



Association of Minnesota Counties

125 Charles Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55103-2108 | Main Line/Switchboard: 651-224-3344, Fax: 651-224-6540 | www.mncounties.org

March 25, 2024

RE: Support for ARMER Radio Funding in SF4205

Dear Members of the Judiciary and Public Safety Conference Committee:

On behalf of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), a voluntary association representing all 87 counties, we want to thank you for considering SF 4205 and inform you of our support for the legislation.

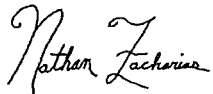
The Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER) is the backbone of public safety communication infrastructure in the State of Minnesota. ARMER radios are used statewide by first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel to communicate and to serve those in need. Having effective communication tools, such as radios, is essential to successfully provide public safety and saves lives in communities throughout the State.

Radios that serve the ARMER system are outdated in many jurisdictions. Counties and other local jurisdictions struggle to fund the maintenance and replacement costs for this vital piece of public safety infrastructure. Local governments often operate on tight budgets, especially in greater Minnesota where the need for radio communications is greatest. Planning for the costly process of replacing this critical infrastructure has proven difficult for local governments. State assistance is necessary to keep our emergency communications up to date and we urge the state to fund a grant program for local jurisdictions to upgrade ARMER radios. We also encourage the Legislature to identify a sustainable funding model to support ongoing replacement and long-term planning for ARMER equipment and infrastructure maintenance.

AMC supports SF4205 and the \$48 million in grants to local government units included in the bill.

Again, we sincerely appreciate your consideration of our perspective. Should you have any questions about the information provided above, please don't hesitate to reach out to your local county commissioners or AMC's Technology Policy Analyst, Nathan Zacharias, at (715) 222-2824.

Sincerely,



Nathan Zacharias, Technology Policy Analyst
Association of Minnesota Counties



Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM)

8716 Arbor Street, Duluth, MN 55808
amem-ed@charter.net / 218-626-7930

2021-2022

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Traverse County

Region 5 Representative

Shawn M. Stoermann

Brown County

Region 6 Representative

Terry Stoltzman

Anoka County

February 18, 2022

Representative Jeff Backer
369 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Jeff Howe
95 University Avenue W. #3231
Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Backer and Senator Howe:

The Clinton, MN elevator fire last year highlighted a need statewide to replace and upgrade ARMER radios that are at the end of their life expectancy.

The Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM) is pleased to share our support for your important public safety legislation (HF2821/SF2670). As you know this will service citizens across the state by providing firefighters, law enforcement and other emergency response personnel with the updated technology to assist them in saving lives.

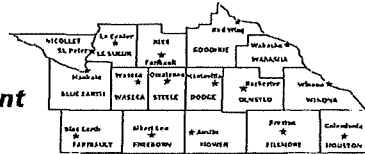
Unfortunately, radios are outdated in many of our local jurisdictions and many of these same jurisdictions are the ones least able to afford the significant cost of replacing them with their limited resources. The replacement cost ranges from \$2,500 to \$4,800 each with an additional \$400 per radio for programming and additional equipment or supplies required to add the radio onto the Statewide radio system.

It is important to note that new radios will meet the new FBI/BCA requirement for encryption in the radios when transmitting criminal justice information.

There are 87 counties, 853 incorporated cities, and 11 federally recognized tribes that will benefit from grants replacing this critical communications equipment. By doing this now, we are increasing our effectiveness to protect life, property, and the deployment of resources, while simultaneously ensuring our responders are utilizing the most modern and interoperable technology.

Again, thank you for your leadership on this very important initiative that will provide interoperability between our local jurisdictions and tribes, as well as state and federal partners.

Kelli Matzek
AMEM President




February 18, 2022

Senator Jeff Howe
95 University Avenue W. #3231
Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Region One Emergency Managers of Southeastern Minnesota would like to show our support for your important public safety legislation (HF2821/SF2670). This will greatly serve all of Minnesota by providing firefighters, law enforcement and other emergency response personnel with the updated technology to assist them in saving lives.

It is important to note that providing funding for ARMER Radios and equipment will assist with the new FBI/BCA requirement for encryption in the radios when transmitting criminal justice information.

