervised release or probation. Many states restore voting rights to people convicted of felonies after they are released from prison. Minnesota does not restore these rights until any court ordered supervised release or probation is completed. Additionally, Minnesota's probationary periods are typically much longer than in other states, which means lengthy delays before people can vote again. All residents should be encouraged to be civically engaged. Those who have served their time and are now living, working and paying taxes in their home communities should be able to vote to elect their government representatives.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Second Chance Coalition and Restore the Vote Coalition.

- **Support Mandated Background Checks for All Firearm Purchases, Support the Red-Flag Initiative and Renew the Federal Assault Weapons Ban.**

A lack of consistent oversight of firearm sales has contributed greatly to the proliferation of firearm-involved crimes across the nation. Enacting mandatory background checks for all firearm sales and purchases has proven effective to some degree in addressing this problem. Another firearm measure that could impact firearm-related crime would be providing a legal means for families and others to initiate the temporary seizure of firearms from an individual who is exhibiting erratic and violent behavior. The courts, law enforcement and advocacy groups support these measures as a first step in addressing the gun violence that impacts our communities.

**LEAD:** Minnesota County Attorneys Association and the County Sheriff’s Association.

- **Support the Uniform Collateral Consequences of Conviction Act.**

When individuals have been found guilty of certain crimes, under certain state and federal laws they become permanently or temporarily ineligible for some licenses, employment, housing and educational support and other public benefits. An example is a lifetime ban from working in a nursing home for a person who has been convicted of financial fraud against a vulnerable adult. Exclusion from certain benefits are referred to as collateral sanctions. These sanctions constitute penalties and disadvantage those upon whom they are imposed. While the goal of these sanctions is to protect the public, oftentimes the sanctions outweigh and outlast the impact of a crime, which may impede the ability of those who have offended to become self-sufficient, productive members of their community. The Uniform Collateral Consequences of Conviction Act is aimed at reforming the imposition of restrictions by: 1) educating the public about collateral consequences for specific acts, 2) notifying individuals when they are criminally charged, and again when they are sentenced and released, regarding the sanctions that apply to them, and 3) establishing a means for individuals convicted of a crime to apply for the restoration of their rights.

**LEAD:** Ramsey County Attorney’s Office.



## **Achievement and Employment**

- **Support the Ratification of the Equal Right Amendment (ERA).**

An amendment to the US Constitution, which would provide equal protection under federal law to all people, regardless of gender, is the focus of renewed efforts at both the state and federal level. In the 2019 state legislative session, a resolution supporting ratification of the ERA was passed by the House. Also, in 2019, a US House committee sent to the floor a bill that would extend a deadline by which the required 38 states must have approved the Amendment. The so-called Equal Rights Amendment or ERA needs only one more state to effect ratification. The ERA amendment would bolster pay equity, domestic violence laws and pregnancy discrimination protections, among other equity goals.

**LEAD:** ERA Minnesota.

- **Support Regional Workforce Efforts.**

Workforce efforts at the local, regional and state levels need to be aligned to ensure maximum benefits for individuals and businesses. To successfully compete in the global marketplace, businesses need access to a diverse, skilled workforce. Addressing the economic, racial and gender disparities, particularly for African Americans and American Indians, requires that

career pathways be opened and that barriers be mitigated. Attention to training and education, must be coupled with equity efforts in housing, transportation, child care and other stabilizing factors. Harnessing the state’s active employer leadership and the state and local workforce efforts requires the investment of adequate, ongoing and predictable state funding.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Workforce Council Association (MWCA).

- **SNAP Employment and Training Programs: Support Local Flexibility.**

Currently, Minnesota mandates that able-bodied adults enrolled in the federal and state funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) must participate in the SNAP Education and Training (SNAP E&T) program. The state has the option of making this requirement voluntary, which would allow local programs to strategically match these vital support services to specific participants. The Minnesota Department of Human Services will ask the state legislature for approval to include this change in the state’s SNAP E&T Plan, which must be submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture annually.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Department of Human Services.



## **Transportation and Transit**

Support investment in building and maintaining a transportation and transit system that provides stable, efficient access to all communities, especially where a current lack of transit limits options for employment, housing, educational and recreational opportunities.

