

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

2022 STATE PLATFORM



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RAMSEY COUNTY STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Resilience: Building Capacity to Respond,
Adapt and Thrive Under Changing Conditions

Residents First: Effective, Efficient and Accessible Operations

Advancing Racial and Health Equity and Shared Community Power

Aligning Justice System Outcomes with Community Values

Advancing a Holistic Approach to Strengthen Families

Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion

Stability Starts with a Place to Call Home

Talent Attraction, Retention and Promotion

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LEGISLATIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These legislative guiding principles provide a foundation for the specific initiatives and support items that are included in the 2022 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, opportunities 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 voter participation.
- Engage in good stewardship of natural resources.

LEGISLATIVE TOP PRIORITIES

Family and Community Stabilization:

- Investing in housing stability—affordability and homelessness.
- Addressing racial disparities in out-of-home displacements.

Systems Transformation:

- Improving mental and behavioral health systems and support.
- Justice system reform.

Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion:

- Funding transportation, including new revenues for transit, roads and bridges.
- Workforce.
- Climate change.
- Bonding requests.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT REQUESTS

RAMSEY COUNTY BONDING REQUESTS

The Park at RiversEdge	\$26M
Rice Street Revitalization	\$3.9M
Bruce Vento Trail Extension	\$3.5M

SUPPORT OTHER BONDING REQUESTS

Gibbs Farm-Pathways to Dakota & Pioneer Life, Ramsey County Historical Society	\$7.63M
Eastbound Kellogg RiverCentre Bridge, City of Saint Paul	\$26M

RESPONSIBLE, RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT *Cont.*

- Encourage inter-governmental collaboration built on the goals of improving performance, increasing efficiencies and building trust across programs, government agencies and communities.
- Support local authority to define local priorities.

STABLE, SUFFICIENT, FLEXIBLE 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.



Racial and Health Equity

Ramsey County supports deconstructing systemic and organizational barriers to create fairer, more inclusive government.

INCREASED HEALTH CARE ACCESS

- Continue to preserve coverage for dependents up to age 26 and prohibit the denial of coverage for preexisting conditions and the use of lifetime caps for coverage.
- 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 that help county financial aid workers address eligibility updates, increased demands for services and the addition of state-mandated data matching activities.

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 mental and behavioral health needs of the community, foster coordination, and ensure parity in services across populations.
- Pursue policy changes to provide clarity within the use of force protocol regarding transport holds for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. Individuals who are in crisis due to mental illness where a transport hold is requested but not enforced are more likely to be arrested and funneled through the correctional system than given proper medical care.
- Support legislation to embed social workers in schools to assess needs and support mental health. The social workers would also ensure families had information about and direct access to county services
- 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 incompetent to participate in their defense due to a mental illness. This includes requiring DHS to resume pre-2018 practices of treating people beyond the acute care need as well as increased community-based supports, including specially trained case managers and forensic navigators, secure IRTS facilities, and increased local hospital capacities to quickly readmit people who either resume drug abuse, discontinue prescription medication compliance, or otherwise decompensate, so that they can obtain necessary care and avoid any further police interactions.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

- Support the ratification of the ERA to bolster pay equity, domestic violence laws and pregnancy discrimination protections, among other equity goals.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORMS

- Support POCI Caucus legislation that further reforms the investigation and prosecution of officer-involved deaths and wrongful actions; 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.

COVID-19 RESPONSE SUPPORT

- Support funding resources directed to COVID-19 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 COVID-19 vaccines with specific focus on underserved communities, kids, youth and young adults.

Residents First

Ramsey County supports improvements in service delivery and facilities, with an emphasis on engaging residents and employees, process efficiency, innovative technology and accessibility.

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 continuing waivers that demonstrate administrative efficiency and 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, General Assistance and Minnesota Supplemental Aid reporting requirements in order to align budgeting methods with nationwide best practices, encourage earned income and employment, and create equity across the program.
- Support legislation, such as a wage minimum, to address the current shortage of personal care assistants.
- Support substantial investment in new, modern technology infrastructure to streamline health care and social service program administration, enhance data and program integrity, and promote efficient service delivery, with a focus on programs connected to MNBenefits applications.

FUNDING FOR LIBRARIES

- Increase Regional Library Basic System Support funding for residents access to digital and database resources.
- Support library construction and remodeling grants fund safety and renovations at libraries.
- Maintain Arts & Cultural Heritage Legacy funding for regional public library systems to support arts, arts education; and arts access, and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage.

FUNDING FOR PARKS AND TRAILS

- Support legislation to ensure that the Ramsey County park system receives a fair share of revenues from Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funding, Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources funding or other environmental stewardship grants.
- Secure \$3.5 million in bonding for the extension of the Bruce Vento Trail.
- Support inclusion of \$15 million in state bonding for capital projects for Metropolitan Regional Parks and Trails, which leverages Metropolitan Council dollars and benefits projects in Ramsey County.