If Region One can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out.


Amy Lammey
Region 1 Chair

March 10, 2022

Dear Chair Mariani, Chair Limmer and Members of the Committee:

Nicollet County is writing in support of HF 2821/SF 2670. We are writing to urge your support of this important public safety initiative.

Effective radios are the backbone of public safety in the State of Minnesota. Our first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel depend upon them to effectively perform their jobs. Radios save lives and serve every constituent of the State of Minnesota.

Radios that serve the ARMER system are outdated in many jurisdictions. They are costly to maintain and replace. In local government units, where budgets are tight, it is very difficult to plan for the costly process of replacing this critical infrastructure. Local government units would urge the state to fund a grant program that allows for the critical upgrade of radios. We would also encourage a sustainable funding support to support ongoing replacement.

Another challenge to replacement radios is that replacing radios is a direct impact of our local taxpayers. Radios are critical to deploying resources, protecting property and life, and protecting our workers. However, they often get overlooked for replacement because there is no existing funding source.

In Nicollet County, there are 421 radios on the statewide ARMER system, most of these radios are used by our small rural emergency departments. There are 5 volunteer fire departments, 2 ambulance service, 1 hospital, 1 college, 2 police departments and the Sheriff's Office which includes our countywide dispatch center and Emergency Management Department.

Out of the 421 radios, there are approximately 368 of the radios that were purchased before year 2012, these radios are no longer supported by Motorola and it is extremely difficult to find radio parts or used parts to fix or maintain the radios. Our emergency services departments rely on the ARMER radio system to provide the interoperability between the departments at the local, regional, State, and Federal levels.

The replacement cost for the radios that are at the end of their life expectancy, range from \$2,500 to \$4,800 each, this expense does not include the radio programming or additional equipment, or supplies required to add the radio onto the Statewide radio system. The additional cost will be approximately \$400 per radio.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

On behalf of Nicollet County Emergency Responders

Sheriff Dave Lange

Nicollet County Sheriff



ADMINISTRATION

John Glisczinski, Administrator

400 Court Avenue, PO Box 256, Gaylord, MN 55334

Phone: (507) 237-7800; Fax: (507) 237-4358

JohnG@co.sibley.mn.us

April 12, 2022

Senator Jeff R. Howe
95 University Avenue W.
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3231
St Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Howe,

Sibley County is pleased to support Senate File 2670 and its companion bill House File 2821 that would allow for state funding of the replacement of ARMER radios to local government such as those needed and used by our Sibley County Sheriff Office.

As you are well aware, the cost of the decision to require encryption on the emergency frequencies used by our Sibley County Sheriff's Department is more than any one entity like Sibley County is able to bear. The Sibley County Board of Commissioners commends and supports the co-authors of SF2670.

Sibley County Board of Commissioners, at their April 12, 2022 Board meeting, endorsed this letter and supports Senate File 2670 and House file 2821 .

Sincerely,

Christian Lilienthal
Sibley County Board Chair

BENTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

581 Highway 23 NE • P.O. Box 159 • Foley, MN 56329
Administrative: (320) 968-7201 • FAX: (320) 968-6885
Jail: (320) 968-8180 • FAX: (320) 968-6347
Records: (320) 968-8150
Facebook: www.facebook.com/BentonMNSheriff/
Twitter: @BentonMNSheriff



Troy Heck, Sheriff
Neal Jacobson, Chief Deputy

03/15/2022

Dear Chair Mariani, Chair Limmer and Members of the Committee:

Benton County is writing in support of HF 2821/SF 2670. We are writing to urge your support of this important public safety initiative. Effective radios are the backbone of public safety in the State of Minnesota. Our first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel depend upon them to effectively perform their jobs. Radios save lives and serve every constituent of the State of Minnesota.

Radios that serve the ARMER system are outdated in many jurisdictions. They are costly to maintain and replace. In local government units, where budgets are tight, it is very difficult to plan for the costly process of replacing this critical infrastructure. Local government units would urge the state to fund a grant program that allows for the critical upgrade of radios. We would also encourage a sustainable funding support to support ongoing replacement.

