



# Board of County Commissioners Agenda Request

**5C**  
Agenda Item #

**Requested Meeting Date:** November 26, 2024

**Title of Item:** Approve 2025 Aitkin County Legislative Priorities

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> REGULAR AGENDA  <input type="checkbox"/> CONSENT AGENDA	<b>Action Requested:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approve/Deny Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Adopt Resolution (attach draft) <input type="checkbox"/> Hold Public Hearing <i>*provide copy of hearing notice that was published</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Direction Requested <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Item <input type="checkbox"/> Information Only
<b>Submitted by:</b> Jessica Seibert		<b>Department:</b> Administration
<b>Presenter (Name and Title):</b> Jessica Seibert, County Administrator		<b>Estimated Time Needed:</b> 20 min.
<b>Summary of Issue:</b> Attached are the 2025 Aitkin County Legislative Priorities incorporating feedback provided by department heads and Commissioners.		
<b>Alternatives, Options, Effects on Others/Comments:</b>		
<b>Recommended Action/Motion:</b> Approve 2025 Aitkin County Legislative Priorities.		
<b>Financial Impact:</b> Is there a cost associated with this request? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No What is the total cost, with tax and shipping? \$ Is this budgeted? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>Please Explain:</i>		

# 2025 Aitkin County Legislative Priorities

## Administration

1. Aitkin County supports promoting legislation that preserves tax base in response to increased property tax appeals, utility tax refunds, and potential “dark store” assessing practices.
2. Aitkin County supports policies that strengthen rural ambulance services including policies that increase Medicaid reimbursement rates, provide ongoing and reliable funding, and focus on building the pipeline of EMT’s and Paramedics through ongoing scholarships.

## Assessor

1. Simplification of the property tax system. We should support legislation that would reduce the number of classifications of property in Minnesota. When assessors spend lots of time classifying property, they have less time available to value property. The complexity makes the system difficult for most people to understand. After recent legislative changes, Minnesota now has a total of 68 classifications which is the most of any State in the US.
2. Increased safety of field employees. Change State Law to grant assessors access to location data of more predatory offenders. Field staff are required to do physical inspections of all real estate in the county. Not knowing where dangerous criminals live puts staff in the field at risk.
3. Change the Disabled Veterans Market Value Exclusion to a state administered refund program. If this change would take place, the costs of the program would be spread over the whole State instead of shifting the tax burden on local governments.
4. Any new program mandated by the State should be funded by the State.

## Attorney's Office

1. Additional sustainable (on-going) funding for County Attorney’s Offices in greater Minnesota to help increase County Attorney’s Office staff wages and salaries so that they can be competitive with the new State Public Defender’s wages and salaries.
2. Additional sustainable (on-going) funding for County Attorney’s Offices for child protection.
3. Additional sustainable (on-going) funding for County Attorney’s Offices for the state judiciary’s shift of a substantial amount of court administration duties to the County Attorney’s Offices.
4. Increased penalties for damage to public property and critical infrastructure.

## Community Corrections

1. County of Financial Responsibility - Placements made by a county that is not the county of residence under Minn. Stats. 260B, are often billed back to the county of residence. We support clarifying state law to align county of financial responsibility with responsibility for assessing a juvenile's needs and determining placement both pre and post disposition. Simply stated, the county making the placement decision should be responsible for placement costs.
2. Juvenile Rule 20 Support and Mental Health - Support the reduction of costs for counties while ensuring that Minnesota's children receive the necessary supports. Targeted state funding to alleviate the costs associated with Rule 20 juveniles, including competency evaluations and mental health treatment. The expansion of Medicaid waivers to cover mental health services, intervention programs, and enhancing training for community supervision staff. Create a pathway to juvenile competency attainment and creation of services to provide support to youth during the delinquency process.
3. Juvenile Delinquency - Support investments by the state in juvenile detention alternatives prior to changing juvenile detention policies. Changes to juvenile detention policies must include collaboration and input from stakeholders including counties that run juvenile detention facilities. Any enacted legislation should include consideration of exceptions related to serious offenses.
4. Mental Health Supports - An increase in mental health services is necessary throughout the state, and particularly in rural Minnesota. A gap in services exists for individuals that exhibit high-risk behaviors due to mental health conditions. An expansion in placement and program options is necessary to ensure that individuals are not incarcerated due to lack of mental health services.
5. State Funding for New Legislation - Policies and laws enacted by the state legislature must include adequate, ongoing state resources to support service delivery related to those policies. State funding and support for improved data infrastructure necessary to provide information on outcomes of supervision. The creation of consistent statewide standards for data collection through the current database, CSTS, in order to ensure consistent data standards and regular collection and analysis of data.
6. Recruitment and Retention of Community Supervision Staff - Efforts both locally and at a statewide level to increase effective recruitment and retention of community supervision staff.

## Economic Development

1. Support legislation that emphasizes Broadband development in rural areas, under-served and un-served areas. Continue to make Broadband improvement a state priority by increasing funding to Border-to-Border program. This includes broadband-based economic development and digital equity strategies, so the highest possible value is gained from broadband infrastructure investment. Aitkin County supports the existing prevailing wage exemption for broadband infrastructure projects.
2. Prioritize funding allocated for housing developments that solve the market rate and workforce housing shortages in rural counties. Allocation of funding should transition from homeowner to developer-focused incentives.

