

Ramsey County Legislative Priorities: 2025 State Legislative Platform (DRAFT)

LEGISLATIVE TOP PRIORITIES

Family and community stabilization:

- Investing in housing stability—affordability and transitions out of homelessness.
- Funding to implement the Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act.
- Preventing and responding to youth violence through innovative community programming and investments.
- Pursue ongoing state aids for Ramsey County to address unfunded mandates and other urgent county needs.

Systems transformation:

- Improving mental and behavioral health systems and support.
- Reforming criminal justice approaches, centering community.

Economic competitiveness and inclusion:

- Funding for Ramsey County bonding requests.
- Investing in workforce supports for all residents.
- Responding to climate change by prioritizing adaptation and resiliency.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT REQUESTS

RAMSEY COUNTY BONDING REQUESTS

Rice Creek Commons Infrastructure \$25 million

The Park at RiversEdge \$20 million

Aldrich Arena & Community Event Center \$6.5 million

Advancing Racial and Health Equity and Shared Community Power

INCREASED HEALTH CARE ACCESS

- Support legislation to address racial disparities in health care access, quality and outcomes.
- Support legislation to increase Minnesota Eligibility Technology System funding to develop needed technological improvements to help county financial aid workers more effectively serve residents.
- Oppose legislation that would change or remove key Affordable Care Act provisions.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Support legislation to develop additional community-based mental health placement options and services to shorten stays in state facilities and reduce costs after inpatient care is no longer necessary.
- Support legislation to address the comprehensive substance abuse, mental and behavioral health needs of the community, foster coordination among partners and ensure parity in services across populations.
- Support policy changes to provide clarity within the use of force protocol regarding transport holds for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Support legislation to address student health needs, including increased reimbursement for school-based clinics as well as embedding social workers in schools to assess needs and support mental health.
- Support legislation to resolve the gaps between the criminal court process and a person's access to mental health care when the court deems someone, an adult or a youth, incompetent to participate in their defense due to a mental illness. Support legislation to increase capacity for Rule 20 evaluations and increase community-based supports and local hospital capacities to quickly readmit people who need care so they can avoid any further police interactions.
- Pursue adequate ongoing funding support for the Youth Mental Health Urgency Room created by the 2022 legislature.
- Support legislation to address acute, complex behavioral health placements and community services and clarify the state's safety net role in providing and funding these critical services.
- Support legislation and funding to support the families, especially children, of murder, suicide, or murder-suicide victims.
- Pursue legislation mandating that the annual cost increases for the Cost of Care per diem rates in state-operated inpatient facilities be capped at the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

COMMUNITY-CENTERED CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS

- Support legislation that further reforms the investigation and prosecution of fatal shootings and wrongful actions by police, increases police accountability and transparency, raises standards of conduct and supports officer excellence, partners officers with the communities they serve, repairs and builds community trust, and enhances community-centered public safety.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (ERA)

- Support the ratification of the ERA to provide equal protection under federal law to all people, regardless of gender.

PUBLIC HEALTH SUPPORT

- Support increased funding for infectious disease response, including, but not limited to: building and maintaining our workforce, specifically for our 24/7 facilities; community education, engagement and outreach, case investigation and contact tracing, testing, delivery of essential services, and distribution of vaccines with specific focus on underserved communities, kids, youth and young adults.
- Pursue legislation to ensure adequate funding to support increased response expectations for local public health agencies to investigate elevated blood lead levels in children.

RACIAL EQUITY IN BUDGETING

- Support legislation to develop a state-based racial equity budgeting tool that will provide racial equity impacts for legislative budgeting decisions.

Residents First: Effective, Efficient and Accessible Operations

DATA PRACTICES ACT AND PRIVACY REFORMS

- Support maintaining flexibility in local governments' data retention schedules and reporting requirements to avoid overwhelming local technical capabilities.
- Support legislation that considers local costs and improved public access when considering updates to the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act and address the use of intentionally disruptive and expensive data requests that provide little or no public benefit.

HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

- Support legislation to ensure state compliance with federal background check requirements that endanger Title IV-E reimbursements to foster care providers.
- Support the modernization of human services programs and processes to improve outcomes and service delivery.
- Support a health care eligibility system that serves as a sustainable platform for performing health care functions and fully integrates with other technology systems.
- Support legislation to simplify and modernize the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), General Assistance and Minnesota Supplemental Aid reporting requirements.
- Support legislation to address workforce challenges and resource shortages in the home and community-based services and disability services system, including increasing wage minimums and other incentives.
- Support continued investment in new, modern technology infrastructure for counties to streamline health care, financial assistance and social service program administration, enhance data and program integrity, and promote efficient service delivery, with a focus on programs connected to MNBenefits applications.

- Support funding to add triage capabilities and improve responsiveness for technology systems tied to the MNBenefits application program.
- Support legislation to simplify, shorten, and/or streamline MnCHOICES reassessments for individuals who have not had a significant change in their health condition.
- Support legislation to increase reimbursement rates for providing waiver case management services.
- Support legislation to increase state funding provided to lead agencies for MNChoices administrative costs related to long term care consultation services.

LIBRARIES

- Support legislation to increase Regional Library Basic System Support funding for residents' access to diverse digital and database resources that reflect the needs of the community.
- Support library construction and remodeling grants to fund safety and renovations at libraries.
- Oppose reductions to Arts & Cultural Heritage Legacy funding for regional public library systems.
- Support legislation to create a task force to review and suggest recommendations for a funding mechanism to support the statewide law library system.
- Support limits on e-book prices.

FUNDING FOR PARKS AND TRAILS

- Support legislation to ensure that the Ramsey County park system receives a fair share of Legacy Amendment funding, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund funding or other environmental stewardship grants.
- Support state bonding for capital projects for Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails, which leverages Metropolitan Council dollars and benefits projects in Ramsey County.
- Support legislation to ensure that the Ramsey County park system and other local agencies in the metro regional park system receive the full 40 percent for operations and maintenance as mandated in state law. Currently the Legislature only funds it at 14 percent.

COUNTY PROCUREMENT CHANGES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

- Pursue legislation that would authorize the county to expand the amount for bids to no greater than \$500,000. Currently, the county can solicit small businesses for bids no greater than \$250,000. This change will enable counties to increase its overall spending with small businesses, which includes businesses owned by women and people of color.
- Support legislation that would authorize the county to use cooperative contracts resulting from competitive proposals in addition to competitive bids and competitive quotes. This change to allow competitive proposals will enable Ramsey County to allow use of cooperative contracts for supplies, equipment, materials, labor services and construction regardless of the type of solicitation so long as there was a competitive solicitation process, align the use of cooperative contracts with the State and further Ramsey County involvement with the cooperative contract initiative lead by NACo.

DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Pursue and support state efforts and funding for digital inclusion and equity to ensure all residents have access to affordable broadband choices, computing devices, and multilingual digital literacy training. This includes, but is not limited to: increasing the federal standard for broadband speeds; increasing the availability of high-quality and competitive broadband choices for residents in single family homes, public housing, and apartment buildings and condominiums, particularly in urban digital desert census tracts.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

- Support modernizing newspaper publication requirements of county board proceedings and financial information.

