Minnesota Legislature Convenes In One-Day Session to Pass COVID-Related Legislation

The Minnesota House and Senate convened today to pass a 33-page bill providing relief both monetarily and through statutory changes in response to the coronavirus pandemic. **HF 4531/SF 4451** spends $330 million (primarily out of the state general revenue fund) on several measures surrounding emergency childcare grants, assistance to veterans (for hospitalization/medical care), appropriations for food shelf/housing support/emergency service grants, additional funding for the COVID-19 Response Fund, tribal nations grants, expansions to the Unemployment Insurance program, and a small business emergency loan program, among others. Following bicameral and bipartisan votes in support the bills, each the House and Senate adjourned until April 14 or at the agreement of Majority and Minority leadership.

Health and Human Services/Community Supports
The appropriations package included more than $70 million dollars for human services. Nearly $30 million is dedicated to childcare. The bill would allow funding to be distributed by grants that would go to childcare centers that remain open during the public health emergency and prioritizes space for children of essential workers.

- $9 million would go to food shelf programs throughout the state. The funds could be used to purchase foods, supplies and support the transportation organizations to allow for the distribution of food and supplies.
- $5.5 million would be used toward temporarily increasing room and board limits and rates for supplementary services as part of housing supports services.
- The legislation also dedicates $26.5 million to be used for additional emergency services grants through the Department of Human Services. This includes $15 million for additional space or purchasing vouchers for motels or other housing options. This also includes $5 million for purchasing hygiene and cleaning supplies and $6 million to provide the necessary staffing when workers are quarantined.

COVID-19 Response Fund Gets Additional Infusion of Money
Legislators appropriated an additional $200 million to the COVID-19 Response Fund. The fund would be used by state agencies as necessary to protect Minnesotans from COVID-19 and maintain state government operations during the peacetime emergency. Expenditures exceeding $1 million from this fund must be reviewed by a commission created by the legislation. The commission would include five Senate and five House leaders.

Real ID
Though the federal government extended the deadline for implementation of REAL ID (see story below in "Across the Nation"), the Legislature added a section in the bill today to modify REAL ID requirements to make it easier for Minnesota citizens to prove their residence. The provision is modeled after **SF 3901** and incorporates suggestions by DPS to help with the application backlog, including a $2.4 million to the Commissioner of Public Safety to hire additional staff to help with the backlog and turnaround time for REAL ID applications. Changes include allowing use of utilities bills with unrelated names as proof of address, allowing certain documents that were issued in the last 12 months (previously set at 90 days), and adding some additional financial statements that can serve as proof of residence.

Public Safety
- **DOC Contracts with County Jails.** **HF 4531/SF 4451** has a section that amends Minn. Stat. 609.105, subd. 2 to allow the Department of Corrections to enter into a contract with a county to house state inmates with sentences of 90 days of less. The bill only allows the ability for the DOC to enter into the contract and does not prohibit a county from declining the contract or proposing its own terms.
Fingerprint Authorization Delay. The bill would allow the BCA to delay fingerprint-based background checks for employees working in critical infrastructure positions during a peacetime emergency. The fingerprinting must be submitted within 30 days of the end of the peacetime emergency. It also provides for criminal penalties if a person gives false information on their application for a position requiring a fingerprint-based background check. The superintendent of the BCA is required to submit a report to the legislature regarding the delays, the reasons for delays, the number of essential workers who were granted delays, and other data related to the statute.

Taxes/General Governance

- **Property Taxes.** 1-month extension (until May 30, 2020) for property tax petitions.

- **A new, one-time exception to municipalities currently holding uncommitted money from the repayment of Minnesota investment fund loans to use those funds to make loans** to retail stores, service providers, and hospitality businesses through FY 2020.

- **Unemployment Insurance.** The bill mirrors unemployment insurance (UI) provisions found in Executive Order 20-05, including:
  - Suspend an applicant’s one-week waiting period for benefits.
  - Suspend the five-week waiting period for business owners.
  - Expands eligibility for applicants who cannot work due to:
    - Determination by health authorities or by a health care professional that the presence of the applicant in the workplace would jeopardize the health of others.
    - A quarantine or isolation order has been issued to the applicant.
    - A recommendation from health authorities or from a health care professional that the applicant should self-isolate oneself or quarantine due to elevated risk of contracting COVID-19.
    - Applicant has been instructed by the applicant’s employer not to come to the place of business due to an outbreak of a communicable disease.
    - Applicant has received a notification from a school district, day care, or other childcare provider that either classes are canceled, or the applicant’s ordinary childcare is unavailable, provided that the applicant made reasonable effort to obtain other childcare.

- For employers, insurance benefits paid as a result of an applicant not being able to work directly or indirectly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic will not be used in computing the future unemployment insurance tax rate of a taxpaying employer.
  - These provisions apply to UI applications filed between March 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020.

- HF 4531/SF 4451 does not include AMC-requested changes surrounding flexibility of electronic signatures, flexibility on land use decision timelines, or flexibility surrounding the 10-day recording fee. AMC is continuing conversations with legislative leaders on these measures and hoping for their inclusion on future legislative work.

- WCAC proposals to create a new workers compensation workplace presumption for first responders who have contracted COVID-19 were NOT included in today’s legislation. AMC, MICA, and LMC continue to monitor these conversations and expect continued conversations on this topic by both the Legislature and the governor’s office.