

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 22, 2026

To: Marcelia Nicholson-Bovell, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Chairperson, Committee on Intergovernmental Relations

From: Katie Domina, Director, Office of Government Affairs

Subject: A report from the Office of Government Affairs regarding legislative updates

File Type: Informational Report

BACKGROUND

Pursuant to File No. 26-9, this report is submitted as an informational report regarding legislative updates. The purpose of this report is to provide an update related to local, state, and federal policy developments, as well as an overview of the current state legislative session.

OFFICE OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

The Office of Government Affairs (OGA) represents the interests of Milwaukee County before local, state, and federal governments. The structure of OGA is a function of state law. There are two staff positions in OGA, representing a partnership between the Board and the Executive: one to represent the County Executive and one to represent the County Board of Supervisors (Board). The Board's Government Affairs Liaison position is vacant. The Board is currently represented through a professional service agreement with Foley & Lardner. There is frequent communication and coordination between OGA and the Board's representative.

STATE UPDATES

2025-27 Legislative Session

The legislature has largely adjourned for the 2025-27 session. The governor acted on all enrolled legislation, including signing:

- [2025 Wisconsin Act 179](#), which provides counties with additional funding to support court operations by increasing various court fees and surcharges, many of which have not been updated since the 1980s. The final enacted version incorporated stakeholder feedback from the original proposal, including reducing the increase of select fees, removing indexing, requiring the clerk of court to post a notice that a fee waiver application is available, and largely requiring that fees and surcharges collected by the clerk be used to support court services. The revenue that funds the partnership with the State of Wisconsin for delivering court services has not kept pace with inflation, and Act 179 should allow for a reduction of property tax levy support for these services.
- [2025 Wisconsin Act 188](#), which increases the threshold for the competitive bidding requirement for local public works and contracts from \$25,000 to \$50,000 and the threshold for providing public notice of contracts from \$5,000 to \$10,000. The previous thresholds were set in the 1990s. With inflation, routine and urgent repairs routinely exceed \$25,000. The increase aligns the threshold with modern construction costs and provides greater flexibility to respond quickly without sacrificing oversight or transparency.
- [2025 Wisconsin Act 233](#), which allows the state Department of Health Services to submit a Medicaid waiver request to the federal government to provide prerelease health care coverage to individuals in the County's care. This would include coverage for up to 90 days preceding release for case management services, medication-assisted treatment for all types of substance use disorders, and a 30-day supply of prescription medications. This provides a reimbursement opportunity for the County that does not currently exist.

Additionally, the governor [vetoed](#) Assembly Bill 24, which would have reduced a county’s shared revenue payments by 15% if the sheriff failed to undertake certain actions relating to certain individuals in county jails. The bill required a sheriff to request proof of whether an individual was lawfully present, alert the Department of Homeland Security if they could not make that verification, and comply with detainers and administrative warrants for those confined for felony offenses.

The governor called the legislature into Special Session on April 14th to take up a constitutional amendment banning partisan gerrymandering. The amendment would add “Districts shall not provide a disproportionate advantage or disadvantage to any political party. Partisan gerrymandering is prohibited.” to Section 3 of Article IV. The legislature gaveled into the special session and it remains open.

A full list of enacted legislation from the 2025-26 legislative session can be found [HERE](#). A full list of veto messages from the 2025-26 legislative session can be found [HERE](#).

Disposition of Other Registered Bills

Bill Number	Relating to	Disposition
Assembly Bill 216 / Senate Bill 218	The amount and distribution of the real estate transfer fee, grants under the land information program, real property recording notification systems, and making an appropriation	Received public hearing and executive session in both houses
Assembly Bill 250 / Senate Bill 254	Funding for the War Memorial Center and making an appropriation [\$9M]	Received separate funding through the biennial budget [\$5M]
Assembly Bill 352 / Senate Bill 360	Limiting the release of certain balloons into the atmosphere, granting rule-making authority, and providing a penalty	Received public hearing in the Assembly
Assembly Bill 387 / Senate Bill 390	Correction bill for 2025 Wisconsin Act 15 and making an appropriation [SNAP amendment]	SNAP amendment was added to Assembly Bill 180 and signed into law as 2025 Wisconsin Act 116
Assembly Bill 57	Requirements concerning assistance in the detention of individuals who are or are alleged to not be lawfully present in the United States	No movement
Assembly Bill 441	Identity requirements for officers who arrest or detain individuals and providing a penalty	No movement
Assembly Bill 444	Prohibitions concerning use of state and local facilities to detain individuals on the basis of immigration status	No movement
Assembly Bill 475	Grants for the provision of immigration-related civil legal services to individuals and families, county grants for the provision of civil legal services to individuals and families, and making an appropriation	No movement
Assembly Bill 739	Prohibitions concerning state or local government assistance with federal immigration enforcement	No movement
Assembly Bill 684 / Senate Bill 761	Eliminating and modifying certain provision enacted under 2023 Act 12 regarding the city of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County	No movement
Assembly Bill 722 / Senate Bill 729	Large energy customer fees; electric utility very large customer class; a renewable resource tariff; building requirements for data centers; water usage by large customers; required pay rate on large-scale data center projects; and granting rule-making authority	Received public hearing in the Senate
Assembly Bill 759	Eligibility to receive occupational credentials for	Signed into law as 2025

