

# Autism Spectrum Disorder Services in Public Schools

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by differences in an individual’s social interaction, communication, and behavior. Public schools must provide special education services to eligible students with disabilities, including ASD. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is responsible for ensuring that schools comply with state and federal requirements regarding special education.
<b>Original Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent does Minnesota provide appropriate supports to individuals living with ASD and their families? How well do state agencies coordinate with each other, school districts, and providers to deliver services? How effectively do state agencies ensure that ASD service providers meet applicable requirements?
<b>Revised Questions</b>	To what extent are appropriate special education services available to students with ASD in Minnesota public schools? How well does MDE coordinate with and oversee school districts to ensure appropriate services are available and provided?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>High</i>	In Fiscal Year 2024, Minnesota public schools spent more than \$400 million on special education services for students whose “primary disability” was ASD. In this same fiscal year, the state appropriated roughly \$2.3 billion and received about \$21 million from the federal government for all special education services.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium</i>	Federal law ensures that students with a disability, including ASD, “have available to them a free appropriate public education” structured to meet their needs. To receive federal funding, states must fulfill certain requirements for the provision and oversight of special education services. State law also requires schools to provide special education and expands requirements in some instances.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	People with ASD can have a range of abilities. Special education supports students through individualized plans and services designed to meet their specific educational needs. Of the students receiving special education services in Minnesota in 2025, the second largest group (nearly 30,000 students or 17 percent) were those whose “primary disability” was ASD.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	The number of students using special education services has grown. Since 2015, the number of students with a “primary disability” of ASD receiving special education has increased by 71 percent.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	If we narrow the evaluation to focus on education, as proposed, the evaluation is more feasible. OLA could conduct an evaluation using standard research methods. However, OLA would likely need to limit the scope of review to a sample of school districts.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA last evaluated special education in 2013, but it has never specifically evaluated how students with ASD are supported by these services.
<b>Discussion</b>	Special education helps ensure that students with ASD can learn in a manner that meets their needs. Given the increase in students determined to have ASD who use special education services, this evaluation could provide useful information about these services.

# Automatic Voter Registration

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	In 2023, the Legislature enacted automatic voter registration. The law requires the Department of Public Safety (DPS) to transmit an individual's citizenship status to the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) when they apply for or make changes to a driver's license. Licensing service center staff are responsible for reviewing citizenship documentation and providing it to DPS's Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) staff. DVS staff must confirm citizenship prior to relaying the information to OSS for an additional review. OSS then reviews certain information to verify eligibility. If confirmed, OSS transfers the information to local election officials for registration.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent has DPS taken appropriate measures to ensure that only eligible voters have been registered to vote?
<b>Revised Questions</b>	To what extent has DPS taken appropriate measures to verify citizenship documentation of individuals who apply for or make changes to driver's licenses and conveyed that documentation to OSS so that eligible voters could be registered to vote?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	The Legislature appropriated \$45,000 to DPS in Fiscal Year 2024 for implementation of the automatic voter registration system. The portion of DPS's overall expenditures dedicated to automatic voter registration activities is likely small.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	Minnesota law establishes automatic voter registration requirements that DPS must follow. DPS must coordinate with OSS to ensure only eligible Minnesotans are registered to vote.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium</i>	As of March 2025, approximately 3.7 million Minnesotans were registered to vote. As of September 2024, DPS reported that over 65,000 Minnesotans had been automatically registered to vote.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	There have been concerns with the integrity of the automatic voter registration process since it was implemented in 2023. Since implementation, DPS reports that it has revised its processes and established additional verification checks to confirm eligibility. Despite recent changes, it may be a good time to evaluate DPS's processes as more individuals will be registered to vote through the automatic voter registration system in the coming years.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA could evaluate DPS's processes for reviewing and relaying information to OSS using standard evaluation techniques, including document reviews. However, OLA would be able to review only a sample of voter eligibility documentation and DPS's oversight of a select number of licensing service centers.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA last evaluated OSS's procedures for voter registration in 2018. At that time, however, automatic voter registration was not in place.
<b>Discussion</b>	Voter registration integrity is essential to fair elections. While OLA could independently review DPS's measures to validate citizenship, the office would likely not be able to review a large enough sample of documentation to make generalizable conclusions about voter registration eligibility.