### **Funding**

- **Support Statewide Transportation Funding.**

Investment in a comprehensive transportation system is an investment in the economic vitality and sustainability of our communities. The annual funding gap for counties has resulted in deferred basic maintenance, safety concerns, mounting congestion and missed economic growth for businesses and commuters. A comprehensive, balanced and sustainable transportation system including roads, bridges, sidewalks/trails and transit are needed to address the varying needs in different parts of the state.

**LEAD:** Association of Minnesota Counties and the Minnesota County Engineers Association.

- **Amend Motor Vehicle Leased Sales Tax to Include Ramsey and Hennepin Counties as Recipients.**

Currently, metro-area counties receive funding for transportation projects through the leased vehicle tax, except Ramsey and Hennepin, even though most of the funds are collected in these two counties. State statute should be amended to include all metro counties.

**LEAD:** Ramsey County and Hennepin County.

- **Support MnDOT Local Bridge Replacement Program.**

The Local Bridge Replacement (LBRP) and Local Road Improvement Programs (LRIP) administered by the State Aid Division of the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) provide important funding support to counties, cities and townships. This includes funding for the replacement, rehabilitation or removal of deficient bridges on the local road systems and for the construction or reconstruction of local roads. Ramsey County supports MnDOT’s efforts to secure state bridge bonds to fund these transportation programs.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Department of Transportation.



- Support the UP Railroad/BNSF Railway Grade Separation Project.**  
 State funds of \$1 million are requested for predesign and design activities for the Union Pacific/BNSF Railway grade separation project. This work includes environmental design and engineering required for the completion of a grade separation of UP and BNSF track adjacent to Westminster Junction to the east of downtown Saint Paul. This has been identified as a critical junction to move all rail lines through this area and help address rail line congestion.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County.**



## General Government

Support general government policies and practices that contribute to efficient, effective and transparent services that are equally accessible to residents and businesses across all regions of the state.

- Update Ramsey County Governing Statute to Conform Community Corrections Administrative Structure with Other Counties.**  
 Currently, Ramsey County's state governing law, Minnesota Statute 383A, contains language regarding the operations and oversight of the county's Community Corrections Department. More specifically, Minnesota Statute 383A.404, gives joint oversight of Ramsey County's corrections department to the county and the district court. Another statute, Minnesota Statute 401.02, which was enacted after the full state takeover of the courts, designated all community corrections counties – including Ramsey County - as the sole authority for their corrections departments, giving them responsibility for funding, structure, administration, operation, management, and supervision. In 2018, the county and the district court established the County-Court Joint Committee to explore better ways to work together. To resolve the ambiguities of current state law, Minnesota Statute 383A.404 should be repealed. Further, the county and the court plan to continue the County-Court Joint Committee to facilitate ongoing collaboration.  
**LEAD: Ramsey County.**
- Hold Counties Harmless for Department of Human Services Errors that Require Repayment of Federal Funds or Result in the Loss of Budgeted Federal Program Funding.**  
 In a state supervised, county-administered system such as Minnesota, counties rely on the state to implement and communicate federal regulations, provide billing systems/technologies, offer training, and oversee compliance with federal regulations. Counties should not be expected to be financially responsible for errors within these systems. In the recently announced Department of Human Services errors involving the overpayment of approximately \$9 million for chemical health services, counties were following department directives and had no knowledge of the miscalculations. Repayment of these improperly-directed federal Medicaid funds should be the responsibility of the state. In addition, immediate solutions are needed for the ongoing loss of Title IV-E reimbursement for counties due to the state's lack of compliance with federal enhanced background check requirements for staff at child care facilities.  
**LEAD: Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).**

## Property Taxes

- **Revise Eminent Domain Process.**

Current state law requires that property owners who are challenging an eminent domain valuation must submit their basic property valuation five days before an eminent domain-related commission hearing date. This gives counties scant opportunity to amend initial offers. Increasing this timeline to 45 days prior to a scheduled hearing would promote settlement and reduce litigation costs. Another way to contain public costs associated with eminent domain actions is to tie the interest rate for awards to the US Treasury Bill secondary market and establish parameters for attorney's fees.

