



# 2024 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

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*Approved by the McHenry County Board January 16, 2024*

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Michael Buehler

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## **MCHENRY COUNTY, IL 2024 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM**

Founded in 1836, McHenry County began as an agricultural community, which grew substantially in the 1990s in 2000s to become the sixth largest county in the State of Illinois. Today, the county is comprised of a patchwork of rural and urban communities in the northwest region of the Chicago metropolitan area, and it boasts a population of approximately 312,000 residents.

Property taxes in McHenry County remain high, and the County Board is committed to lessening its burden on residents by encouraging smart, sustainable development that expands the tax base. The County Board recognizes that a strong, vibrant economy also is dependent upon the preservation and protection of the county's natural, agricultural, and cultural resources, as the county's rural character and natural areas attract visitors, new residents and businesses to the county.

Unfunded mandates and added regulations from both the State and the Federal Government have increased the cost of county operations, and they threaten the county's fiscal strength and opportunities for tax relief.

Partnerships with federal and state legislators are essential for enabling the County to provide high-quality services in a fiscally responsible manner. The 2024 Legislative Program was developed in coordination with the full County Board, county departments and regional stakeholders. The Program includes legislative priorities to sponsor and priorities to support. Sponsored priorities are those sponsored by McHenry County. Supported priorities are those sponsored by other partner organizations. Each priority contains a brief description and proposed legislative action in accordance with the McHenry County Legislative Tenets.

# **MCHENRY COUNTY'S LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

McHenry County begins the development of its Legislative Program in the early fall prior to the Illinois General Assembly's Veto Session. The Law & Government/Liquor (LGL) Committee seeks input from county elected officials as well as department heads, partner agencies, and state elected officials for legislation ideas that directly impact the county government and services.

The LGL Committee reviews proposed ideas and begins the vetting process for possible inclusion into the proposed program. This process may include, but is not limited to, consultation with other impacted elected offices, units of government and standing committees with subject matter expertise.

The LGL Committee then develops and approves a proposed legislative program for the consideration of the full County Board before the following year's General Assembly session.

After the County Board approves the program, it is disseminated to McHenry County's legislative advocates and its delegation to Springfield and Washington D.C. After the conclusion of the General Assembly's Spring Session, the LGL Committee evaluates the success of the program and begins the legislative process again.

Given the fast-paced environment of the Illinois General Assembly, the County Board Chair, the County Administrator, and their delegates and legislative advocates are permitted to file witness slips on behalf of the McHenry County Board on issues where the Board's position is clearly stated by the Legislative Program, the County's Legislative Tenets or by resolution.

Should the County Board's position be ambiguous or unknown, the Chair may submit a witness slip under the Office of the County Board Chair. Where practicable, the County Board may issue a resolution declaring its position on policy. County Board Members are empowered to file witness slips in their own personal capacities.

# 2024 LEGISLATIVE ADVOCATES



**ILLINOIS STATE ASSOCIATION  
OF COUNTIES  
JOE MCCOY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The Illinois State Association of Counties (ISACo) is a statewide association whose mission is to empower county officials to provide excellent service to their residents. ISACo member counties are comprised of forward-thinking public servants who recognize that the challenges confronting county governments require new and innovative ideas, collaborative solutions and collective advocacy at the state and federal levels of government.



**MCHENRY COUNTY COUNCIL  
OF GOVERNMENTS  
CHALEN DAIGLE  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Established in 1976, the McHenry County Council of Governments is a cohesive network of governmental bodies who seek to foster cooperation between all levels of government. The purpose of the McHenry County Council of Governments is to uphold and advocate principles of effective local government, facilitate solutions to regional issues and otherwise lessen the burdens of government.