COUNTY PROCUREMENT CHANGES FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

- Support 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. Increasing county expenditures with small BIPOC-owned businesses is an important part of Ramsey County's overall strategy to reduce racial disparities.

A Holistic Approach to Strengthening Families

Ramsey County supports listening to families, understanding needs and providing non-traditional services and opportunities that promote wellbeing for infants, children, youth and their families.

CHILD PROTECTION REFORMS

- Support African American Family Preservation Act legislation encouraging county case management and support services 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.
- 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.
- 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. Current law requires approval from the county board and DHS to accept new members.
- Pursue legislation to allow the option to remove law enforcement from child protection responses. In Minnesota the police department is the first contact when a report is made, and they have the authority to remove children before child protection is involved. Ramsey County has implemented changes with Saint Paul Police to stop this practice and supports legislation to create consistent practices with all police departments.

CHILD CARE REFORMS

- Support child care licensing practice improvements to simplify rules and promote improved relations between providers and regulators.
- Support efforts to implement refinements to training, county liability insurance requirements and other requirements to foster best practices in all child care settings.
- Support state compliance with the Federal Child Care Block Grant Act of 2014 to prevent the loss of federal funding and support additional state investments in child care infrastructure.
- Support legislation to make permanent strategic waitlist changes that allow more families who have not used MFIP to access essential work-related support.



A Holistic Approach to Strengthening Families

Continued.

CHILD SUPPORT REFORMS

- Pursue legislation to provide flexibility in collecting child support and other cost-of-care funds when a child is in foster care to reduce financial instability for families in crisis and decrease collection costs.

HUNGER RELIEF

- Support additional funding and policy changes to address hunger relief needs in Ramsey County. Hunger continues to disproportionately affect our racial and ethnic communities, revealing long-standing systemic issues that have been heightened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ECONOMIC SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES

- Support legislation to provide cash payments or other economic supports, like the federal child tax credit expansion, to families in a way that will not make them ineligible for income, food or medical assistance, with the goal of removing barriers so families can self-stabilize.

Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion

Ramsey County supports strategies that advance economic competitiveness and inclusiveness by creating greater prosperity and opportunity for all.

STATE-LOCAL FISCAL PARTNERSHIP

- Support efforts to maintain County Program Aid (CPA) with indexing funding and increasing the base appropriation after the COVID-19 economic recovery.
- Pass a 2022 omnibus bonding bill that addresses the backlog of the state's growing public infrastructure needs and invests in important regional projects.

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 BIPOC communities, by coupling training and education with equity efforts in housing, transportation, child care and other stabilizing factors.
- Dedicate sufficient, ongoing state funding to provide workforce programming targeted to those who are unemployed, under-employed or under-represented in the workforce as a means to reduce disparities and to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce.

DIGITAL EQUITY

- Support legislation to write broadband spending guidelines in ways that are inclusive of metro digital equity needs. Some examples of this include high-speed broadband internet for underserved areas, affordable and subsidized device ownership programs and multilingual digital literacy and skills training that meet the community's needs. The Minnesota Department of Education's December 2020 study entitled, "Digital Equity Community Needs Assessment Report," can be a basis for this work.

FLEXIBILITY FOR SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Support legislation to make participation in SNAP Education and Training Programs voluntary so that local programs can strategically match these vital support services to specific participants.

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.
- Seek \$3.9 million in bonding funds for reconstruction of the Rice Street Revitalization Project from Wheelock Parkway in Saint Paul to County Road B in Roseville and Maplewood. These funds would offset \$7.805 million in county and city construction costs currently programmed in the Ramsey County 2021-2025 Transportation Improvement Program.

Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion

Continued.

- Seek legislation alongside Hennepin County to amend the Motor Vehicle Leased Sales Tax 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.
- Defend against any attempts to shift transit costs to counties. The Ramsey County Regional Railroad Authority has been approving the maximum levy for the last several years, and Ramsey County has adopted a 0.5% sales and use tax for the development of the transitways within the county, including:
 - Green Line Light Rail Transit
 - Gold Line Bus Rapid Transit
 - Purple Line (Rush Line) Bus Rapid Transit
 - Riverview Transitway
- 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:
 - I-35E / County Road J interchange
 - Highway 36 / Century Avenue (Highway 120) interchange
 - Purple Line (Rush Line) Bus Rapid Transit
 - Riverview Corridor Transitway
 - Rondo Community Land Bridge
 - UP Railroad /BNSF Railway grade separation adjacent to Westminster Junction
- Seek support for equity in funding of transportation development that helps to repair and acknowledge past wrongs with infrastructure investments.

