



131 W. Wilson St., Suite 505
Madison, Wisconsin 53703
phone (608) 267-2380; (800) 991-5502
fax: (608) 267-0645
league@lwm-info.org; www.lwm-info.org

To: Senate Committee on Elections, Election Process Reform and Ethics

From: Curt Witynski, J.D., Deputy Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities

Date: March 11, 2021

Re: **SB 21, Aids to municipalities and counties for certain special election costs**

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities supports SB 21, creating a program providing state reimbursement to local governments required to conduct special elections to fill vacancies in certain state offices. This bill is the same as 2019 SB 71, which the Senate passed unanimously last session.

Municipalities and counties currently fund one hundred percent of special election costs for state or national offices when vacancies occur. The unanticipated expenses of a special election for filling a vacancy in a state or federal office places strain on municipal and county budgets. Local governments must account for these expenses outside their normal budgeting process.

Since 2010, there have been 19 special elections for the Assembly and the Senate - not including recalls. For 16 of those elections, primaries were also required.

SB 21, which has bipartisan support, requires state reimbursement of the expenses that such elections impose upon local governments. SB 21 applies to special elections called by the Governor to fill a vacancy for the offices of State Senate and Assembly, statewide constitutional officers, United States Senate and House of Representatives, district attorneys, justice of the supreme court, court of appeals judge, and circuit court judge. If the special election or special primary is consolidated with a regularly scheduled statewide election, the state would only reimburse the costs directly associated with the vacancy.

Under SB 21, a cost is eligible for reimbursement only if the Wisconsin Elections Commission determines that the cost is reasonable, and the rate paid by the local government for the cost does not exceed the rate customarily paid for similar costs at a primary or election that is not a special primary or election. Among the costs covered by the bill are rental payments for polling places, election day wages paid to election officials working at the polls, costs for the publication of required election notices, printing and postage costs for absentee ballots and envelopes, data entry costs for a statewide voter registration system, and other significant election costs identified by municipal clerks in previous state surveys.

We urge the committee to recommend passage of SB 21. Thanks for considering our comments.

YOUR VOICE. YOUR WISCONSIN.