



HENNEPIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
A-2400 GOVERNMENT CENTER  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55487-0240

May 8, 2019

Senator Bill Ingebrigsten  
Room 3207 Minnesota Senate Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Rick Hansen  
Room 407 State Office Building  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Omnibus Environment Finance Conference Committee Chairs:

On behalf of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners, I am writing to express our support for several important funding items contained in the omnibus environment finance bill (S.F. 2314/H.F. 2209) and to register concerns with one policy provision. Specifically, Hennepin County urges you to 1) increase funding for SCORE recycling grants; and, 2) establish and fund a grant program for local governments to mitigate the spread of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). Without state help on these issues, Hennepin County and other local units of government will have difficulty meeting state waste management mandates and will not be able to adequately combat the growing EAB problem as the pest spreads throughout the state. We also encourage you not to include restrictions on the state's environmental agencies use of "unadopted rules", as this could also impede our ability to meet waste management mandates.

As you know, counties are charged with managing mixed municipal solid waste in Minnesota. Hennepin County has developed programs to proactively target waste reduction, waste education, organics composting, recycling and waste processing in an attempt to meet the state's requirement to recycle 75 percent of our waste in the Metro Area by 2030. The state provides assistance to all counties in the form of SCORE grants, which are funded through a portion of the solid waste management tax (SWMT). Hennepin County distributes 100% of the SCORE grants it receives among its 45 cities. However, while the amount of money generated by the SWMT has increased dramatically since its inception, funding for SCORE grants has remained almost flat and has not kept up with increased demands for services. In fact, only 21% of the SWMT goes to SCORE grants supporting county recycling programs, while 30% of that tax goes to the General Fund to pay for issues unrelated to garbage management. In order to help us meet the state imposed recycling mandates, we urge conferees to significantly increase SCORE funding to all Minnesota counties.

We are also very concerned about the spread of Emerald Ash Borer and the drastic effects it will have on our environment, economy and financial resources. Eighteen Minnesota counties, from southeast Minnesota, to the Metro Area, to the shores of Lake Superior and most recently the north-central part of the state, are now under quarantine. This extremely destructive pest is expanding its range rapidly, and cities and counties do not have the financial, technical or personnel resources to contain or mitigate the damage. There are nearly 1 billion ash trees in Minnesota, all of which are threatened by this invasive species. Hennepin County alone has about 1 million ash trees on its maintained areas, including parks, yards, boulevards, and parking lots. Losing that many trees in urban, suburban, and rural areas alike will wreak havoc on water tables, storm water systems, wildlife habitat, shade canopies, energy use, and forestry budgets, not to mention the negative impacts it will have on industries and businesses that are reliant on this natural resource. And while the recent cold weather will likely have temporarily slowed its spread, the polar vortex in no way eliminated the pest, nor has it reduced the need to aggressively remove and replace infected ash trees. We support the provisions in the House version of the bill (H.F. 2209) which provide modest assistance to the state and local governments to remove and replace trees lost to EAB and to help transport wood waste to waste-to-energy facilities.

Finally, we are concerned about provisions in the Senate bill that establish limitations on unadopted rules by the Pollution Control Agency (see S.F. 2314, Section 124). This language will create tremendous uncertainty for counties if all guidance and planning conducted by the PCA will require rulemaking. Counties are tasked with developing programs to reduce solid waste and improve the environment. Adoption of this language threatens to force Hennepin County's every-six-year Solid Waste Master Plan into a rulemaking process. As it is, it takes two years to develop the Plan; due to extensive outreach during our last process, we received approximately 1,500 comments from the public and affected businesses. Restricting agencies from providing guidance on how policies will be implemented threatens to force even simple things into rulemaking, such as providing brochures and pamphlets that describe how residents can access or take advantage of services.

As such, Hennepin County opposes any language that limits the work of the PCA in seeking reasonable public input in developing policies, guidelines and interpretative statements for waste policy and programs. Requiring a lengthy rulemaking process in these situations is unnecessary and will only delay implementation of advancements in solid waste planning and management.

Thank you for your time and attention, and if you have any questions or comments regarding this information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Marion Greene  
Chair, Hennepin County Board of Commissioners

cc: Omnibus Environment Finance Conference Committee Members