

2020 FEDERAL Legislative Priorities



INFRASTRUCTURE



COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY
AND LAND USE



HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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

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



Infrastructure

Ramsey County will continue its long commitment to working across all levels of government to maximize funding opportunities. The county is encouraged by indications that the White House supports federal transportation investment and will continue to be a proactive partner to our congressional delegation and US Department of Transportation.

Passenger Rail

Support for passenger rail needs to be enhanced through increased funding to the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant program, and by authorizing the State of Good Repair grant program. Additionally, funding needs to be provided for rail improvements from Union Depot in Saint Paul, MN to Chicago, IL, which will enable a second daily passenger train for this corridor and for the completion of an environmental assessment of existing rails.

Transportation Reauthorization

Sustained transportation reauthorization will benefit the following Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority Projects involving Union Depot in downtown Saint Paul:

- **Riverview Corridor:** Between Union Depot and the Mall of America (Bloomington).
- **METRO Gold Line Corridor (Gateway):** Between Union Depot and Woodbury.
- **Rush Line Corridor:** Between Union Depot and White Bear Lake.
- **Red Rock Corridor:** Between Union Depot and Hastings.
- **Second Daily Train:** Between Union Depot and Chicago.
- **Bruce Vento Trail:** From Buerkle Road to Highway 96.

Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act

Implement provisions in the FAST Act, reauthorizing highway and transit programs, as well as Amtrak, through 2020, including:

- Expanded funding options for programs under the Capital Investment Grant program (Core Capacity/Small Starts/Fixed Guideway Capital Projects).
- Conversion of the Surface Transportation block grant program.
- Modifications to the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program, making transit-oriented projects eligible to apply for TIFIA loans.
- Fully fund capital improvement grants.



Community, Economic and Workforce Development

Protect Basic Human Rights of Immigrants

Oppose increased efforts to discourage immigrants from accessing public assistance, such as housing, medical assistance, basic cash support and law enforcement protection. Like most other residents and citizens, immigrants seek public assistance as a last resort, and only in times of temporary, intense need for basic services that may arise as they work to achieve or maintain self-sufficiency. Inhibiting immigrants through fear or threat of consequence when they need services, deprives them of access and denies them the opportunities to build stable lives for themselves, their families and to contribute to the communities in which they live. Further, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Deferred Enforced Departures (DED) and access to legal representation continue to be unresolved pressing issues for immigrants and the communities in which they live.

2020 Census

The next full census takes place in 2020. Extensive preparation and coordination with federal, state and local government partners requires adequate funding from the federal government. If the census does not yield an accurate count and in fact, misses a significant number of residents, Minnesota could lose one of its eight congressional seats and an electoral college vote. The most likely residents to be missed are immigrants, both legal and illegal, who may avoid being counted in the 2020 census out of fear related to recent immigration disruptions. Ramsey County has the highest number of immigrants per capita amongst Minnesota counties; therefore, an efficiently-run census operation with accurate outcomes is important the county.

HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME)

Protect the HOME Program, which provides important funding for affordable housing units in market-rate multifamily new construction, foreclosed/forfeit property acquisition, rehabilitation and resale, and down-payment assistance to first-time homebuyers throughout suburban Ramsey County cities. Ramsey County is part of a four-county consortium and currently receives approximately \$400,000 per year from HOME, a reduction of more than \$350,000 per year over the past 10 years. HOME is also an important source of program income from loan repayments, allowing additional investment in affordable properties. The president's latest budget would eliminate funding for HOME. Congress will need to address this important funding issue in 2020 and oppose the suggested cuts in the president's budget proposal.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

Restore funding to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). CDBG supports community development programs providing assistance to low- and moderate-income persons in suburban Ramsey County. Ramsey County currently receives approximately \$1 million, down 50 percent from historic levels. The latest budget proposal issued by the president included elimination of the CDBG program altogether (NACo). Ramsey County supports the restoration of funding for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant.

Tax Incentives for the Development of Affordable Housing

Legislation to expand and improve the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) has been reintroduced in both the House and Senate. Passage of the Affordable Housing Improvement Act would increase the development of affordable housing nationwide by approximately 450,000 housing units. The bill provides incentives to developers by increasing the housing credit allocation by 50 percent, phased in over five years. It would also lock in the four percent LIHTC credit rate for financing with housing bonds and tax credits.