Another challenge to replacement radios is that replacing radios is a direct impact on our local taxpayers. Radios are critical to deploying resources, protecting property and life, and protecting our workers. However, they often get overlooked for replacement because there is no existing funding source.

In Benton County, there are 355 radios on the statewide ARMER system, most of these radios are used by our small rural emergency departments. There are 3 volunteer fire departments, 2 ambulance services, 3 police departments and the Sheriff's Office which includes our countywide dispatch center and Emergency Management Department. Our emergency services departments rely on the ARMER radio system to provide the interoperability between the departments at the local, regional, State, and Federal levels.

The replacement cost for the radios that are at the end of their life expectancy, range from \$2,500 to \$4,800 each, this expense does not include the radio programming or additional equipment, or supplies required to add the radio onto the Statewide radio system. The additional cost will be approximately \$400 per radio. Thank you for your consideration to this important matter.

On behalf of the public safety entities of Benton County, Rice, Foley, and Sauk Rapids,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Troy Heck".

Troy Heck
Benton County Sheriff

03/08/2022

Re: HF 2821 SF 2670 ARMER Radio Replacement Funding

Dear Senator Howe,

On July 25, 2022 a 911 emergency call was made in the City of Clinton in Big Stone County. The caller said the large elevator was on fire. The Fire Chief immediately knew that this was a great threat to the city, with concern of a potential explosion and harm to the nearby residents.

The Fire Chief immediately requested mutual aid resources from surrounding departments, there were 19 Fire Departments who assisted at the scene over a two-day period. These departments were all communicating over the 800 MHz ARMER radio system. There were 36 departments total who responded to the scene or on standby waiting to respond. The radio system has changed over the years, this system allows for interoperability not only in a single county but throughout the State of Minnesota.

Days after the incident, Governor Walz, Congresswoman Fischbach, Senator Westrom and Representative Backer visited the scene and heard from local emergency services departments. One of the Fire Chiefs who served as the Assistant Incident Commander shared his concern of how his small department was unable to replace his aging radios, he explained that the money that they bring in by fundraising is used to replace equipment that is needed to fight the fires, they also have a small tax base and their members are all volunteers.

This is what we hear from throughout the State of Minnesota, our small volunteer departments are struggling to replace the aging radios and share their concern of not being able to fund this reliable communication system. Grant funding is desperately needed at this time.

Important Points:

- The ARMER Radio System was a result of post 9/11 recommendations that highlighted the need for LMR (land mobile radio) systems that provide emergency responders with the ability to communicate between disciplines and across jurisdictional boundaries.
- The new 700/800 MHz ARMER radios have replaced the old VHF radios, the old VHF radio allowed for one emergency responder to key up on the radio to talk to one VHF radio user in the county where they worked. The ARMER radios allow the radio user to talk to many disciplines anywhere in the State of Minnesota.
- Counties are tasked with a responsibility for public safety and public response. Interoperable radio communication between units are vital and necessary to provide the best service, quickly and efficiently. Without the funding for replacement radios, emergency responders will have limited communication resources and the quality of service delivered to Minnesota's residents and visitors will suffer.
- The XTS (portable radio) and XTL (mobile radio) are minicomputers, they do not have the life expectancy of the old VHF radios. The life cycle is shorter, most radios are aging and reaching twelve years or older. Computers are not made to last 12 years, the radios have an RF transmitter and are similar to our cell phones and computers. In addition to the length of time

RESOLUTION 23-03

RESOLUTION SUPPORTING OF HF1075 / SF 1576 AND PUBLIC SAFETY INITIATIVE

WHEREAS, The County of Traverse is writing in support of this important public safety initiative, HF1075 / SF1576.

WHEREAS, Effective radios are the backbone of public safety in the State of Minnesota. Our first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel depend upon this ARMER system to effectively perform their jobs. Radios save lives and serve every constituent of the State of Minnesota.

WHEREAS, Radios that serve the ARMER system are outdated in many jurisdictions. They are costly to maintain and replace. In local government units, where budgets are tight, it is very difficult to plan for the costly process of replacing this critical infrastructure. Local government units would urge the state to fund a grant program that allows for the critical upgrade of radios. We would also encourage sustainable funding to support ongoing replacement costs.