Advancing a Holistic Approach to Strengthen Families

CHILD PROTECTION REFORMS

- Pursue ongoing funding to fully implement the African American Family Preservation Act.
- Support Families First legislation allowing 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 that help avoid compounding the trauma out-of-home displacements often cause while ensuring the funding and operational mechanisms are efficient and sustainable.
- Pursue legislation to create an exception or variance to the background check policy, enabling county staff to make an informed placement decision without relying on the state.
- Pursue legislation to allow autonomy to determine which applicants to Ramsey County's Children's Services Review Panel have been impacted by our system, represent the community we serve and should be selected to participate on the panel.
- Support legislation requiring coordination between law enforcement and county child protection agencies to occur prior to a child being removed.
- Support legislation to increase required training for law enforcement officers on child protection and the use of emergency holds, particularly regarding the impact of child protection removals on children and families.
- Support child protection and foster care systems change and reform developed in partnership with community.
- Support legislation that ensures counties are able to adequately administer the foster care system while also ensuring that Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Retirement Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) funds are used to meet the best interests of an eligible child in foster care.

CHILDCARE REFORMS

- Support childcare licensing practice improvements to simplify rules and promote improved relations and support between providers, county regulators, and the state.

- Support efforts to implement refinements to training, county liability insurance requirements to foster best practices in all childcare settings.
- Support additional state investments in childcare infrastructure and workforce.

CHILD SUPPORT

- Pursue legislation requiring employers to report new hires of 1099 independent contractors to the Minnesota Department of Human Services to increase payments and enhance fairness of child support orders.
- Pursue legislation to modify the child support redirection statute to enable counties the administrative authority to stop a redirection of support when it is in the best interest of the child.

HUNGER RELIEF

- Support additional funding and policy changes to address hunger and food insecurity among Ramsey County residents, particularly racially and ethnically diverse communities.
- Support more flexibility in state funding to allow community-based organizations to purchase culturally-connected and medically appropriate foods and fund food rescue programs.
- Support policy change and funding to allow food growing spaces; increasing community resiliency, urban agriculture and local food economies.

ECONOMIC SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES

- Support legislation to provide cash payments or other economic supports to families in a way that will not make them ineligible for economic assistance programs, with the goal of removing barriers so families can self-stabilize.

IMMIGRANT, REFUGEE, MIGRANT AND ASYLUM-SEEKING FAMILIES

- Support budget legislation and policies that ease navigation and access to essential wraparound services such as emergency and transitional shelter, medical assistance, emergency food, basic cash support, and legal assistance.
- Support the acceleration of processing work authorization applications by USCIS for new arrivals, including those with temporary protection status (TPS), those granted humanitarian parole, and asylum applicants.
- Support legislation and policies that increase access to immigration legal resources aimed at keeping families and children together as they undergo immigration proceedings.

Intergenerational Prosperity for Racial and Economic Inclusion

RICE CREEK COMMONS

- Pursue \$25 million in funding for the Rice Creek Commons development project in Arden Hills on the former Twin Cities Army Ammunition (TCAAP) site. The project consists of building stormwater infrastructure and a public roadway (known as the Spine Road) that will connect County Road H and Highway 96 through the Rice Creek Commons development.

THE PARK AT RIVERSEDGE

- Pursue \$20 million in funding for the Park at RiversEdge. RiversEdge is an innovative public-private project revitalizing the historic riverfront and expanding public access to the Mississippi River. The Park at RiversEdge is a new nine-acre urban park that will provide a land bridge extension of the public realm space. The funds will be used for the design, engineering, and/or construction of underlying infrastructure, parking to support the site, and the park itself. The Park at RiversEdge will include expanded public access to the river from the downtown bluff to the shoreline, community gathering space for public events, and trails that connect to the river and to other downtown destinations and park trail systems.

STATE-LOCAL FISCAL PARTNERSHIP

- Support efforts by the Association of Minnesota Counties working group to review changes to the County Program Aid (CPA) formula. The current formula creates inequities for taxpayers by artificially capping aid to counties with populations over 500,000.
- Pursue ongoing state aid for Minnesota African-American Family Preservation Act (MAAFPA) implementation, solid waste management, and community corrections, and other urgent county needs.
- Pursue a payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) to mitigate reduced property tax capacity in Ramsey County.
- Support an annual state omnibus bonding bill to address the backlog of public infrastructure and regional projects.
- Support additional state funds for elections implementation by local entities.
- Support changes to the county share formula for cannabis tax revenues to reflect the disparate impact cannabis prohibition has had on certain communities.

REGIONAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS

- Support efforts to align local, regional and statewide investments for workforce development programs to ensure the unique needs of businesses are met while supporting job seekers with career pathways needed to obtain family sustaining wages and benefits.
- Support legislation to address existing economic, racial and gender disparities, especially among Black/African American, American Indian and other racially/ethnically diverse communities, by coupling training and education with equity efforts in housing, transportation, childcare and other stabilizing factors.
- Support sufficient, ongoing state funding to provide workforce programming to those who are unemployed, under-employed or under-represented in the workforce to reduce disparities and to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce.
- Support additional funding and broader allowable uses of funding to provide workforce development supports for residents beyond what traditional program funds (WIOA/TANF) allow. Broader uses would include training stipends to enhance upward mobility, work tools and equipment, basic needs payments, and child enrichment activities.
- Support legislation that excludes payments made under Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) programs from income assessments under public benefit programs.

- Support removal of employment barriers including barriers to obtaining a driver's license, which is a critical workforce credential. Pursue state investment in Ramsey County to create more employment and training supports and opportunities for those who are justice impacted. Support may include re-entry navigators.
- Pursue additional funding of \$750,000 to ensure continuity of the Tech Squad program and to support the development of public and private pathways for tech industry careers. This program, which addresses race, gender and socioeconomic gaps in the tech industry, was established with previous funding of \$1 million.

EXPANDING HRA ELIGIBILITY

- Pursue statutory changes to Ramsey County's Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) that will allow the use of resources for businesses while continuing to prioritize housing fund investment. Statutory authority in Minn. Stat. 469.1082 and the use of special legislation allows the HRA to expand to include Economic Development Authority (EDA) powers. Ramsey County seeks this expansion to enable greater economic partnership with cities that opt in.

AFFORDABLE AND STABLE HOUSING

- Pursue funding and policy legislation in partnership with the Heading Home Ramsey Continuum of Care to fund emergency shelter, day shelter and winter warming spaces, and critical supportive services such as outreach, shelter entry, and diversion for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
- Support increased funding for homeless prevention programs, including the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP) and Local Homeless Prevention Aid (LHPA).
- Pursue clarifying language to the Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) that allow up to 10% of aid to be used for program administration.
- Support increased funds and housing infrastructure bonds for the production and preservation of affordable housing.
- Support increased funds for housing programs that help first-time homeowners, those experiencing mental illness or other disabilities, those with criminal records, large families, families seeking reunification, veterans and those who are homeless.
- Support legislation that advances policy and practice reforms that reduce barriers to affordable homeownership, such as reducing the cost of production.
- Pursue an increase in the number of Housing Support Demonstration beds to 500, in accordance with last year's expansion of the program to all seven metro area counties, and an allocation of 28% of those beds to Ramsey County in accordance with the formula developed by the Regional Metro Committee.

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

- Support Conversion of Underutilized Buildings (CUB) credit for developers pursuing conversion of downtown office buildings.

PROPERTY TAX ASSISTANCE

- Support transitioning the special property tax refund to a property tax credit that is automatically calculated and issued to qualifying homeowners on their annual property tax statement, thereby reducing property tax regressivity and helping keep home ownership affordable. Currently, state statute requires homeowners to apply for the special property tax refund.

INTEREST RATES ON TAX-FORFEITED PROPERTY

- Support legislation to allow the county to set market-based interest rates on contracts for deed for tax-forfeited properties to reduce barriers for low-income families interested in purchasing or repurchasing these properties and provide a low-barrier pathway to homeownership for those with more modest incomes.

TAX FORFEITURE

- Support revisions to the Tax Forfeited Lands Settlement (MN Laws 2024, Ch. 113, Sec. 1) to allow counties to recoup 100% of their costs associated with managing and cleaning up tax forfeited property before transferring remaining proceeds to state.