ERA Ratification

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 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.



Environment, Energy and Land Use

Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LAWCON)

In 1964, LAWCON was established to provide grants for outdoor recreation projects and to develop and redevelop parks. To date, Ramsey County has received nearly \$1 million from LAWCON for park projects.

Clean Water

Support investment and funding for infrastructure improvements relating to any contamination of water systems, as well as improved corrosion control, lead monitoring and public notification of contaminants in public drinking water. Support improvement of storm water, wastewater and drinking water infrastructure.

Recycling and Energy

Environmental concerns, particularly climate change, bring waste generation, recycling and energy production into sharp focus. With international recycling markets stalling, federal efforts are necessary to incentivize industry to invest in innovative recycling practices and to spur communities and individuals to reduce waste and engage more intently in local and national recycling practices.



Health and Human Services

Social Services Block Grant Funding (SSBG)

Maintain or increase SSBG block grants at the current funding level. SSBG supports services such as adult protective services, special needs childcare, child welfare and child abuse prevention (NACo).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Preserve the SNAP program to address hunger and food security issues for no and low-income residents. Given the recent efforts by the White House to eliminate or reduce eligibility through rule, it is increasingly important to voice strong support for services that address basic human needs, such as food security. SNAP provides food assistance to nearly 63,000 low-income families in Ramsey County. The SNAP Education and Training program, which provides support services (such as child care and transportation) to SNAP-enrolled students, is a central component to helping families achieve and maintain economic stability.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

Protect essential provisions of the ACA, including: coverage for pre-existing conditions, dependent coverage until age 26, no limits on annual/lifetime coverage, no-cost coverage for preventative care, and the mandate for individual coverage. Support the local-state-federal partnership structure for financing health care access and oppose measures that shift federal and state costs to counties. This law has proven effective in significantly expanding access to insurance to more low and moderate-income families and individuals. Ramsey County supports premium assistance to help keep the cost of insurance within reach.

Medicaid Services Financing

Enhance flexibility in the Medicaid program to support local care systems. Preserve the ability to match local funds and receive targeted supplemental payments and bolster the federal-state-local partnership structures for Medicaid services (NACo).

Mental Health

Support consistent funding for mental health services provided through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as well as legislation that will increase Ramsey County's ability to provide local systems of care. Funding for the Community Mental Health Services (CMHS) block grant should be funded at current levels or increased to rise with demand for services (NACo).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Increase investment in TANF. TANF funds are a major component of the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), which provides financial assistance to nearly 18,000 low-income Ramsey County families. TANF also helps pay for child care assistance for MFIP families and supports county employment services (NACo).

Families First (Title IV-E)

Full funding and roll-out of the Families First promises to address long-standing issues with state and county child protection and foster care systems, including racial disparities of out-of-home placements. Enriching financial support for prevention, wrap-around services that are culturally-attuned is essential to improvements in the nation's child protection and family support programs.

Firearm Regulation

Reinstatement of the Firearms Assault Weapons Ban would be a strong first step in addressing the epidemic number of mass shootings and other gun-related violence. When the 1994 ban sunset in 2004, a surge of automatic weapons shootings occurred, which has not subsided. The ban was effective and should be reinstated.

 **Ramsey County Support of Other Platforms**

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

- The National Association of Counties (NACo) and its associated professional organizations. The county board reserves the option to oppose individual items in the NACo platform that are contrary to the interests of the county.

Ramsey County Board of Commissioners

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ramsey County Government Relations

250 Courthouse
15 West Kellogg Blvd.
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

Federal Government Relations

Lockridge Grindal Nauen
Federal Relations Group
415 Second Street NE, Suite 210
Washington, D.C. 20002

Alana Peterson
Managing Director
202-544-9840 (office) 218-213-4129 (cell)
ajpeterson@locklaw.com

Emily Tranter
Federal Relations
202-544-9840 (office) 202-544-9896 (cell)
ejtranter@locklaw.com



Government Relations

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

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