**LEAD: Ramsey County Assessor's Office.**

- **Allow Use of Federal Identification Numbers In Lieu of Social Security Numbers on Homestead Classification Applications.**

Under current law, only property owners with a valid Social Security number are allowed to apply for homestead classification. Under the proposal, property owners with a valid individual taxpayer identification number issued by the Internal Revenue Service would also be allowed to apply for homestead classification and then be able to participate in the Minnesota Property Tax Homestead Credit Refund.

**LEAD: Ramsey County Assessor's Office.**

- **Allow Flexibility of Interest Rates for Contracts for Deed on Tax Forfeited Properties.**

Counties boards are authorized to sell at auction or allow repurchase of certain tax forfeited properties by prior owners using a contract for deed (CFD). State statute requires that the interest rate charged on these CFDs must be the same as the rate charged for late payment of property taxes, which is currently ten percent. This creates a barrier to low-income families wanting to purchase or repurchase these properties. Lowering this interest rate to the rate charged for homestead Confession of Judgement, which is two percent above the prime rate charged by banks or five percent, whichever is higher, would provide a path to home ownership to families with more modest incomes.

**LEAD: Ramsey County Assessor's Office.**

## Data Practices and Data Systems

- **Balance Data Practices Laws to Foster Government Efficiency and Transparency.**

The efficient, transparent operation of government is enhanced by well-balanced data practices and privacy laws. Defined public data access, coupled with prudent protection of information that is personal and defined as private or non-public, allows residents to be informed of government actions. Technological advances and changes in business practices that rely less on paper and more on electronic formats (such as email) are driving the most recent review of current data practices laws.

Local governments are responsible for setting data retention schedules and for filing periodic reports with the state. If state-mandated retention schedules are further defined to include fixed retention intervals, flexibility for local governments would be diminished – without any expected improvement in service delivery to residents. Additionally, overly prescriptive requirements may overwhelm local technical capabilities. Updates to data practices laws should consider the costs to state and local governments and how these laws improve access; they should also address the occurrence of intentionally disruptive, expensive data requests that provide little or no benefit to the public.

**LEAD: Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC).**

- **Increase Funding for the Technology Systems Employed by Counties and the State to Support State- and Federal-Mandated Programs.**

Increased funding is needed to improve the variety of computer systems that counties must use to administer and deliver a broad variety of programs in social services, public health, and correction to ensure that the correct services are being delivered to those who are eligible. Protecting the data privacy of our residents is also a central charge that requires updated technology and programs. One of the most important systems is the METS, which is used by county human services departments to assess applicant eligibility for health care programs and to efficiently identify and correct errors. Technology improvements are needed to assist financial aid workers following eligibility updates, increased demands for services and the addition of state-mandated data matching activities.

**LEAD:** Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).

### Census

- **Require Access to Multi-Unit Housing for US Census Workers.**

Minnesota is at risk of losing one of its eight congressional seats and an electoral college vote, should the upcoming census under-count the actual population. Renters are at particularly high-risk of being missed in the count because census workers cannot gain access to apartment units. Ramsey County residents are more likely to be renters than other state residents (40% compared to 25% statewide) and most live in multi-unit housing, making an undercount in Ramsey County more likely. An accurate count is important to the state to avoid the possible loss of a congressional seat and an electoral college vote. Additionally, an undercount could also impact federal allocations for programs such as highway aid, Medicaid, SNAP and Section 8 Housing.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Census Mobilization Partnership.

### Environment

- **Fund Ash Tree Wood Waste Processing Program.**

Emerald Ash Borer is killing ash trees at an alarming rate across 20 Minnesota counties, including Ramsey County. Processing these dead trees is expensive but could be partially off-set by using this waste for biomass fuel, which could be then be used by Saint Paul Cogen (District Energy), as well as for research and development efforts to recover value from wood waste. Currently there are no alternatives for this volume of wood waste. This material, by law, cannot be landfilled. It cannot be placed in the trash for delivery to a resource recovery facility, and open burning is not allowed. Saint Paul Cogen provides renewable energy to a substantial portion of downtown Saint Paul (including Ramsey County buildings) and produces electricity sold to Xcel Energy under a power purchase agreement. That agreement expires in 2023, and the economics of wood waste management will change as a result. State support is necessary to allow wood waste to continue to be handled by Saint Paul Cogen. Should funding not be available, it is likely the Saint Paul Cogen would discontinue use of wood waste as fuel, convert to natural gas, and cease producing electricity.

