



Range Association of Municipalities and Schools

5525 Emerald Avenue

Mt. Iron, MN 55768

rams@ramsmn.org • 218.748.7651

Thursday, January 23, 2025

Representative Josh Heintzeman
Environment Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
2nd Floor, Centennial Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: RAMS comments regarding HF 8 (Heintzeman)

Representative Heintzeman:

On behalf of the Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS), representing 69 local units of government in the Taconite Assistance Area (TAA), and serving over 155,000 residents in 27 cities, 27 townships, and 15 school districts in the 13,000 square miles of northeastern Minnesota commonly known as the Iron Range, we would encourage committee support for HF 8 (Heintzeman) as well as future dialogue and development of this timely, impactful, and important piece of legislation.

RAMS was formed in 1939 to promote and serve the regional needs of Northeastern Minnesota communities on the Iron Range. We have lived the impact of broken permitting and regulatory processes firsthand and hope to see a resolution to this ongoing issue. In addition to the many fine and necessary provisions contained in HF 8, in its current form, we would encourage additional discussion and development on the bill, including, but not limited to:

- Strengthen the Ombudsman language to include cross- and inter-agency accountability. Consider this not as a “single person” model, but a distributed leadership model with multiple touch points and built in accountability. Encourage more front-facing checklists and outcome-oriented processes.
- Addition of a community/labor/industry panel (with report required) to develop a plan for ongoing continuous improvement (CI) of Agency processes.
- Incentivize agency level decision-making: Reflect on the current state of hiring additional permitting professionals and what changes may be relevant. Currently, the “pay to expedite” feature, as it currently stands is not incentivizing agency level decision making.
- Concerned that eliminating the scoping process for mandatory EIS, which is meant to limit the breadth of issues covered in an EIS, moves everything to the EIS, creating a “high stakes” situation as items that would have been deemed not significant now have equal treatment as issues that are significant.
- Consider ways to support agency staff by reframing and removing “reporting for failure”. Current reporting methods focus on tracking and cataloging failure, rather than focusing on continuous improvement and dialogue between staff, community, and project proposers.





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RAMS sincerely appreciates the leadership shown in HF 8. We also appreciate that this is a process. What you are doing to further permitting and regulatory reform builds off the important first steps taken during the 2024 legislative session. We hope to be a helpful partner as this legislation moves forward. We stand ready to contribute what we can, where it makes sense, for the benefit of our members in the Taconite Assistance Area, knowing that improving outcomes helps everyone statewide, regardless of zip code.

Sincerely,

Paul Peltier

Executive Director

Range Association of Municipalities and Schools

218.431.1317

paul@ramsmn.org

Sent via email

cc:

Range Delegation
Senator Justin Eichorn
Senator Robert Farnsworth
Senator Grant Hauschild
Representative Ben Davis
Representative Spencer Igo
Representative Roger Skraba
Representative Cal Warwas
Commissioner Sarah Strommen, DNR
Commissioner Katrina Kessler, MPCA
RAMS Board of Directors

Range Association of Municipalities and Schools (RAMS) The organization represents more than 90,000 residents and 69 public sector units of government, including 27 cities, 27 townships, and 15 public school districts in the 13,000 square mile Taconite Assistance Area (TAA) of northeast Minnesota. As an organization, RAMS has represented the interests of the Iron Range region for 85 years.

