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March 29, 2023

**Re: County Comments on SF2438 (Hawj) Environment and Natural Resources Appropriations:
Amended by A-3 Delete Everything**

Dear Chair Hawj and Members of the Senate Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), a voluntary association representing all 87 counties, we want to thank you for your work this session. **We appreciate the time you have invested in hearing legislation and for allowing us to offer our support and critiques.**

There are numerous provisions included in SF2438, as amended by the A3-DE amendment, that impact county government operations, responsibilities, and finances. AMC supports the investment made in state agencies that support and coordinate with local governments on environment and natural resources issues. We would also like to address and thank you for the investments that support the work of Minnesota counties. The following are key provisions for AMC in the current Senate Environment Omnibus Budget Bill:

- **SCORE Grants (13.29-13.31):** SCORE programs are an essential tool to achieve zero-waste goals and these state grants are an important part of county solid waste budgets. Unfortunately, the funding is insufficient for the infrastructure investments and program needs necessary for achieving our state goals, and funding has already fallen mostly on local resources. **We appreciate this committee's support of SCORE funding with an increase of \$2 million to the base for these important waste management efforts.**
- **County Feedlot Program (lines 16.25-16.31):** Counties with delegated authority serve as a local support for livestock producers in implementing water quality measures. Funding for the county feedlot program has been flat for more than a decade even though the work included in county delegation agreements has continued to increase along with the costs to deliver these services. The appropriation in the bill (\$2.959 million) represents a much-needed increase for this base funding that also requires county matching funds. It will be important to maintain this increase into the future for program stability.
- **Subsurface Sewage Treatment System (SSTS) Program (lines 9.7-9.22):** AMC supports the additional investment in support of county subsurface sewage treatment system (SSTS) programs. 86 of Minnesota's 87 counties administer SSTS programs and with more than 630,000 systems across Minnesota, representing an estimated 43.1 billion gallons of SSTS treated wastewater, which is no small task. This increase for base funding is appreciated.
- **Natural Resources Block Grants (lines 43.30-44.10):** The Natural Resources Block Grants provide state support for certain environmental functions required of county governments by the state of Minnesota, including the Wetland Conservation Act, shoreland protection and local water management. We appreciate the recognition of the need for
- **Solid Waste Capital Assistance Program (lines 15.13-15.15, 85.11-90.16):** The Solid Waste Capital Assistance Program provides funding that support the investment of local dollars in necessary waste management infrastructure. As the state looks to achieve its recycling and waste reduction goals, we will need to build the infrastructure to manage those materials. Many areas of the state have old, outdated facilities or lack the basic infrastructure to meet these needs. The funding and program updates in this legislation will improve our waste management outcomes.

- **Waste Prevention and Reduction Grants and Loans** (lines 15.30-15.34): AMC supports the committee's investment in the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's (MPCA) Waste Prevention and Reduction Programs. This is an opportunity to engage a more diverse group of partners to increase management opportunities related to organics and build our reduction/reuse capacity.
- **Metropolitan Landfill Contingency Action Trust (MLCAT)** (lines 17.32-18.2): The MLCAT is necessary to address emergency and long-term care at landfills and waste disposal sites in the seven-county metro area. The fund balance is already inadequate to address the expected expenses at eligible sites within the next three years. We appreciate the partial repayment of funds (\$12 million) included in the bill. MLCAT is primarily funded by local taxes and when these funds were previously transferred to address general fund deficits, they were scheduled to be repaid, but the repayments were later canceled. This begins to correct that and catch-up on this old debt.
- **Rough Fish Report** (lines 24.23-25.31): AMC supports establishing recreational harvest limits and spawning protection for native "rough" fish species of Minnesota that are ecologically beneficial. The work laid out in this proposal and the development of a report is an important first step toward a better understanding of how to manage these native fish.
- **Solar Panel Recycling Report** (lines 15.10-15.12, 110.24-111.29): AMC supports development of a plan to address solar panels and their structures at end of life. Minnesota needs to be prepared to deal with the materials and land impacts that will be part of a carbon-free future, including responsible management of hazardous components.

Again, thank you for the investments made in the people and programs dedicated to the improvement and protection of Minnesota's environment and natural resources. We look forward to working with you all on this budget proposal through the rest of the legislative process. Please let us know if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



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