# Board of Animal Health Oversight of Companion Animals

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Board of Animal Health (BAH) is responsible for protecting the health of Minnesota domestic animals. This responsibility extends to a variety of animals, including cattle, deer, horses, poultry, sheep, and cats and dogs held by breeders and kennels. BAH is also responsible for inspecting and licensing commercial cat and dog breeders and certain kennels.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	How well has BAH fulfilled its responsibility to “protect the health of the state’s domestic animals” with respect to companion animals? To what extent has BAH enforced commercial breeder licensing and enforcement, and kennels and dealers laws? To what extent has BAH established adequate policies and standards for its work? How does Minnesota’s regulation and oversight of companion animals compare to that of other states?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	For Fiscal Year 2024, BAH reported total expenditures of \$7.4 million, of which 3 percent was dedicated to activities related to dog and cat breeders. It is unclear how much was dedicated to work in kennels. The state funded more than 80 percent of the board’s expenditures in Fiscal Year 2024.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	BAH is established in state law. The board consists of seven members, who are appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate. Minnesota statutes grant the board its authority to inspect and license commercial dog and cat breeders and kennels.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Low</i>	In Fiscal Year 2024, BAH licensed 92 kennels and 89 commercial dog and cat breeders. In addition, the board awarded three commercial breeders through the Breeder Excellence Program.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	This topic has appeared on OLA’s list of potential evaluations several times since the Legislature enacted a law to license commercial breeders in 2014. It may be a good time to review BAH’s work in this area.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	OLA could complete this evaluation using standard evaluation techniques, such as interviews and document reviews.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA last evaluated BAH’s work in 2018, but OLA has never evaluated the board’s oversight of companion animals.
<b>Discussion</b>	An evaluation focused on BAH’s oversight of companion animals would be manageable and potentially useful to determine how well the board oversees the health of these animals in the state.

# Child Care Assistance Program

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides financial assistance for child care to families with low incomes. The program is also intended to improve the quality and availability of child care for all Minnesotans by training providers and increasing child care availability. As of April 2025, the administration of CCAP is transitioning from the Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF).
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	How effective is CCAP in helping low-income families access affordable child care? How well has DCYF administered the program? What controls are in place to ensure only eligible child care centers receive funds?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>High</i>	CCAP received about \$60 million of state funds in Fiscal Year 2024 and is estimated to receive \$163 million in Fiscal Year 2025. CCAP also receives federal funding. It received almost \$259 million in Fiscal Year 2024 and an estimated \$229 million in Fiscal Year 2025. Additionally, counties must match part of the funding they receive from the state.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium</i>	DCYF allocates funds to counties and tribes, who administer the program to families. However, DCYF, counties, and tribes must follow requirements in federal law, in addition to those in state law.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	DCYF reported that CCAP serves an average of 23,000 children and 12,000 families per month. There are nearly 4,000 registered CCAP child care providers across the state. CCAP impacts both families who receive assistance and others who benefit from greater availability of licensed, high-quality child care providers.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Low</i>	The ongoing transfer of administration from DHS to DCYF decreases the usefulness of an evaluation of CCAP at this time. Reviewing DHS's administration would no longer be meaningful, and DCYF's administration is currently being established. In addition, in 2024, the federal government made changes to the law authorizing CCAP that affected certain aspects of the program.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	CCAP is a large program with substantial state-local coordination, which would result in a large, complex evaluation.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA's Special Reviews team released two special reviews in 2019 on CCAP regarding internal controls and fraud.
<b>Discussion</b>	While CCAP is a large, important program that will receive a substantial funding increase in Fiscal Year 2025, recent changes in administration and federal law would have a negative impact on the usefulness of a CCAP evaluation at this time.

# Enterprise Talent Development

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Minnesota Management and Budget's (MMB's) Enterprise Talent Development (ETD) provides training and resources to state and other public employees. ETD provides required training for new state supervisors and managers and required annual training for state employees on topics such as respectful workplace policies. It also provides other training and resources on a variety of topics, including leadership development, team collaboration, and retirement planning.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent does ETD provide appropriate and effective training for state employees? What standards, if any, does ETD use to develop and/or approve training?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	MMB collects fees from agencies whose employees participate in ETD trainings. In Fiscal Year 2024, MMB's Enterprise Employee Resources unit, which includes not only ETD in addition but is also tasked with other responsibilities related to statewide human resources management, spent just over \$10 million.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	Statutes direct MMB to develop and implement training, including required training on certain topics, and training policies applicable to state executive branch employees.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium</i>	ETD offers training to over 57,000 state employees. Local government employees may also participate in ETD training.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	Concerns were recently raised about the appropriateness of an article that could be accessed through two of ETD's training courses; according to MMB's Commissioner, MMB's leadership directed ETD to remove the article and directed a review of training content.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	OLA could complete this evaluation using standard evaluation techniques such as interviews, surveys, and document reviews.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA has never evaluated ETD. OLA completed a review of best practices for state employee training in 1995.
<b>Discussion</b>	We are not aware of persistent concerns about the appropriateness of ETD training, but the proposed evaluation is feasible and could be informative.

