

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 159

**To establish a Legislative Research
Committee for Hennepin County**

April 1963

Citizens League
545 Mobil Oil Building
Minneapolis 2, Minnesota

APPROVED
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

April 5, 1963

~~DATE APR 10 1963~~

REPORT TO: Board to Directors

FROM: Legislative Action Committee, John Windhorst, Chairman

SUBJECT: Findings and recommendations on the need for legislation establishing a Legislative Research Committee through which the Hennepin County Senate and House Legislative Delegations can function between sessions

RECOMMENDATION

We have reached the point where it has become an urgent necessity for members of the State Legislature elected from Hennepin County districts to establish procedures enabling them to discuss and obtain information on issues of direct concern to residents of Hennepin County between legislative sessions. One clearly acceptable way of accomplishing this objective would be to enact legislation formalizing the Hennepin County Senate and House Delegations in such a way as to enable their continued activity between sessions. Specifically, we urge favorable action during the current session of the Legislature on HF403, or a bill containing its major provisions.

BACKGROUND AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

During recent sessions of the Minnesota State Legislature the number of legislative proposals of less than statewide application, which affect in a direct and important way the residents of Hennepin County, has increased steadily. Many of these legislative proposals have been controversial and have involved complex issues. Legislators are finding it all but impossible to give these proposals the kind of penetrating depth analysis and discussion during the legislative session which will assure both sound and positive resolution of the issues involved. The result, far too frequently, has been adjournment of the session with no action whatsoever and postponement of the issue for two additional years.

As an example of the growing magnitude of the problem, we list just some of the more significant bills of direct impact to Hennepin County residents and of less than statewide application which are now under consideration by the State Legislature:

1. A bill to determine the future status and control of Minneapolis General Hospital and proposing to transfer to Hennepin County administrative and financial responsibility for public relief programs and for providing tax-supported hospital and medical care for the poor and the medically indigent.
2. A bill expanding the boundaries of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Sanitary District, providing representation for suburban residents on the Sanitary District Board, and establishing a method of paying the costs of operation and construction.
3. A bill creating a metropolitan transit authority.

4. Several bills which would abolish or seriously restrict the authority of the Minnesota Municipal Commission.
5. A bill proposing to double the maximum millage allowed to finance the operations of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Planning Commission.
6. A bill proposing comprehensive changes in the Minneapolis Special School District Act.
7. Several bills proposing to redistrict Hennepin County Commissioner Districts.
8. Several bills proposing substantial changes in the organization of the lower court system in Hennepin County.
9. A bill authorizing the Hennepin County Park Reserve District to issue up to \$8 million in bonds for the acquisition and betterment of major park areas and facilities throughout Hennepin County.
10. A bill enabling the City of Minneapolis to become a part of the Hennepin County Park Reserve District.
11. A bill authorizing the City of Minneapolis to issue up to \$20 million of bonds to initially finance and speed up the construction of state highways within the City of Minneapolis.
12. A bill abolishing the elective office of Coroner and establishing the office of an appointed Medical Examiner and requiring that he be a doctor of medicine.
13. A bill which has for its purpose the enabling of the establishment of a mall on Nicollet Avenue in downtown Minneapolis and the banning of private vehicles on Nicollet Avenue.
14. Bills proposing to abolish or modify the local consent requirement for rezoning property in Minneapolis.
15. A considerable number of bills increasing the salaries of elected and appointed municipal and county officials and employees.
16. A number of bills which will result in an increased tax levy for public employee retirement programs and involving procedural changes in the management of these programs.

Each of the legislative proposals listed above involves complex, and frequently controversial, issues, and countless hours of legislators' time if they are to be given the kind of careful consideration to which they are entitled. Each legislator representing a district in Hennepin County could well devote his entire attention to these issues alone during the legislative session. But these bills are only a minute fraction of the legislative proposals on which these legislators must pass judgment during the current session of the Legislature.

During the 1961 session most legislators representing districts in Hennepin County sensed the need to establish procedures under which these legislators could familiarize themselves in greater depth with these proposal directly affecting

Hennepin County residents. Bills were introduced creating a Legislative Research Committee in Hennepin County and appropriating funds out of county revenues in order to provide staff assistance for the committee. The Hennepin County Senate Delegation supported a bill under which an equal number of senators and representatives from Hennepin County would have been designated to serve on the Interim Committee. The House Delegation favored a bill under which all of the senators and representatives in Hennepin County would have comprised the Legislative Research Committee. These bills were not successfully compromised and no legislation was enacted.

