



MACSSA

Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators

March 20, 2023

Senator John Marty
Chair, Senate Finance Committee

SF2265 Wiklund Commissioner human services public health emergency transition procedures establishment

Dear Chair Marty and Committee members,

The Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) supports SF2265, particularly the \$36,000,000 appropriation to assist counties with resuming Medical Assistance (MA) renewals following the expiration the federal peacetime emergency and the unwinding of continuous enrollment for MA programs in Minnesota. County eligibility staff across the state will have unprecedented workloads as redetermination of eligibility for public health care programs takes place for over 1.5 million individuals.

Adequate resources and authority for both the Department of Human Services (DHS) and counties to redetermine eligibility for Minnesotans enrolled in Minnesota Health Care Programs (MHCP) is key to success during this urgent period. Much of this work, however, falls on counties who process most MA applications. This increased administrative burden during a COVID-19 unwinding process is made even more complicated by the reality of a 30% increase in MHCP enrollment since January 2020. MACSSA thanks Chair Wiklund for including resources for counties in this urgent and timely appropriation bill.

The task before county eligibility staff over the next 18 months is unprecedented. To highlight the gravity of the task ahead, one county shared that they are modeling their preparations for the end of continuous enrollment on the Emergency Operations Center model. This process has all the workings and the urgency of a planned emergency, and thus, that is how they will set up and structure the re-enrollment process for their county. Nearly every case will need to be touched and amended by county staff in the next 12 months. Because of the requirements of continuous enrollment, county staff have been unable to update cases and make adverse changes to enrollment during the peacetime emergency. This will significantly impact how many cases auto-renew versus how many cases county staff will need to manually renew, resulting in amore time-intensive process for staff.

On top of processing applications to maintain enrollment, eligibility workers and other county staff will need to conduct timely response and outreach to those who are eligible but run into barriers to re-enrollment. To effectively ensure those who are eligible remain enrolled, and to lessening adverse impacts to those who should be redetermined but are not during their reenrollment period, county staff will take on work beyond what has traditionally been their role and workload. When an individual calls, in a panic about the medication they need or a service they no longer can access after churning off coverage, counties will be triaging and responding to those emergencies in work that goes beyond assessing eligibility and processing their paperwork.

This bill's \$36 million appropriation to counties would support counties in the work of this large enrollment undertaking. The appropriation is manageable enough to administer and will ensure that funds are allocated for their best use under the current timeline and conditions. In determining the appropriate fiscal ask, MACSSA did outreach to a diverse group of member counties regarding their need

and capacity to turnaround new resources quickly for use during the unwinding. Several counties developed methodologies to estimate approximate statewide cost or impacts of the additional work due to the unwinding of continuous enrollment and increased caseloads - with each of them landing very nearly at the same statewide number. Counties calculations fit with the needs and capacity to effectively use funds now.

However, the most universal feedback from human service directors about this appropriation is that, **due to the quick turnaround and short timeframe of this unwinding process, funds will not be used uniformly in each county and that flexibility is needed with any new funding counties received.** The need for this funding to be flexible is key, as the needs and ability to bring on new staff in short order, targeted to this high-volume period, will differ depending on workforce availability across the state. MACSSA appreciates the language not being overly prescriptive regarding how the funds are spent by counties and appreciate that DHS has also recognized and echoed the need for flexibility with these funds to respond in a timely matter to a county's greatest need. The wide-ranging impacts of continuous enrollment means there will be appropriate usage across several areas that intersect and interact with state Medicaid programing including social services, income maintenance, and health care eligibility. MA enrollment is central to so much of the eligibility and access to services across human services. The end of the peacetime emergency significantly impact a wide range of county staff beyond healthcare, from those determining eligibility for SNAP and child care assistance, to waiver services for our aging community and individuals with disabilities.

Counties appreciate Chair Wiklund's amendment to ensure there is a simple allocation formula, rather than a heavily administrative grant process for administering these funds. Workforce capacity is already a challenge and county staff need to be focusing on the task at hand and not navigating new bureaucracy and paperwork. Equally, the timing for eligible usage of these funds is also key. Currently, the bill allocates the money in fiscal year 2024, but it is important that language wouldn't prevent counties from being able to allocate these funds for costs they are incurring now as we build up to fast approaching deadlines. Counties have long been, and currently are making preparations for this unprecedented workload and it is important that resources can be applied to staff counties hire now and to investments counties make now in the technology or infrastructure to be successful. Additionally, relevant costs will continue beyond the immediate 12-month period of unwinding, as we know there will be considerable work to re-enrollment for those who churn off eligibility despite best efforts of staff. It is prudent for allocated funds to carry over and remain available to counties through 2025 as well.

MACSSA asks you to support this bill. We share Chair Wiklund's urgency to move this bill forward quickly, to maximize its impact and quickly put these new resources to use in our community at this critical time.

Sincerely,



Matt Freeman
Executive Director
Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators

Cc: Sen. Wiklund