TRANSPORTATION AND TRANSIT FUNDING

- Support statewide transportation funding that adequately invests in the long-term sustainability of local communities and addresses deferred basic maintenance, safety concerns, mounting congestion and missed economic growth opportunities for businesses and commuters. A comprehensive, balanced and sustainable transportation solution should include robust funding for a multimodal transportation system including roads, bridges, sidewalks/trails and transit and address the varying needs in different parts of the state.
- Support legislation alongside Hennepin County to amend the Motor Vehicle Leased Sales Tax (MVLST) to include Ramsey and Hennepin counties as recipients so revenues can be spent in the metro-area counties where most funds are collected.
- Support investments in MnDOT's Local Bridge Replacement and Local Road Improvement Programs to fund the replacement, rehabilitation or removal of deficient bridges on the local road systems and for the construction or reconstruction of local roads.
- Oppose attempts to shift transit costs to counties.
- Support federal and state funding for major transportation and transit projects in Ramsey County that are extremely complex in nature, involve multiple jurisdictions and communities, span many years for project development, and require funding from multiple sources to complete. Some of these include:
 - Highway 36/Century Avenue (Highway 120) interchange.
 - Purple Line (Rush Line) Bus Rapid Transit
 - Rondo Community Land Bridge.
 - UP Railroad/BNSF Railway grade separation adjacent to Westminster Junction.
- Support federal and state funding for passenger rail planning, design, implementation, operation, as well as freight capacity improvements that would benefit passenger rail service.

- Pursue a long-range funding mechanism to cover the increased cost of rail liability insurance at Union Depot resulting from the launch of the Borealis train and future rail passenger service.
- Support for equity in funding of transportation development that helps to repair and acknowledge past wrongs with infrastructure investments.
- Support reform of the governance for Metropolitan Council with a focus on accountability, transparency, and cooperative partnership.
- Support a sales tax exemption on transit projects.
- Support a requirement that Metro Transit consult with locals when they ask for state or federal funds, so all parties are aware of project costs.
- Pursue speed camera enforcement similar to that authorized for Minneapolis and Mendota Heights in 2024.

Putting Well-being and Community at the Center of Justice System Transformation

RESPONSE OPTIONS FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

- Pursue ongoing funding for culturally appropriate, intensely therapeutic, community-based home placement options for youth involved in the justice system.
- Support funding for the creation of family support groups, community-based sites for conflict or crisis de-escalation, and other resources to prevent incarceration and support youth and families through all stages of the justice process.
- Support legislation to align licensing requirements for service providers across state agencies to reduce barriers, along with additional investments for providers to sustain and improve programs that can fully support youth and their families.

COMMUNITY SUPERVISION FUNDING

- Support full funding for the community supervision formula and further refinement of the policy language enacted in 2023.

EXTENSION OF POST-CONVICTION RELIEF

- Support legislation to extend the current two-year post-conviction relief time limit for immigrants who face deportation proceedings or are otherwise unable to apply for immigration benefits due to improper, defective or outdated misdemeanor convictions.

GUN SAFETY

- Support legislation that reduces gun violence through a community-centered approach to violence prevention, including funding for focused deterrence, non-fatal shooting investigations, and funding for the development of new response types and enhancements to dispatch countywide resources.
- Support legislation authorizing cities and counties to set criteria for allowing weapons on their properties.

UNIFORM COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES OF CONVICTION ACT

- Support legislation that gives those who have become permanently or temporarily ineligible for employment, housing or some licenses a means to apply for a restoration of their rights and notifies individuals when they are criminally charged, and again when they are sentenced and released, about the sanctions that apply to them.