# Financial Transparency in Nursing Facilities

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Department of Human Services (DHS) establishes payment rates for nursing facilities that receive Medical Assistance (Minnesota's Medicaid program), which includes almost all facilities in the state. Nursing facilities report their costs annually to DHS, which sets these payment rates. In 2024, the Legislature adopted new reporting requirements for nursing facilities to increase transparency. For example, nursing facilities must report costs associated with leases, rent, and use of land or other real property and provide DHS with all private audits by February 1 each year.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	How effectively has DHS monitored nursing facilities' costs and compliance with legal requirements? In particular, how has DHS ensured that these facilities have complied with the 2024 Nursing Facility Transparency Law? How transparent are nursing facilities when disclosing costs? To what extent have nursing facilities undergone private audits?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	DHS's Nursing Facility Rates and Policy Division spent around \$4 million on administrative costs in Fiscal Year 2024.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium</i>	Nursing facilities must comply with federal regulations to receive Medicaid funding for eligible residents. Minnesota statutes and rules authorize DHS to establish payment rates for nursing facilities, and state law also defines reporting requirements for nursing facilities.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	There are about 20,000 nursing facility residents in Minnesota at any time. Individuals living in the facilities and the federal and state governments bear most nursing facility costs. Costs can have a significant impact on residents' personal income and savings, affecting their overall health and well-being.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Low</i>	The 2024 law went into effect on August 1, 2024. Because there has been only one reporting period since the requirements changed, there may be limited data to conduct an evaluation.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Low-Medium</i>	OLA could evaluate this topic using standard evaluation techniques, but there may be just a single year's worth of data to answer the evaluation questions.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA has never evaluated financial transparency in nursing facilities.
<b>Discussion</b>	Although costs in nursing facilities are an ongoing concern in Minnesota, new reporting requirements have only recently gone into effect and there may not be sufficient data available to conduct an evaluation at this time.

# Fiscal Notes

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Fiscal notes are official estimates of the potential costs and savings of proposed legislation, prepared by state agencies at the request of legislative committee chairs. The Legislative Budget Office (LBO)—which is overseen by the Legislative Budget Office Oversight Commission—reviews fiscal notes to ensure the notes are reasonable, accurate, and objective.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent have fiscal notes provided legislators with timely and credible information? To what extent have fiscal notes been useful in the state’s budget process? How does Minnesota’s approach to fiscal notes compare to other states’ approaches?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Unclear</i>	The LBO received approximately \$2.5 million in state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2024. Individual agencies do not report staff time dedicated to producing fiscal notes, which for some agencies may be substantial.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	State law establishes fiscal note requirements. The LBO develops the standards that dictate how agencies should prepare fiscal notes.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium</i>	Fiscal notes are an important tool for understanding the potential fiscal impact of proposed legislation and therefore play a key role in the legislative process. Low-quality fiscal notes could lead to the misallocation of state funds, impacting Minnesotans and state agencies’ work.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	The LBO assumed responsibility for reviewing fiscal notes in 2019. Although the LBO is sufficiently well established to enable a useful evaluation, there is no compelling reason to conduct one at this time.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA could complete most of this evaluation using standard evaluation methods, such as surveys, document reviews, and interviews. However, statutes designate the Legislative Auditor as an ex-officio member of the LBO Oversight Commission, which creates challenges regarding independence. An evaluation would therefore likely need to focus on the timeliness and usefulness of a sample of agencies’ fiscal notes.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA previously evaluated fiscal notes in 2012, when Minnesota Management and Budget was responsible for reviewing fiscal notes. OLA has not evaluated fiscal notes since then.
<b>Discussion</b>	OLA’s 2012 evaluation found that despite being the subject of periodic complaints, Minnesota’s fiscal note system was “not fundamentally broken” and generally worked as intended. Although OLA could determine to what extent past recommendations have been implemented, the value of that work is unclear. Additionally, although OLA has the authority to evaluate other legislative offices, doing so would involve significant independence concerns.