3. Support the promotion of outdoor recreation in the rural counties by continuing to advocate for the programs offered by Explore Minnesota.
4. Sustain and expand workforce development programs that offer vocational and specialized trade training for all age groups. Increase funding for high school vocational training laboratories and apprenticeship opportunities to enhance these programs further.
5. Increase programming to develop entrepreneurial business expansion in rural counties.
6. Advocate for increased funding to support both new and existing childcare providers. Offer incentives for at-home remodels and licensing fees to help new providers get started. For existing providers, expand programs that fund equipment upgrades and provide staffing support. Ensure that current funding is allocated effectively to reach the providers directly, not just the families.

## Environmental Services

1. Aitkin County and MACPZA support county autonomy and immunity from a mandatory statewide building code due to the foreseeable impacts of funding such a program, logistical capacity, and limited workforce to fulfill this obligation.
2. Aitkin County and MACPZA support addressing solar and wind system end of life handling, including full decommissioning, to ensure the financial burden does not fall onto local governments and local taxpayers who may or may not have benefitted from the solar energy generated.
3. Aitkin County and MACPZA supports state (DNR) assistance with implementation of regional executive boards to address aquatic invasive species challenges and meet minimum standards developed by MAIRSC, MNDNR, MACPZA, and MLR.
4. Aitkin County and SWAA support allocating 100 percent of the revenue generated by the Solid Waste Management Tax (SWMT) to state and county waste management activities, including increased funding for SCORE (Governor’s Select Committee on Recycling and the Environment) grants to counties.
5. Aitkin County and SWAA support bonding requests for proposed solid waste management projects as a partial match to the funds that counties invest in infrastructure for safe, environmentally sound management of solid wastes in response to state mandates and goals.
6. Aitkin County and SWAA support Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) to include improved product stewardship among manufacturers, retailers, and consumers and which creates producer-led material and toxicity reductions, reuse, repair, and recycling programs. These programs must include transparency and accountability measures, maximize use of existing infrastructure, and provide local governments with a voluntary role in development and implementation.

## Health & Human Services

1. Support structural investments to modernize, sustainably fund, and collaboratively govern a statewide human services technology system that accounts for local implementation needs and prioritizes the replacement of SSIS and MAXIS.

2. Support investments to expand services and address gaps in the state-wide mental health continuum, specifically establish and fund a children’s mental health initiative, expand access to state operated mental health beds, permanently eliminate the county “Does Not Meet Medical Criteria” cost share, and clarify the state’s safety net role in providing and funding these critical services.
3. Support legislation in which funding is being requested to support counties in the required work under the new Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act specifically surrounding adding staff and implementing active efforts as defined by statute.
4. Support legislation for MnCHOICES reassessment simplification in situations where clients have not had a change in needs and do not wish to pursue any changes in service. This will focus resources on new assessment needs and will improve access for all clients.
5. Support continued policy and funding efforts to support foundational public health responsibilities and ensure cannabis education and prevention is adequately funded in Minnesota.
6. Support investment in the county public health and human services based workforce in the areas of administrative simplification, recruitment, retention and training, inclusive of expediting access to required trainings, streamlining training and onboarding requirements, simplifying and reducing administrative burden and duties of staff to make the workload more person centered and manageable.

## Highway Department

1. Local Road Improvement Program/Local Bridge Bonding Program - Aitkin County supports immediate funding of the Local Road Improvement Program and the Local Bridge Bonding Program to fund regionally significant local road and bridge projects throughout the state.

## Human Resources

1. Change the frequency of reporting for pay equity from every three years to every five years.
2. Simplify the process and shorten the timeline (no longer than 6 months) for Minnesota counties who are interested in exiting the Minnesota Merit System. Allow counties to exit at any time throughout the calendar year.
3. Clearly state in the law that County Boards (and city/township/school) are allowed to discuss non-union wages and benefits in closed session, in addition to union negotiations strategy.
4. Aitkin County supports legislation that would allow data to be shared between county departments giving appraisers and other field staff advance notice of potentially dangerous properties when working in the field.

## Land Department

1. Support Outdoor School for All Minnesota legislation. This is a grant that would fund a three-day, two-night immersive nature experience for every fourth through eighth grade student. This would include all programming fees, transportation and ancillary costs such as teacher stipends, thus making these trips entirely free to students and schools.

2. Sustainable funding for rehabilitation of tax forfeited property with blight issues.
3. Aitkin County supports dedicated state funding to local government units for beaver control and opposes any legislation that would restrict type of trap used, trap size, and trap placement.

## Recorder's Office

1. Aitkin County supports electronic submissions of well certificates through the Department of Health.
2. Aitkin opposes the addition of surcharges to the recording fee for non-recording activities and purposes.
3. Aitkin County supports statewide eRecording.

## Sheriff's Office

1. Pursue legislation that would continue medical assistance payments for incarcerated individuals allowing for more mental health and chemical addiction treatment options, which may result in stabilization after release and reduced recidivism. (Federal program)

## Treasurer's Office

1. Under Return of state fees - Suggest adding Marriage License fees to be retained by the county as the state receives most of the revenue but all the work is done in Treasurer's office.
2. Have Mobile Homes returned to tabs issued by the DMV rather than being taxed thru the property tax system or raising the value threshold for them to be taxed thru the property tax system.