HF403 was introduced on February 5, 1963 by Representatives F. Gordon Wright, Douglas M. Head, Lyall Schwarzkopf, Edward Volstad and John Skeate. HF403 would create a Legislative Research Committee consisting of the senators and representatives in the Legislature from Hennepin County. The committee is authorized to investigate and study, accumulate, compile, analyze and report on information concerning policies, plans, programs and procedures relating to or affecting the fiscal and legislative needs of the County and any governmental or political subdivision within the County, including any school district and any metropolitan or district authority having jurisdiction in any area of the County. The committee would be further authorized to gather information and provide material to be used by senators and representatives from the County in their work while the Legislature is in session, and in connection with any legislative proposals affecting the County and its subdivisions. The committee is given the authority to appoint subcommittees to perform any of its functions or duties and the committee would be required to meet at least once in each quarter and at such additional times as may be designated by the chairman of the committee. The committee is authorized to select a chairman and a vice chairman from its own members and to appoint a secretary and such other persons and obtain the assistance of such research agencies as it deems necessary. The Hennepin County Board of Commissioners would appropriate from the County General Revenue Fund \$15,000 for the use of the committee during the year ending December 31, 1963, and \$10,000 for the use of the committee for each year thereafter. No other bills to accomplish this objective have thus far been introduced. HF 403 was referred to the Rules Committee and thus far it has not been discussed either in the Rules Committee or in a meeting of the Hennepin County House Delegation.

Senators and representatives representing districts in both Ramsey County and St. Louis County have conducted work between sessions for several years under enabling legislation similar to that provided for in HF403.

DISCUSSION

The conclusion that legislators representing districts in Hennepin County must find a way to enable continuing research, analysis and discussion between legislative sessions seems inescapable. It is unreasonable to expect legislators to even understand fully the many complex issues involved on these numerous legislative proposals having an important effect on residents of Hennepin County during a 90- or even a 120-day legislative session and at the same time do justice to the many other legislative bills having statewide application. It is even more unfair to expect these legislators to develop sound and specific proposals resolving these issues which will be agreeable to the vast majority of the members of the Hennepin County Senate and House Delegations. The present system, under which almost all organized legislative activity on proposals of less than statewide application ceases with the adjournment of a legislative session and does not resume until December, just prior to the next legislative session, must not be allowed to continue.

There are various ways to go about establishing the organizational framework necessary to enable interim activity on the part of Hennepin County legislators. The method selected in HF403 of having the Legislative Research Committee consist of all senators and representatives from Hennepin County is certainly one acceptable way of achieving the objective. In the absence of any alternative specific proposal, we most certainly urge support for enactment of HF403.

We understand that some legislators are reluctant to establish this type of Legislative Research Committee because it would involve legislators in controversial issues, perhaps to their own personal disadvantage. We are not convinced that this is an inevitable result, although we concede that many of the issues will be controversial. We see the primary purpose of the Legislative Research Committee as fact-finding, rather than as reaching conclusions. We would anticipate that the actual development of specific proposals by members of the Delegation and the effort to reach agreement on these specific proposals would be postponed until the legislative session actually begins. The principal weakness of the present system is that legislators go into a legislative session with almost no background on these complex issues of less than statewide application and by the time the session gets very far along there simply is not sufficient time to deal properly with all the issues that legislators must decide.

We are convinced the establishment of a Legislative Research Committee for Hennepin County legislators could be of invaluable assistance. For this to happen, however, will require dedication on the part of legislators and will require a substantial financial appropriation in order to assure an adequate staff to assist the legislators and to provide for the necessary resource materials, supplies and out-of-pocket expenses on the part of legislators. We therefore strongly urge that the amount appropriated be not less than the \$10-15,000 annually as contemplated in HF403.

We also regard it as important that the legislative issues which might be placed on the working agenda for the Legislative Research Committee not be limited to issues entirely involving a part or all of Hennepin County. There are a number of exceedingly important problems involving much of the Twin Cities metropolitan area and, since there is no comparable Legislative Research Committee for the metropolitan area, these metropolitan issues should be considered by the Hennepin County Legislative Research Committee.

We regard enactment of this type of legislation during the current session as most urgent. For a number of reasons the creation of a Legislative Research Committee for Hennepin County would be particularly well timed. All senators representing Hennepin County districts have just been elected for 4-year terms, and they therefore will be back intact in the 1965 legislative session. While this might not be true for representatives, the district boundaries will not be changed again prior to the 1965 session. This makes more likely the return of a greater number of incumbents and if these legislators, after having one legislative session under their belts, will use the interim between now and the 1965 session to acquire a greater understanding of these issues of importance to Hennepin County residents, the 1965 session could be a particularly productive one. With the rush to adjourn the current session now beginning, it seems obvious that many important issues of concern to our metropolitan area will be lost in the shuffle and will provide the framework of a most ambitious interim agenda for the Legislative Research Committee. No one can say for certain how well this type of Legislative Research Committee will function, but we can say that the present system is not working and that we therefore have everything to gain and little to lose by creating such a committee at this time.