# **MCHENRY COUNTY, IL 2024 LEGISLATIVE TENETS**

1. Support legislation granting additional permissive authorities for counties.
2. Support legislation allowing counties to expand non-property tax revenue sources.
3. Oppose unfunded mandates imposed by the state or federal government.\*
4. Oppose legislation that would reduce the existing authority of county government.
5. Oppose legislation that erodes the existing County revenue base.
6. Support legislation that benefits the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of McHenry County.

\*Legislators are encouraged to approve sound legislation regardless of funding source so long as reasonable attempts to provide non-local funding have been made.

# STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SPONSOR

## **INCLUDE THE MCHENRY COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE IN THE CO-RESPONDER PILOT PROGRAM**

**Issue:** The General Assembly created the Co-Responder Pilot Program in May of 2022. The law stated that the police departments of East St. Louis, Peoria, Springfield, and Waukegan shall develop a co-responder unit, a unit of police social workers to conduct follow-up visits for individuals that may benefit from mental or behavioral health services. The General Assembly also appropriated \$10 million in funding for these programs, yet allocated only \$9.6 million to specific communities. The McHenry County Sheriff's Office has successfully launched its county-wide Police Social Work Program in June of 2022, and already employs five social workers who are making a difference in the lives of McHenry County residents.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the inclusion of the McHenry County Sheriff's Office in the Co-Responder Pilot Program legislation and the allocation of the remaining \$400,000 in funding to help support this program as it is now a template for local governments across the State of Illinois.

## **IMPROVE ZONING LEGISLATION FOR SOLAR AND WIND FACILITIES**

**Issue:** The General Assembly removed county zoning authority for solar and wind facilities based on assertions that counties were using the zoning process to hamper the State's clean energy goals. This has resulted in siting that conflicts with local planning and smart growth practices. McHenry County and many other counties have consistently approved most if not all solar and wind facilities over the years in accordance with the LaSalle factors.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks restoration of zoning authority for counties that have consistently approved solar and wind facilities over the past five years.

# STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT

## ENHANCE REPRESENTATION AND SERVICE IN REGIONAL TRANSIT

**Issue:** Recognizing the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Chicagoland region's transit system, the need to make improvements to the quality of transit service provided, and the system's \$730 million operating deficit beginning in 2026, the General Assembly commissioned the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to develop the Plan of Action for Regional Transit (PART) with regional stakeholders, including McHenry County. CMAP did develop a PART report which recommended two possible changes to governance of regional transit. The first was integrating the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Pace, and Metra into one transit entity, and the second was empowering the RTA with new authority, while maintaining the CTA, Pace, and Metra in their roles as operating agencies.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the implementation of a stronger RTA with the CTA, Pace, Metra continuing their roles as operating agencies. The County also seeks more suburban representation on the RTA and operating boards as well as enhanced regional transit services. The County also supports additional State and local revenue streams for improvements to public transit, which must include support for suburban paratransit services such as the County's MCRide program. New capital funding should accelerate the construction of a new Metra rail yard northwest of Woodstock.

## INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WORKFORCE HOUSING

**Issue:** Both federal and state governments recognize the importance of workforce housing. Many workers in McHenry County are struggling to find housing that is priced at less than 33% of their gross income. Workforce housing initiatives can take upwards of five years to implement, which disincentivizes developers, local governments, and other agencies from partnering on their construction.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks increased funding from the State of Illinois and the Federal Government for workforce housing initiatives as well as the streamlining of the application process through the Illinois Housing and Development Agency.

## ENCOURAGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND THEIR FAIR CONTRIBUTION TO LOCAL ROAD MAINTENANCE

**Issue:** Following the State of Illinois' policies to transition to clean energy, there has been a rapid proliferation of electric vehicle usage. The transition to electric vehicles has created fairness questions for the financing of local road maintenance because electric vehicle owners do not pay the Motor Fuel Tax.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County supports initiatives that will ensure electric vehicle owners contribute their fair share to the funding of local transportation projects as their registration fees only fund State transportation initiatives. The County supports reforming distributions from the State EV registration fee to share EV revenue with Counties and other local governments.

# STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT

## IMPROVE PERSONAL PROPERTY REPLACEMENT TAX FUNDING

**Issue:** Each year the Illinois Department of Revenue (IDOR) distributes Personal Property Replacement Tax (PPRT) funds to local taxing districts to compensate for their loss of revenue when the State took away their authority to impose personal property taxes on corporations, partnerships, and other business entities in 1979. Cook County and local governments in its jurisdiction automatically receive 51.65% of the revenue, which is then divided amongst themselves in proportion to the personal property tax collections for the 1976 tax year. The remaining 48.35% is divided amongst local governments in the rest of Illinois in proportion to the personal property tax collections for the 1977 tax year.

In August of 2023, IDOR indicated that local governments would see a 28.8% reduction in Fiscal Year 2024 PPRT funding compared to Fiscal Year 2023. This reduction, coupled with the reduced Local Government Distributive Fund allocation, will directly and significantly impact McHenry County's revenues.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the return of PPRT distributions to Fiscal Year 2023 levels, at least until Local Government Distributive Fund allocations can be fully returned to 10%.

## PRESERVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT DOLLARS

**Issue:** The Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) is a state fund that is used to distribute a portion of state income tax to counties and municipalities for local services. It has been in place since 1969 as a way to reduce dependence on property taxes. Until 2011, 10% of income tax revenue received was deposited into the LGDF for distribution, but it has gradually been reduced.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the return of LGDF dollars and the elimination of the sales tax administrative fee due to the uncertainty of future revenues.

## AMEND THE PAID LEAVE FOR ALL WORKERS ACT TO EXEMPT LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

**Issue:** The Paid Leave for All Workers Act passed by the Illinois General Assembly, requires certain employers, including local governments, to give their employees 40 hours of paid leave over a 12-month period. The leave may be used for any purpose at any time, and an employee is not required to provide an employer with a reason for the leave. While the Act is a well-intended effort to establish a minimum paid leave standard, it creates public safety issues for government employers. The Act does not specify that employers may deny requests for time off due to coverage issues, which could lead to understaffed jails and nursing facilities as well as subpar services to residents.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the exemption of local governments from the Paid Leave for All Workers Act to ensure public safety and quality services, especially since local governments like McHenry County already provide more paid leave than the Act requires.



# STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT

## **PERMIT THE PUBLICATION OF ASSESSMENTS ONLINE**

**Issue:** Every four years, county assessments offices must publish all assessments in a newspaper of general circulation in the county at great cost to taxpayers.

**Recommendation:** Given the decrease in newspaper readership, the increase in the use of the internet, and the cost of publication to counties, McHenry County requests that the legislature pass a bill allowing counties to publish assessments online.

## **INVEST IN TRANSPORTATION: PASSENGER RAIL IN DOWNTOWN MARENGO**

**Issue:** The State of Illinois has allocated approximately \$275 million for the extension of passenger rail service from Chicago to Rockford with stops in Elgin, Huntley, Belvidere, and Rockford. The rail line runs through the City of Marengo's downtown area and passenger rail service has long been coveted. Since the State of Illinois selected Metra to be the rail line's operator, there is a unique opportunity to provide this service to residents of the southwest portion of McHenry County.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the State's commitment of a passenger rail station in downtown Marengo.

## **ENCOURAGE THE EFFICIENT LOCATION OF UTILITIES AT THE ROUTE 23 AND I-90 INTERCHANGE**

**Issue:** The first full interchange on McHenry County soil was built on State Route 23 and Interstate 90 in 2019, but the extension of utilities in the surrounding area has been slow to progress.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County welcomes efforts to encourage the efficient location of utilities at the Route 23 and I-90 interchange to spur nodal commercial and industrial development and the larger regional economy.