# Medical Assistance Provider Fraud Prevention

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Medical Assistance (MA), Minnesota’s Medicaid program, provides basic health care coverage to certain Minnesotans, including low-income families, qualified pregnant women and children, and individuals with disabilities. The Department of Human Services (DHS) screens, certifies, and enrolls MA providers, such as hospitals, dental groups, doulas, and transportation drivers. DHS’s Office of the Inspector General is responsible for identifying and preventing provider fraud, waste, and abuse in the program.
<b>Original Evaluation Questions</b>	What measures has DHS established to prevent fraud in the Medical Assistance program? How do these measures compare to best practices?
<b>Revised Questions</b>	What measures has DHS established to prevent provider fraud in the Medical Assistance program? How do these measures compare to best practices?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>High</i>	MA is Minnesota’s largest public health care program. In Fiscal Year 2023, Minnesota spent a total of \$18.1 billion on MA, \$6.5 billion of which was state funded. In the same year, the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit recovered nearly \$6 million.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium</i>	Medicaid is a federal program that requires DHS to screen providers, verify service provision, and establish methods to identify fraud. State law also obligates DHS to prevent fraud in its programs, including screening MA providers it enrolls.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	In Fiscal Year 2023, MA covered an average of 1.4 million people per month—nearly one-quarter of Minnesotans. In the same year, the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit secured 43 provider fraud convictions. Provider fraud hurts those MA intends to serve, wastes tax dollars, and damages the program’s integrity.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Unclear</i>	In recent years, media have reported on MA provider fraud, and the Minnesota Attorney General has prosecuted numerous MA provider fraud cases. Additionally, the federal government, which funds nearly two-thirds of Minnesota’s MA, has indicated particular concern with Medicaid fraud. However, the governor has proposed new investments in staffing, policy, and artificial intelligence fraud prevention programs, and the Legislature has proposed several fraud prevention measures. These changes could alter the state’s fraud prevention efforts, making an evaluation of current efforts irrelevant in the future.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	While the scope of this evaluation is large, OLA could complete the evaluation using traditional evaluation methods. We would need to determine whether to limit our evaluation to DHS’s Office of Inspector General activities or DHS’s provider enrollment activities, or include both.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	In recent years OLA has issued a number of reports on the oversight of various aspects of MA, such as outstanding provider debt and personal care assistance.
<b>Discussion</b>	A closer examination of DHS’s MA fraud prevention methods is feasible, but the potentially large scope would be resource intensive. Additionally, upcoming changes could render the findings irrelevant; it may be prudent to revisit this topic in the fall.



# Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Agricultural runoff can harm lakes, rivers, streams, and groundwater. The Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (WQCP) is a voluntary program that provides incentives to agricultural landowners to implement conservation practices that protect water quality. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) partners with other agencies and local governments to certify program participants and support their implementation of techniques tailored to address their farms' unique water-quality risks.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	How well has MDA managed WQCP? How long does certification take? To what extent has MDA measured water quality improvements as a result of the program? To what extent has water quality improved? To what extent has MDA established and achieved sustainability and environmental outcomes for WQCP? How well has MDA complied with applicable requirements?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	Since its inception, WQCP's annual appropriation (from the state's Clean Water Fund) has increased from \$1.5 million for Fiscal Year 2014 to \$3.5 million for Fiscal Year 2025. MDA directs most of this funding to local government partners that provide technical support to agricultural landowners who are certified or seeking certification.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	WQCP is established in state law and MDA developed the process for assessing an agricultural producer's water-quality risks. MDA also approves the local government partners and other individuals who work directly with landowners seeking certification.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium</i>	Agricultural runoff can threaten water quality throughout the state. According to an MDA report, farms certified through WQCP have implemented new conservation practices that have prevented thousands of tons of runoff from entering Minnesota lakes, rivers, and streams every year. However, as of February 2025, fewer than 1,600 of Minnesota's more than 60,000 farms were certified through WQCP.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	While Minnesota's water quality is of perennial interest to legislators and the public, there is no urgent reason to evaluate WQCP this year.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	The questions posed are fairly broad; OLA may need to narrow their scope. Then, OLA could evaluate WQCP using standard evaluation techniques, including data analysis, document reviews, interviews, and surveys.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA has never evaluated WQCP. OLA's most recent program evaluation related to MDA or water quality was <i>Pesticide Regulation</i> , released in 2020.
<b>Discussion</b>	Since MDA began administering WQCP in 2014, enrollment and interest has continued to expand. MDA reports that the program has been successful in terms of water-quality outcomes and the financial health of the participants. An OLA evaluation could help determine the value of the program and provide suggestions for the future.