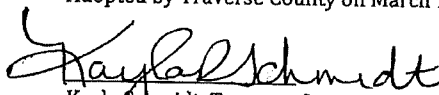
WHEREAS, The cost to replace the aging radios is a direct impact of our local taxpayers. ARMER radios are critical to deploying resources, protecting property and life, and protecting our workers. However, they often get overlooked for replacement because there is no existing funding source.

WHEREAS, In Traverse County, there are 181 radios on the statewide ARMER system, most of these radios are used by our small rural emergency departments. The emergency service departments who serve Traverse County rely on this interoperability. The radios allow for communication between all emergency service departments.

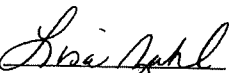
WHEREAS, Traverse County has aging radios on the ARMER system that are no longer supported, it is extremely difficult to find radio parts or used parts to fix or maintain the equipment. Our emergency responders rely on the ARMER radio system to provide the interoperability between the departments at the local, regional, State, and Federal levels. The replacement cost for the radios that are at the end of their life expectancy, range from \$2,500 to \$5,500 each, this expense does not include the radio programming or additional equipment, or supplies required to add the radio onto the Statewide radio system. The additional cost is approximately \$400 per radio.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Traverse County supports the HF1075 / SF1576 and urges the importance of public safety initiative.

Adopted by Traverse County on March 7, 2023



Kayla Schmidt, Traverse County Board Chair

Attest: 

Lisa Zahl, Traverse County Coordinator

03/08/2022

Re: HF 2821 SF 2670 ARMER Radio Replacement Funding

Dear Senator Howe,

On July 25, 2022 a 911 emergency call was made in the City of Clinton in Big Stone County. The caller said the large elevator was on fire. The Fire Chief immediately knew that this was a great threat to the city, with concern of a potential explosion and harm to the nearby residents.

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This is what we hear from throughout the State of Minnesota, our small volunteer departments are struggling to replace the aging radios and share their concern of not being able to fund this reliable communication system. Grant funding is desperately needed at this time.

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- The XTS (portable radio) and XTL (mobile radio) are minicomputers, they do not have the life expectancy of the old VHF radios. The life cycle is shorter, most radios are aging and reaching twelve years or older. Computers are not made to last 12 years, the radios have an RF transmitter and are similar to our cell phones and computers. In addition to the length of time

they have operated, many are subject to harsh conditions – such as extreme heat/cold, constant use with 24/7 response, and normal wear and tear by being hauled around.

- Motorola radios that were purchased years ago have begun to reach the end of life, end of support for the products. Please see the attached documents.
- Replacement batteries for the XTS (portable) radio are difficult to find, there is one battery for the XTS product and in the future will no longer be available.
- Due to the cost, First Responders (Fire, EMS, Law Enforcement) across the state are unable to replace their aging radios. To compound the problem, many departments do not have an adequate number of radios needed for their departments. These departments will not be able to purchase additional radios if they are unable to replace the old radios.
- The replacement cost of ARMER radios ranges from \$2500-\$5000 depending on model and need. This price does not include the installation and programming cost which can reach around \$400.00 per unit.
- Many local government units can only provide funding through their levies. This is a direct impact to the local taxpayers and increases to local levies. Many local government units cannot keep pace with the need to replace these units through levy funds only.
- Small rural county emergency services departments do not have levy authority to fund radio replacements. Many small rural emergency service departments are staffed by volunteers and their only way to raise money is through fundraising.
- In Stevens County, Emergency Manager has made a concerted effort to replace radios through grants and levy funds the board has supported. Still, the county has fallen behind. With 230 of the radios still needing replacement.
- The last large round of grant funding was available from around 2009-2012, many radios statewide have not been replaced since that time.
- All 87 counties can benefit from this funding.

Please reach out by email if you have questions or comments donagreiner@co.stevens.mn.us. This funding is greatly needed throughout the State of Minnesota.

Sincerely,



Dona Greiner
Emergency Management Director
Big Stone County and Stevens County