FINES & FEES

- Support legislation to increase flexibility to waive fines and fees charged in the criminal justice system.
- Pursue legislation to eliminate the removal of a driver's license as a penalty for past due medical payments or allow counties the authority to waive the debt owed to them.
- Pursue legislation to increase funds available for auto theft prevention and intervention programs by increasing the auto theft fund surcharge to \$1.00 per vehicle every six months.

CASH BAIL REFORM

- Support legislation to eliminate the harm to community caused by the cash bail system by allowing the use of a risk assessment tool to determine whether to release individuals back into the community.

EXPUNGEMENTS

- Support legislation to centralize and automate the process of sealing criminal records for low-level felonies and lesser crimes after the waiting periods in the expungement statute.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PREVENTION

- Support funding to fully address the shelter and other needs of domestic violence victims.
- Support funding for programs targeted at reducing domestic violence rates in our community.

COURT SYSTEM FUNDING

- Pursue state funding to support the four specialty treatment courts run by the Second Judicial District. These courts provide alternative adjudication of certain DWIs, mental health related criminal cases, cases involving veterans, and cases involving substance abuse.
- Pursue legislation that would ensure reimbursement for county costs associated with providing state-mandated defense attorneys for Child in Need of Protection Services (CHIPS), civil commitment, and public housing eviction cases.

ALLIED RADIO MATRIX FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE (ARMER) FUNDING

- Support sustainable, ongoing funding to update and maintain the ARMER Radio System that services public safety and public service radio users statewide.

HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTHCARE FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS AND INDIVIDUALS IN THE COMMUNITY

Support legislation directing the Department of Human Services to submit a Section 1115 Medicaid Demonstration Waiver application to:

- (1) allow incarcerated individuals to access to proper health care in jails;
- (2) update Medicaid's prohibition on paying for health care and mental health treatment delivered in institutions;
- (3) allow incarcerated individuals to submit an application for SNAP and other benefits prior to their date of release; and
- (4) allow for Medicaid reimbursement for efforts related to the social determinants of health, including but not limited to, support for food security, transportation, housing, and mental health support.

Responding to Climate Change and Increasing Community Resilience

EQUITABLE CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

- Support legislation that mitigates contributions to climate change and promotes sustainability in county operations.
- Support legislation that resources the expansion of adaptation and mitigation efforts and responds to the impacts of increasingly extreme weather.
- Support legislation that focuses on increasing use of local, clean energy to create jobs and diversify the local economy.
- Support legislation and funding that protects and enhances natural environments, including efforts that address reforestation needs for local governments impacted by the Emerald Ash Borer.
- Support legislation that resources initiatives focused on the mental and physical health impacts of climate change.

WASTE AND ENERGY EFFORTS

- Support legislation to encourage the development and use of new technologies to address organic waste and create renewable energy resources, including by streamlining and adopting new permitting requirements that differentiate new technologies from waste-to-energy regulations developed in the 1980s.
- Support the legislative efforts of the Partnership on Waste and Energy and the Ramsey/Washington Recycling and Energy Board.
- Pursue, in collaboration with Washington County, additional funding to support the creation of a new anaerobic digestion facility for the east metro.

Aligning Talent Attraction, Retention & Promotion

EMPLOYEE SUPPORTS

- Pursue legislation to make any necessary changes to Ramsey County statute in order to implement initiatives that advance our primary goal of attracting, retaining and promoting talented employees across races, classes, cultures, genders, ages and abilities.
- Support legislation that allows county assessors to use more virtual and online tools in their appraisal work.

RAMSEY COUNTY 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 Minnesota (LPHA).
 - Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators (MACSSA).
 - Minnesota Association of County Officers (MACO).
 - Minnesota Association of Community Corrections Act Counties (MCCAC).
 - Minnesota County IT Leadership Association (MCITLA).
 - Solid Waste Administrators Association (SWAA).
 - Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers (MACVSO).
- Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM).
- Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA).
- Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MAWD).
- Minnesota County Engineers Association (MCEA).
- Minnesota Association of Workforce Boards (MAWB).

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.