# Minnesota Board of Public Defense

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Minnesota Board of Public Defense is a Judicial Branch agency that provides public defense to certain individuals who cannot afford to obtain legal counsel. The board has identified five goals to support its mission and is responsible for appointing certain lead public defenders and approving standards for public defender offices, among other tasks. The board employs nearly 900 assistant public defenders and other professionals.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	What are current average caseloads for public defenders in Minnesota, and how do they compare to national standards? To what extent has the Minnesota Board of Public Defense met its goals? To what extent have board members provided effective leadership and carried out their responsibilities?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>High</i>	Board operations are primarily state funded. In Fiscal Year 2024, the board expended approximately \$153 million.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	The board and its responsibilities are established in law, as are the criteria that make an individual eligible to receive a public defender and the duties of certain lead public defenders.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	The board reports that it represents individuals in more than 140,000 cases annually. Those represented by public defenders cannot afford to pay for legal representation. Navigating the legal system without representation could have significant adverse effects on the defendants' case outcomes and lives.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	In 2022, an overwhelming majority of public defenders voted that they had no confidence in the leadership of the State Public Defender, and more than half of the public defenders who completed a union survey reported that working conditions hindered their ability to conduct timely investigations. At the same time, the board received a 55 percent increase in state funding between fiscal years 2022 and 2025, which may have helped to address some concerns.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	The topic could be evaluated using standard evaluation techniques, including data analysis, document reviews, interviews, and surveys.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA last evaluated the public defender system in 2010.
<b>Discussion</b>	This could be a timely and useful topic. The questions posed for this evaluation would also give OLA an opportunity to assess the extent to which recommendations from its 2010 report were implemented.

# Minnesota Department of Health: Nursing Home and Assisted Living Facilities Licensing

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Nursing homes and assisted living facilities provide care and assistance to individuals who are unable to live entirely on their own. The Health Regulation Division at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is responsible for inspecting and licensing these facilities to help ensure the health and safety of their residents.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent does the MDH process for licensing nursing home and assisted living facilities promote transparency, accountability, and quality care? How does Minnesota's process for licensing nursing home and assisted living facilities compare to national standards or best practices? To what extent has MDH complied with requirements related to nursing home and assisted living facilities licensing? How, if at all, have changes in ownership at nursing home and assisted living facilities coincided with changes in staffing, resident safety, resident mortality rates, overall quality of care, and costs? To what extent does MDH investigate the appropriate use of public funds for nursing home and assisted living facilities?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Medium</i>	The Health Regulation Division received \$42 million in direct state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2024. The proportion of staff and funding dedicated to licensing nursing homes and assisted living facilities is unclear.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	Licensing requirements for nursing homes and assisted living facilities are established in state law, although nursing facilities that accept Medicare or Medicaid patients must also meet certain federal certification requirements.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	Thousands of Minnesotans utilize the state's more than 300 licensed nursing homes and more than 2,000 assisted living facilities. As the state's population ages—by 2030, more than one-fifth of Minnesotans will be 65 or older—demand for these facilities will likely grow.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>High</i>	Legislators and members of the public have raised concerns regarding transparency in the licensing process for nursing homes. Minnesota's licensing law for assisted living facilities took effect in 2021, and now may be a good time to evaluate its initial impact.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	OLA could complete most of this evaluation using standard evaluation methods, such as surveys, document reviews, and interviews. Analyzing the impact of ownership changes will depend on the quality of available data. The scope of the proposed evaluation questions is very broad, so an evaluation may need to focus on certain questions, address either nursing homes or assisted living facilities, or be completed over a longer-than-typical timeframe.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA released an evaluation of MDH's Human Resources Management Division in 2025. OLA last evaluated activities completed by the Health Regulation Division in 2018.
<b>Discussion</b>	Nursing homes and assisted living facilities provide essential care to thousands of Minnesotans, and an effective licensing process is vital for the oversight of those facilities. An evaluation of the state's licensing process could provide valuable insight.

