POPE COUNTY MINNESOTA

POPE COUNTY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2025

Prevent Cost-Shifts to Counties for State Mandated and Previously-Funded Services.

The Governor's current budget and current session legislation is designed to balance the State budget on the back of County taxpayers by shifting costs for mandated and previously-funded services to Counties. Particularly concerning is the scheme to require local County taxpayers to bear the cost of State mandated Human Services expenses. If adopted, this mandate alone would require Pope County raise its property tax levy by more than 5%, not taking into account any other mandated expenses (like the planned implementation of MAAFPA). Pope County asks that any adopted legislation and State budget should not balance the State's aggressive spending in other areas and its projected structural deficit on the County and its local property taxpayers.

Provide Local Tax Relief and Stop Property Tax Hikes by Protecting County Program Aid.

Equally important to Pope County as avoiding mandated cost-shifts to Counties is the preservation of County Program Aid payments to County governments. The State-mandated services provided by Counties are extensive, of which modest County Program Aid payments are a small acknowledgement of the burden local property taxpayers would bear if this aid were to be diminished or eliminated. Without these supports, local County property taxpayers would see an immediate increase in property tax levies of more than 6% on average without CPA. Make no mistake, any action by the State to eliminate or diminish County Program Aid is a tax increase on local taxpayers.

Support SCORE Grants and End the General Fund Drain on the SWMT.

Counties are being challenged to provide solid waste management, facilities, and programs that meet the needs of the public and wishes of policy makers. SCORE is the primary state funding to local governments for waste management and is funded with Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) revenue. The establishment of the Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) in 1997 was intended to help state and local governments address waste management issues, but instead has been diverted over the years to the general fund for unrelated purposes. With growing costs, instead of the 27% of the SWMT going to the State general fund, counties need 100% of the SWMT to be dedicated to waste management.

Assure Adequate Funding for Rural Transportation Infrastructure.

With over 90% of Minnesota's road miles and 80% of its bridges on local road systems, current funding projections are inadequate to maintain and improve local roads and bridges under County jurisdiction. Pope County supports addressing this unsustainable funding gap through a multi-pronged approach. Pope County supports ongoing, dedicated funding for transportation in rural areas to address ongoing funding shortfalls, including those to the Highway Users Tax Distribution Fund. Pope County supports the robust utilization of bonding for rural transportation projects. Finally, Pope County also supports local option sales tax reform that allocates transportation funding more equitably and does not disproportionately favor urban areas and regional centers to the detriment of the state's rural areas.

Other Concerns

Pope County's other concerns include **Protecting County-Based Purchasing** for delivery of Minnesota Health Care Programs by strengthening the quality of and access to health care in County communities and supporting local health care providers; **Promoting Child Care Availability to Benefit Local Families and Economies** to attract and retain residents and employees in the community by supporting policies and programs to provide child care placements, through supports for current and new child care centers; **Preservation of Local Control Related to Land Use Issues** to assure local governments are at the table and have a voice about where impactful development and uses are to be located in their own communities; **Increasing PILT Payments to Counties** to compensate for lost local tax revenues; and **Continuation of Border-to-Border Grant Funding** to connect all Minnesotans.

Thank you for the work you do on behalf of our citizens and taxpayers, and please remember their best interests and well-being in the decisions you make during this and every legislative session.