THE PARK AT RIVERSEEDGE

- Pursue \$26 million in bonding 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 funds are for acquisition, design, furnishing and construction of a land bridge extension of the public realm space called The Park at RiversEdge. This new nine-acre urban park space includes: 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.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Support legislation that addresses climate change, protects and enhances natural environments, and promotes sustainability in county operations.



Justice System Outcomes

Ramsey County supports policies that align justice system transformation with state and community values.

PROBATION REFORMS

- Support legislation to cap probation lengths to five years or similar outcome-based time limits to address racial disparities and give offenders the best shot at positive community and family involvement while improving public safety and saving taxpayer dollars.

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.

FELON VOTING RIGHTS

- Support legislation to clarify the reestablishment of voting rights for felons who have served their time and are living, working and paying taxes in their home communities so they do not have to complete extensive probationary periods before they are able to vote.

GUN SAFETY

- Support mandated background checks for all firearm purchases to reduce firearm-related crime.
- Support legislation to provide a legal means for families and others to initiate the temporary seizure of firearms from an individual who is exhibiting erratic and violent behavior.
- Support legislation that reduces gun violence through a community-centered approach to violence prevention, as well as supporting funding for the development of new response types and enhancements to dispatch countywide resources.

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. Low-income workers whose drivers' licenses are suspended can lose their jobs, leaving them unable to earn the income necessary to pay their court debt or meet other basic expenses such as groceries and rent.

Justice System Outcomes

Continued.

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 release individuals back into the community if they are determined not to be a risk to society.

AUTOMATIC 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. Criminal records and the collateral consequences that follow long after people have fulfilled their obligations to the justice system serve as barriers to jobs, housing, education and more, preventing people from serving as productive members of our community.

PROSECUTOR-INITIATED RESENTENCING

- Pursue legislation to enable prosecutors to initiate a motion to the court to reduce a person's sentence based upon their success in programming, abiding by conditions of supervised release, furthering their rehabilitation, and/or other factors that have subsequently reduced the person's risk for recidivism or indicate that a sentence reduction is in the interest of justice.

STATE TORT LIABILITY ACT CHANGES FOR THE STATE FAIR

- Pursue legislation to make necessary changes to the State Tort Liability Act to enable an outside law enforcement agency to take over all law enforcement duties for the State Fair grounds.

Housing Stability

Ramsey County supports programs that provide access to safe, healthy, stable and accessible housing options for all residents.

AFFORDABLE AND STABLE HOUSING

- Support budget and bonding legislation that increases public funds and attention to the preparation of homeowners and the production and preservation of affordable housing.
- Support legislation that advances policy and practice reforms that reduce barriers to affordable homeownership, such as reducing the cost of production.
- Support new state funding of more loan counseling for the refinancing of special loans, such as rehab/down payment assistance. Currently there is not enough organizational capacity for the amount of refinancing that is happening in the market.
- Support increased funding for affordable housing and housing programs focused on specific populations in need of additional assistance, including those experiencing mental illness, or other disabilities, individuals with criminal records, large families, veterans and those who are homeless.
- Support housing infrastructure bonds for buildings that are 50% AMI with at least 10% of units at 30% AMI in order to better leverage American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.
- Support legislation to create a dedicated fund for the development of affordable housing that enrolls private investors into the production of affordable housing to benefit local businesses, creates jobs and contributes to the overall growth of the economy.
- Support expanding the Housing Support Demonstration capacity to include all seven metro-area counties to increase access to Housing Support for traditional rental assistance and support services for people experiencing homelessness. Consider legislative changes that would allow distributing vouchers based off priority populations in order to maximize ARPA and Housing and Redevelopment Authority funding.

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. This has led to underutilization of the refund and contributes to property tax regressivity. Transitioning the refund to a credit allows all homeowners to receive the credit if they are eligible and will help combat property tax regressivity and keep homeownership affordable.

FEDERAL IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS FOR HOMESTEAD APPLICATIONS

- Pursue legislation to allow use of Federal Identification Numbers in lieu of social security numbers on homestead classification applications to expand access to Minnesota's Property Tax Homestead Credit Refund.

INTEREST RATES ON TAX-FORFEITED PROPERTY

- Support legislation to allow flexible 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.

EVICITION PROTECTIONS

- Support creating a right to counsel for tenants in cases brought by landlords alleging breach of lease in public housing evictions, which tend to raise more complicated issues that are harder for tenants to address without a lawyer's help.

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).
- Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM).
- Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA).
- Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts (MWAD).
- Minnesota County Engineers Association (MCEA).
- Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA).
- Minnesota of Workforce Boards Association (MAWB).
- Partnership on Waste and Energy.
- Ramsey/Washington Recycling and Energy Board.

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.



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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



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ramseycounty.us