## **SUPPORT THE ALLOCATION OF CONNECT ILLINOIS FUNDS**

**Issue:** Western and northern portions of McHenry County have well-documented gaps in high-speed internet coverage.

**Recommendation:** To increase both agricultural and economic development in the region, McHenry County requests that Connect Illinois funds be expeditiously allocated to encourage internet enhancements in underserved areas like those in this county.

# STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT

## **ADEQUATELY FUND TOWNSHIP BRIDGE REPLACEMENT**

**Issue:** From 1979 until 2023, Township Bridge Program (TBP) funding allocations had remained at \$15 million dollars across all of Illinois despite massive increases in construction prices. For the State of Illinois' 2024 Fiscal Year, the General Assembly increased TBP funding to \$60 million in its budget implementation bill, but this may only be a one-time increase. McHenry County has 80 township structures that are eligible for repair, but will only receive \$653,376 for the State's one-time funding increase for them.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks the codification of the annual \$60 million allocation to the Township Bridge Program in the Highway Code, and welcomes further funding to repair township bridges.

# FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SPONSOR

## **ASSIST WITH RENOVATION FUNDING FOR THE POLICE SOCIAL WORK HEADQUARTERS IN THE MCHENRY COUNTY REGIONAL TRAINING CENTER**

**Issue:** The cutting-edge McHenry County Police Social Work Program has been temporarily housed at the Community Foundation of McHenry County since its inception last year, but it must find a new home to continue providing critically needed services in the community.

McHenry County acquired the old Cary Village Hall and police department building for \$1. Renovations for the old village hall are complete, but the police department portion of the facility remains in poor condition and unsuitable for use.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks Community Project Funding of approximately \$3 million to renovate the police department portion of the old Cary Village Hall and house the successful McHenry County Police Social Work Program, a DUI testing center, the workspace for MIAT, and an emergency operations center.

## **INVEST IN TRANSPORTATION: THE WOODSTOCK RAIL YARD PROJECT**

**Issue:** Metra is embarking upon a \$150 million project to build a new rail yard in the City of Woodstock. This would alleviate locomotive idling in downtown Crystal Lake, increase the quantity of Metra service for the residents of Woodstock, and enhance the economic vitality of the region. McHenry County has partnered with Metra and the City of Woodstock and will help facilitate the necessary acquisition of property and engineering contracts which will cost approximately \$20 million.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks assistance with the funding for the acquisition of property and engineering contracts for the Woodstock Rail Yard Project.

## **INCREASE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT FUNDING**

**Issue:** The Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) was created under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 and provides Americans with infrastructure; safe, affordable and accessible housing; and quality jobs assisted through financing new and expanding businesses. Despite the success of CDBG programs across the United States, CDBG funding has declined by 55% since 2000 which has severely hampered local governments' ability to foster sustainable and economically resilient communities. Moreover, communities such as McHenry County are further hindered by the CDBG formulas which are not as favorable to counties with urban, exurban, and rural areas.

**Recommendation:** McHenry County seeks an increase in CDBG funding from \$3.3 billion in FY 2023 to \$4.2 billion in FY 2024 as well as the change or creation of a funding formula that would assist communities with a combination of urban, exurban and rural areas.

# FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES TO SUPPORT

## **SUPPORT FUNDING FOR COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS (CVSOs)**

**Issue:** The number of veteran suicides nationwide continues to rise, and approximately 14 of the 20 veterans who die by suicide each day are not under Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care. This national public health crisis requires a national approach that meets veterans where they're located.

County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs) are often the first point of contact in the community for veteran's services and they provide assistance on a range of benefits, including service-connected benefits, enrollment in VA health care, VA home loans, education benefits, and available job placement assistance. Veterans are not always aware of the available benefits, and CVSOs are often the first to inform them about their eligibility. CVSOs are nationally accredited by the VA to prepare, present, and prosecute VA claims. However, there is currently no federal funding directly available for CVSOs.

**Recommendation:** Support the CVSO Act, or similar federal bills, that provide federal funding to support CVSOs or similar local entities.