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Contact: Julie Liew

651-259-1917

jlliew@flaherty-hood.com

Bill to increase city aid finds strong bipartisan support at Legislature

Mayor: LGA is the 'unsung hero of Greater Minnesota communities'

ST. PAUL—As discussions about the projected state budget surplus and potential changes to the tax code heat up the Capitol, city leaders from Greater Minnesota are calling on lawmakers to pass legislation introduced today that would increase funding for critical state aid to cities.

The bill, [SF 3082/HF 3493](#), boosts funding for the state's Local Government Aid (LGA) program by \$30.5 million. Chief authored by Sen. Bill Weber (R-Luverne) and Rep. Paul Anderson (R-Starbuck), two long-time advocates for LGA, the legislation has bipartisan support in both houses and a long list of Republican and Democrat co-authors who represent a wide mix of rural, suburban and urban cities.

"Sen. Weber and Rep. Anderson are veteran legislators and great champions for Greater Minnesota. We are grateful they are taking the lead on this issue and continuing to fight on behalf of the nearly 90 percent of Minnesota cities who receive LGA," said Dave Smiglewski, mayor of Granite Falls and president the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities (CGMC).

Securing additional LGA funding is a top legislative priority for the CGMC this session. While small increases in recent years have begun to make up for drastic cuts made to LGA in the mid-2000s, the program still receives less funding than it did in 2002. At the same time, inflation and hefty increases in costs such as employee health insurance premiums and construction materials have caused cities to struggle to provide the services and amenities residents depend on while keeping property taxes in check.

"The average Minnesotan might not know anything about LGA, but it is absolutely vital to keeping our cities strong and providing a good quality of life for our residents," Smiglewski said. "Every time you drive down a plowed street, call emergency services or visit a city park, there is a good chance you are experiencing the benefits of LGA. It is the unsung hero of Greater Minnesota communities."

Lawmakers have been vocal about the need to pass a tax bill in order to deal with issues that have sprung up due to the recent federal tax overhaul. Since changes to LGA funding are typically addressed in the tax bill, Smiglewski said this focus on the state's tax situation provides an opportunity to pass an LGA increase this session.

"Our communities have waited long enough. Now that the economy is strong and Minnesota is on the right track, it is time to restore LGA funding," Smiglewski said. "As our legislators debate tax changes and plans for the budget surplus, we are counting on them to make sure LGA is a major part of the conversation."

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The Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization representing 96 cities outside of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Coalition educates legislators about issues important to Greater Minnesota. Visit the CGMC online at greatermncities.org and follow us on Twitter [@greatermncities](https://twitter.com/greatermncities).