**LEAD:** Saint Paul Cogen.

- **Support Efforts to Prevent and Clean-Up Trichloroethylene (TCE) Contamination.**

Trichloroethylene (TCE) contamination threatens people and wildlife exposed to this volatile chemical compound. State funding is needed to support state and local public health efforts to prevent TCE release and environmental contamination, to identify safer alternatives for TCE, to identify incidence of exposure, to provide services for those impacted by exposure, and for remediation when contamination occurs. In addition, ensuring standardized reporting by industry and coordinated responses by government agencies are essential to addressing the misuse or accidental release of TCE into the environment.

**LEAD:** Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.



## Parks and Libraries

### Libraries

- **Increase Regional Library Basic System Support (RLBSS) to \$17 Million.**  
 Funding for this program has been flat since state FY 2009, at \$13.57 million annually. Distributed through the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA), RLBSS funds provide direct support for Ramsey County Library services, programs, staff training, and technology infrastructure. Collective purchases made by MELSA with RLBSS funding enhance free access to online digital resources and database services for Ramsey County residents. If this funding is allocated, libraries also support adoption of a Minnesota Library Association endorsed distribution formula that reflects population and local tax base.  
**LEAD:** Metropolitan Library Service Agency.
- **Support Library Construction and Remodeling Grants for Libraries.**  
 Under a proposal from the Metropolitan Library Service Agency and the Minnesota Library Association, a \$10 million appropriation would be made to an existing grant program under MN Statute 134.45. The library construction grant program augments existing capital funds for construction and renovations to better serve local residents. The renovation project at the Ramsey County Library in Maplewood may benefit from this state appropriation to libraries.  
**LEAD:** Metropolitan Library Service Agency and the Minnesota Library Association.

## Ramsey County Platform Support of Other Positions

In addition to the initiatives contained in this platform, the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners generally supports the legislative recommendations of the local units of government within the county and organizations in which it holds membership, including, but not limited to:

- Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC) and its associated professional organizations, including:
  - Local Public Health Association of MN (LPHA).
  - Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).
  - Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO).
  - Minnesota Community Corrections Act Counties (MCCAC).
- Minnesota County Engineer Association (MCEA).
- Ramsey/Washington Recycling and Energy Board.
- Partnership on Waste and Energy.
- Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MWAD).
- Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM).
- Minnesota Workforce Council Association (MWCA).
- Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA).
- Metropolitan Library Services Association (MLSA).

The County Board may choose to take a different position on individual items within the platforms of these and other organizations whose platforms they generally support.

The county board may also consider additional positions in response to issues that emerge during the legislative session.



## Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
Room 220 Courthouse  
Saint Paul, MN 55102  
*ramseycounty.us*

**Nicole Joy Frethem**  
District 1  
651-266-8362  
Nicole.Frethem@ramseycounty.us

**Rafael Ortega**  
District 5  
651-266-8361  
Rafael.E.Ortega@ramseycounty.us

**Mary Jo McGuire**  
District 2  
651-266-8359  
MaryJo.McGuire@ramseycounty.us

**Jim McDonough**  
District 6  
651-266-8350  
Jim.McDonough@ramseycounty.us

**Trista MatasCastillo**  
District 3  
651-266-8360  
Trista.MatasCastillo@ramseycounty.us

**Victoria Reinhardt**  
District 7  
651-266-8363  
Victoria.Reinhardt@ramseycounty.us

**Toni Carter**  
District 4  
651-266-8364  
Toni.Carter@ramseycounty.us

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## Ramsey County Government Relations

15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
Room 250 Courthouse  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

**Jennifer O'Rourke**  
*Director*  
651-266-8007 (office) 651-724-3461 (cell)  
Jennifer.O'Rourke@ramseycounty.us

**Melissa Finnegan**  
*Government Relations Specialist*  
651-266-8022 (office) 651-278-8374 (cell)  
Melissa.Finnegan@ramseycounty.us



**Government Relations**

250 Courthouse  
15 West Kellogg Blvd.  
Saint Paul, MN 55102

[ramseycounty.us](http://ramseycounty.us)