# MinnesotaCare Eligibility

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	MinnesotaCare provides health care coverage to eligible Minnesotans. Individuals qualify if they live in Minnesota, do not have other affordable health care coverage (including eligibility for Medicaid), have limited income, and are not incarcerated. The Department of Human Services (DHS) administers MinnesotaCare, including processing applications for coverage and verifying enrollees' eligibility.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent has the Department of Human Services (DHS) ensured that only eligible Minnesotans enroll in MinnesotaCare?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Medium</i>	Minnesota spent \$58 million to fund MinnesotaCare in Fiscal Year 2023, which covered 9 percent of the program's \$676 million total expenditures. While enrollees may pay monthly premiums, federal funds cover the vast majority of program costs.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	The Affordable Care Act grants states the authority to establish health programs for low-income individuals not eligible for Medicaid. Minnesota law establishes eligibility criteria for MinnesotaCare and requires DHS to verify MinnesotaCare eligibility.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	MinnesotaCare provided health care coverage for an average of over 104,000 people per month during Fiscal Year 2023.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	We are not aware of a particular reason to prioritize this topic at this time.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	OLA could conduct this review using standard research methods. However, this review would assess compliance rather than providing evaluative findings and recommendations.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Low</i>	OLA's Financial Audit Division audited MinnesotaCare eligibility compliance in 2021 and 2018.
<b>Discussion</b>	The question posed is better suited for a Financial Audit Division compliance audit; we have added this topic to the list of potential financial audits for 2026.

# Nonemergency Medical Transportation

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Medical Assistance pays for or provides nonemergency transportation to and from medical appointments and procedures for eligible individuals. The type of transportation available varies based on the individual's location in the state and medical needs. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and counties and tribes share responsibility for ensuring that Medical Assistance recipients receive needed transportation.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent have Medical Assistance recipients received appropriate nonemergency medical transportation? To what extent are transport-level certifications completed in a consistent manner and in compliance with requirements? How well has DHS overseen nonemergency medical transportation services?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>High</i>	DHS spent \$117 million for nonemergency medical transportation on a fee-for-service basis and \$132 million for managed-care recipients in 2023. Funding derives from both state and federal sources.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	Federal law requires states to provide nonemergency transportation to Medicaid recipients (Medical Assistance is Minnesota's Medicaid program). However, states have wide latitude to administer services as they choose.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	Obtaining transportation is essential for some Medical Assistance recipients to access the health care they need. In 2023, there were 3.3 million transportation claims for fee-for-service recipients and 5.4 million claims for managed-care recipients.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Unclear</i>	The governor has proposed a major restructuring of nonemergency medical transportation this session. If the governor's proposal passes, an evaluation this year would be poorly timed because we would be assessing a system about to undergo major changes. However, if the proposal does not pass or is postponed, an evaluation could be useful in informing future reform efforts.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	The combination of state and county responsibilities would make it challenging to evaluate with a narrow scope, but key data appear to be available. Our 2011 report was limited to evaluating transportation for fee-for-service recipients; including managed-care recipients would significantly increase the evaluation's scope.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA last evaluated nonemergency medical transportation in 2011.
<b>Discussion</b>	Nonemergency medical transportation has been an area of ongoing legislative interest, and an evaluation by our office could provide a helpful update to our 2011 findings. However, if the Legislature adopts the governor's restructuring proposal, OLA would be unable to assess significant changes that DHS would likely implement starting in 2026. It may be prudent to reconsider this topic in the fall.

# Office of Ombudsperson for Families

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families monitors compliance with the law when entities—including certain state agencies, county social service agencies, or district courts—make child protection and out-of-home placement decisions for children of color. The office reviews complaints about child protection decisions and may conduct investigations into entities' decisions or actions described in a given complaint. In its effort to improve child protection outcomes, the office has three ombudspersons, each of whom works with one of the following: African American families, Asian Pacific families, or Spanish-speaking families.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	How effectively has the Office of Ombudsperson for Families fulfilled its statutory duties? How well has the office handled complaints?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	The Legislature appropriated \$845,000 to the Office of Ombudsperson for Families for Fiscal Year 2025.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	Minnesota law establishes the Office of Ombudsperson for Families and defines the office's powers and duties. The Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage, the Council on Asian-Pacific Minnesotans, and the Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs (each created by state law) appoint the ombudsperson for their respective communities.
<b>Impact</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	In calendar year 2022, 32,047 children were allegedly victims of maltreatment, and 11,235 children were in out-of-home placements. Children of color in Minnesota continue to be disproportionately represented in the child protection system. The Office of Ombudsperson for Families can play an important role in holding agencies accountable and protecting the interests of families of color. The office received 540 complaints or inquiries and conducted 33 investigations in calendar year 2023.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families has retained similar duties and powers under state law since it was established in 1991. However, there does not appear to be a pressing need to evaluate the office at this time.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA could evaluate the Office of Ombudsperson for Families using standard evaluation methods, such as interviews and document reviews. OLA may need to use translation services to communicate with some families who have made complaints to the office.
<b>Balance</b> <i>High</i>	OLA has never evaluated the Office of Ombudsperson for Families. OLA's last financial audit of the office occurred in 2003.
<b>Discussion</b>	The Office of Ombudsperson for Families can help ensure that agencies are following child protection laws by monitoring agency actions, conducting investigations, and making recommendations. This is important work that OLA has never evaluated.

