

Housing Assistance Bill Passes Senate Committee

A bill providing \$30 million in housing assistance passed the Senate Agriculture, Rural Development and Housing finance committee on April 27. [SF4495 – Westrom](#) was amended so landlords would not be prohibited from charging late fees. The bill awaits action by the Senate Finance committee. The House proposal for housing assistance, [HF4541 – Hausman](#), includes \$100 million and awaits a hearing in the House Ways & Means committee. Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at 651-366-7564 or charlie@metrocitiesmn.org with any questions.

4d Expansion Bill Passes Senate Taxes Committee

Expanding the current 4d low-income rental housing program was part of a larger bill debated and passed by the Senate Taxes committee on April 28. The proposal, in [SF3843 – Chamberlain](#), would eliminate the 0.75 percent first-tier tax rate and set the class rate for all low-income rental properties qualifying as Class 4d properties at 0.25 percent.

Metro Cities supports the current 4d property tax program but prior to expanding it, supports an evaluation of the effects an expansion would have for local property tax bases. City officials are concerned that an expansion of the 4d program could have consequential effects on local property tax structures and that these effects should be evaluated before expanding the program.

A bill to study the 4d program was introduced earlier this session. [HF4497 – Her](#) requires the Department of Revenue and Minnesota Housing to produce a report on the 4d property tax classification, to determine the impact on local property taxpayers and local governments. Neither the expansion nor study bill have been heard in the House. Metro Cities supports the study bill. Contact Charlie Vander Aarde at 651-366-7564 or charlie@metrocitiesmn.org with any questions.

Senate Committee Passes Bills Relating to City Commissions and Documents

The Senate Local Government Committee passed two bills related to City Charter Commissions and how documents can be received by local governments. [SF 3298-Senjem](#) changes current laws related to the appointment of charter commission members. A district court judge may now reappoint a commission member within 60 days rather than 30 days. The bill eliminates the authority of a city council to appoint a replacement if the district court judge fails to do so within the allotted time. In MN 107 cities are charter cities. Chairs of the Rochester and the Brooklyn Park charter commissions testified in support. The bill passed and was referred to the Senate Floor. The House companion is on the House Floor.

The committee also passed [SF 4525 - Kiffmeyer](#), that allows local governments, including cities, to accept documents and signatures electronically, by mail or fax during a peacetime public health emergency. The filings include documents for planning and zoning, land use, documents that require the signature of an architect, engineer, or landscape architect, birth and death certificates, and recording a notary commission. This authority would expire January 6th, 2021 or 60 days after the peacetime public health emergency is terminated, whichever is earlier. The bill was passed and referred to the floor.

House Ways and Means Passes Tobacco 21

The House Ways and Means Committee passed [HF 331 - Edelson](#), a bill that would raise the legal age to purchase tobacco in MN to 21. The bill will make MN in compliance with federal law and includes changes to penalties for selling tobacco or other regulated products to those under 21. The bill includes a provision that allows local units of government to consult with interested persons to develop alternative penalties for using a fake ID to buy tobacco, tobacco-related devices, electronic delivery devices, or other products. An amendment was adopted that removed a reporting requirement of licensing authorities to the commissioner of Human Services. The bill was passed 17-11 and was moved to the House Floor.

Elections Bills Heard in the House

The House State Government Finance Committee heard [HF 1603](#) (Dehn), the elections omnibus bill. The bill as amended grants the Secretary of State the authority to direct all jurisdictions to conduct 2020 state primaries and the general election through mail-in balloting. A Secretary of State directive could also include directives related to the closure of polling places. Secretary of State Simon testified in support of this bill and described this as one of two tracks the state could consider addressing safety concerns during the upcoming elections. MN Association of County Officers (MACO) also testified in support of an all-mail-in balloting approach. Both testifiers said there are several jurisdictions that are currently all mail-in balloting jurisdictions. Some members expressed opposition to this bill, noting concerns of giving the Secretary of State excess authority. The bill was passed 10-7 and was referred to the Ways and Means Committee.