# State Oversight of Long-Term Care Insurance

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	Long-term care insurance provides coverage for the costs of care for individuals who cannot care for themselves due to prolonged illness or disability. It may cover services such as at-home, assisted living, or nursing facility care. The Minnesota Department of Commerce (Commerce) is responsible for reviewing and approving long-term care insurance policies offered for sale in the state, as well as reviewing and approving proposed rate increases.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	Does Minnesota have adequate laws in place to protect against unreasonable increases in rates for long-term care insurance? To what extent has Commerce provided sufficient oversight of the rates providers are charging?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Low</i>	Expenditures for Commerce’s Insurance Division in Fiscal Year 2024 were about \$10.6 million. That amount included spending for all of the department’s insurance regulatory activities, so the expenditures for long-term care activities would be just a portion of that figure.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	Both state and federal laws govern insurance companies, but review and approval of rates is a state function.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	According to data from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, there were about 200,000 Minnesotans covered by long-term care insurance policies at the end of 2022.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	Long-term care insurance—and specifically fast-increasing premiums—has been a topic of interest for at least a decade. Commerce published special reports on long-term care insurance in 2015 and 2016 in response to legislative concerns. That said, there is no particular advantage to addressing this topic this year.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	We could evaluate Commerce’s oversight of long-term care insurance using standard techniques. Depending on how the project is scoped, we may retain an external consultant with actuarial expertise.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA last completed a program evaluation at Commerce in 2022.
<b>Discussion</b>	Ratepayers in states across the nation have complained about large increases in their long-term care insurance premiums. However, the fact that these concerns are widespread suggests that the underlying issues may be systemic and not related to any individual state’s regulatory activities. Therefore, a program evaluation may not address these concerns.

# Taxpayers' Transportation Accountability Act

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Taxpayers' Transportation Accountability Act (TTAA) requires the Department of Transportation (MnDOT) to estimate the costs of certain state highway transportation projects before entering into private contracts. For projects estimated to cost more than \$250,000, MnDOT must determine that department staff could not do the work at a lower price before entering into private contracts. In Fiscal Year 2024, MnDOT outsourced all TTAA-governed projects—including 20 projects MnDOT estimated that department staff could have completed at a lower cost—primarily citing lack of staff availability.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent has MnDOT complied with contracting requirements in the TTAA? To what extent are the factors MnDOT uses to evaluate costs of performing work itself versus contracting out for a project appropriate and consistent? How effective has TTAA been at achieving its policy goals? How has the budgeting process affected MnDOT's ability to capitalize on potential savings?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Medium</i>	In Fiscal Year 2024, MnDOT reported that it executed 113 private transportation contracts subject to TTAA requirements, which totaled over \$71 million.
<b>State Control</b> <i>High</i>	MnDOT is responsible for improving state roads and managing transportation contracts. State law establishes the TTAA and requirements for private transportation contracts.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	The state's trunk highway system has a significant impact on those who use the state's roads. State-managed roads comprise less than 10 percent of Minnesota's roads but carry approximately 60 percent of total traffic volume.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	While there is no urgent reason for an evaluation that we are aware of, the state's highway system continues to age and become increasingly expensive to maintain.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>High</i>	OLA could evaluate the department's compliance with the TTAA using standard evaluation techniques, including document reviews, surveys, data analysis, and interviews.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA evaluated aspects of MnDOT projects and contracting in 2016, 2019, and 2021 but has never examined the department's compliance with the TTAA.
<b>Discussion</b>	Since the TTAA took effect in 2009, MnDOT has executed 994 contracts subject to its requirements. MnDOT plans to invest significantly in the state's highway system in the coming years, so now may be an appropriate time to evaluate MnDOT's compliance with the TTAA.