A separate elections bill was heard in Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday morning. [HF 3429](#) (Dehn) makes several technical changes to election administration for the 2020 state primary and state general elections to respond to COVID-19. Included in the amended bill are deadlines for absentee ballots and when they can be counted. The goal of the legislation is to provide local elections administrators the time they need to count an expectedly high number of absentee ballots. The bill also appropriates money through the Help America Vote Act, this includes the federal money given to Minnesota and the required 20 percent state match. The bill was passed 27-2.

Bill Establishing a COVID-19 Relief Account Passes Senate

[SF 4486](#) (Sen. Rosen) passed the Senate this week, on a vote of 42-25. The bill creates an account for federal COVID-19 funds, from which the Legislature would appropriate funding from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund. When funds are spent, MN Management and Budget (MMB) would close the account. See the [April 22 newsletter](#) for a detailed discussion on the bill from when it was heard in the Senate Finance Committee.

Members opposing the proposal expressed concern that a legislative process would be more cumbersome. Arguments in favor of the bill centered on the legislature's ability to have a more deliberative, inclusive, and transparent process when deciding how the money should be spent. Senator Rosen noted that there is no pre-defined mechanism to get local units of government a share of the funds. There is no companion bill in the House of Representatives.

Bills of Note

[HF 4593](#), Hertaus/[SF 4518](#), Anderson, P: Bill authorizes property tax payment delays for Class 3A properties until July 15, 2020.

[HF 4595](#), Elkins/[SF 4501](#), Franzen: Bill allows for tax increment financing pooling by up to 35 percentage points for expenditures outside of the geographic area of the TIF district for certain housing projects.

[SF 4528](#), Anderson, P.: Bill extends the due date for first half property tax payments for 3a and 4c (1) properties.

[SF 4525](#), Kiffmeyer: Bill authorizes counties, cities, and townships to accept certain documents or signatures electronically, by mail, or by facsimile.

Governor's COVID-19 Briefings

Below are highlights from this week's Monday and Tuesday briefings from Governor Walz. MN Department of Health and other administration officials spoke at the briefings. See the state's [COVID-19 web page](#) for the latest specific health data.

Monday:

The state has ramped up outreach and education efforts with the food processing industry after COVID-19 outbreaks in the Smithfield plant in South Dakota and the JBS plant in Worthington, MN. Commissioner Petersen of the Department of Agriculture and Commissioner Leppink of the Department of Labor and Industry were also on the call. Petersen spoke on behalf of concerned farmers from across the state and said that while the food supply in MN is stable there may be some disruptions and higher prices as other plants experience their own outbreaks. The state is working closely with local public health departments to respond to reports of symptomatic employees at these facilities. Commissioner Leppink elaborated on the collaboration across departments and their desire that employers continue to seek out guidance from the state.

Tuesday:

The increase in lab-confirmed cases from Monday to Tuesday was the largest since the beginning of the pandemic (365 new positive cases in a day). MDH Commissioner Malcolm and Director Ehresmann said that the state will continue to see cases rise as testing capacity is increased. State Epidemiologist & Medical Director, Ruth Lynfield was on the call to talk about serology testing. Dr. Lynfield explained that antibody testing must be timed to an individual's exposure and it can take a week or longer for the antibody levels to be detected using this method. Dr. Lynfield also made a point to say that research has not been completed yet on the level of immunity individuals develop after recovering from COVID-19. As it stands, a serology test that shows an individual has contracted and recovered from COVID-19 doesn't guarantee that person's immunity going forward.

Metro Cities COVID-19 Page

Metro Cities continues to update its [COVID-19 resources page](#) as information is available. On the page you will find the Governor's Executive Orders and the latest information from the Department of Public Health. Guidance from other MN state agencies such as the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and the Department of Labor and Industry (DLI). You will also find the latest information on federal action and what resources congress has made available to local governments. Contact Metro Cities if there is a resource you are looking for not on this page.

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