# Unemployment Insurance

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	The Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program provides temporary partial wage replacement to workers who become unemployed or have their hours greatly reduced through no fault of their own. The program is administered by the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). Employers that meet certain conditions must pay UI taxes; the revenue collected from these taxes goes into the UI Trust Fund. The UI Trust Fund is used to pay for UI benefits.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent does DEED have effective internal controls for the UI Program? To what extent has DEED complied with applicable laws in managing UI? How has the UI Trust Fund balance changed in recent years, and what have the reasons been for any changes? How timely and consistent are DEED's investigations into suspected UI fraud?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Medium</i>	According to DEED, in 2024, the UI Program paid out about \$1.3 billion, including payments from the UI Trust Fund. As described above, employers that meet certain requirements must pay into this fund. In Fiscal Year 2024, the UI Program spent about \$43 million in special revenue funds and \$51 million in federal funds.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium</i>	UI is a joint federal-state program. Federal law establishes guidelines states must follow in administering their UI programs, and states establish additional requirements related to eligibility and benefits.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	In Fiscal Year 2023, DEED processed more than 266,000 initial applications for UI. Not only does the program provide economic stability to individual workers, it can help stabilize local economies by supporting spending and keeping workers in their communities during times of unemployment.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium</i>	The balance of the UI Trust Fund decreased between 2023 and 2024, and some legislators have expressed concerns about this decrease. There have also been ongoing concerns nationally about UI fraud and improper payments; however, in 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor found that Minnesota's improper payment rate was low compared to most other states.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	With appropriate scoping, OLA could answer the evaluation questions using standard evaluation methods, including interviews, document reviews, and data analysis. However, questions related to the UI Program's internal financial controls are better suited for a financial audit.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Low</i>	In 2024, OLA released <i>Unemployment Insurance System: Information Technology Performance Audit</i> . The same year, OLA also released <i>Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay Program: Performance Audit</i> , which relied on UI data. In 2022, OLA released <i>Unemployment Insurance Program: Efforts to Prevent and Detect the Use of Stolen Identities</i> .
<b>Discussion</b>	Given that OLA has recently published several reports related to the UI Program, this year may not be the best time to conduct the evaluation. In addition, the questions posed are better suited for a financial audit; we have added this topic to the list of potential financial audits for 2026.

# Voter Registration System

## Topic Selection Background Information

April 2025

<b>Program Overview</b>	To vote in federal or state elections, Minnesotans must meet eligibility requirements and register. Voter registration responsibilities are shared in the state; county election officials must process registration applications and maintain voter records, while the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) must maintain a statewide voter registration database. OSS regularly receives data from other state agencies to help ensure the accuracy of voter records.
<b>Evaluation Questions</b>	To what extent has OSS complied with requirements related to election security measures to ensure only the votes of eligible voters are counted? To what extent has OSS complied with Help America Vote Act requirements? How has the number of registered and active voters changed in recent years? To what extent have changes to voter documentation requirements affected election security and participation?
<b>State Resources</b> <i>Unclear</i>	OSS's total expenditures have fluctuated year-to-year. In Fiscal Year 2023, OSS's total expenditures were about \$15 million, and in Fiscal Year 2024 they were about \$27 million. It is unclear what portion of OSS's overall expenditures were from voter registration activities or how much counties spend on those activities.
<b>State Control</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	Minnesota law establishes voter registration requirements that OSS must follow. OSS must also follow certain federal laws, such as the 2002 Help America Vote Act.
<b>Impact</b> <i>High</i>	About 3.7 million people are registered to vote in Minnesota, and election integrity is important for all Minnesotans.
<b>Timeliness</b> <i>Medium-High</i>	There has been significant public and legislative interest in voter registration processes in recent years. It may be useful to learn whether changes to voter registration requirements in 2023 affected election security and participation in the 2024 general election.
<b>Feasibility</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA could analyze OSS's voter registration data and interview staff about their processes. However, OLA would likely need to limit the scope of the review to State Voter Registration System data and documentation from a sample of counties.
<b>Balance</b> <i>Medium</i>	OLA's 2018 report, <i>Voter Registration</i> , addressed topics similar to those noted above.
<b>Discussion</b>	Election integrity and voter access are vital to a strong democracy. However, OLA's evaluation of Minnesota's election security would likely need to be limited to an analysis of OSS data and documentation from a sample of counties. In addition, it would be challenging to draw definitive conclusions about whether recent changes to voter registration requirements had an impact on election security and participation.