	recipients of deferred action under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program	Wisconsin Act 240
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Constitutional Amendments

In Wisconsin, proposed changes to the state constitution must be approved in two consecutive legislative sessions, followed by ratification in a statewide referendum. The governor cannot veto a constitutional amendment passed by the legislature. Three proposed constitutional amendments passed for the second time in this session and will appear on the November ballot:

- [AJR 10](#) – Freedom to Gather: The freedom to gather in places of worship during a state of emergency.
- [AJR 102](#) – Discrimination: Prohibiting governmental entity discrimination.
- [SJR 116](#) – Governor’s Veto: Prohibiting the governor from using the partial veto to create or increase any tax or fee.

Other Legislative Items

There were several bills impacting Wisconsin counties that ultimately did not see action in the Senate:

- Assembly Bill 514, which would have provided various justice system positions over the next two biennia.
- Assembly Bill 807, which would have created an office of county board counsel in counties with a county executive.
- Assembly Bill 625, which would have established pay for performance guidelines for certain homelessness programs.

Additionally, there has been no agreement on any spending of the state’s surplus, which is expected to grow to \$2.5 billion by June 30, 2027. There are several competing proposals:

- Governor’s proposal [\$1.3b]: Special education reimbursement, general school aids, school levy tax credit, and exempting cash tips.
- Legislative Republican proposal [\$2.3b]: Rebates, school levy credit, special education reimbursement, grants to businesses impacted by flooding, and a deduction for expenses incurred by educators
- Legislative Democrat proposal [\$1.3b]: Special education, general school aids.

FEDERAL UPDATES

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has remained partially shut down since February 14th as part of debate over the administration’s immigration operations. There have been proposals to fund agencies within DHS other than Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), but they have not advanced. There has also been a proposal to advance funding for ICE and CBP through the reconciliation process.

Since the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations last met, the federal government denied the state’s appeal to a previous denial of FEMA public assistance stemming from the August 2025 flooding event. That denial impacts Door, Grant, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha counties.

Congressionally Directed Spending

Earlier this year, Milwaukee County was awarded \$1 million to support the purchase of new buses and \$250,000 to support facility upgrades at the Kosciuszko Community Center through the FFY26 congressional appropriations process in partnership with Congresswoman Gwen Moore.

Submissions through this process are the result of a partnership between departmental staff, Strategy, Budget and Performance, and the Office of Government Affairs. The FFY27 congressionally directed spending process is underway. Congresswoman Moore advanced two Milwaukee County projects for consideration:

1. [Community Violence Initiative Project \(DHHS\) - \\$2.5 million](#)
2. [Underground Fuel Tanks Project \(MCDOT\) - \\$2.5 million](#)

Senator Tammy Baldwin has not yet announced which community projects she will advance for consideration.

President Trump FY 2027 Budget Request

President Trump released his budget proposal for FFY27, which begins on October 1, 2026. Broadly, the proposal increases defense spending by 44% (for a total of \$1.5 trillion) and proposes a 10% (\$73 billion) cut to non-defense agencies. As a next step, the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will begin marking up the individual appropriations bills. The National Association of Counties' analysis of the budget request can be found [HERE](#).

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) Annual Conference will be held from September 20-22, 2026 in Sauk County and the Annual Business Meeting will occur on September 20th. Counties have an opportunity to submit resolutions for consideration at the Annual Business Meeting. Resolutions adopted at the Annual Business Meeting become part of the WCA platform. All submitted resolutions must be adopted by the full Board, must be on a matter of public policy impacting a county's powers or responsibilities in the Wisconsin Statutes, and must be submitted no later than 4:30pm on Monday, June 22nd to be considered. Resolutions from the 2025 meeting can be [found here](#).

PREPARED BY

Katie Domina, Director, Office of Government Affairs

APPROVED BY

Katie Domina

Katie Domina, Director, Office of Government Affairs

ATTACHMENTS

2025 Annual Policy Report

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Director of Legislative Services, Office of the County Clerk



**MILWAUKEE
COUNTY**

2025 Annual Policy Report

April 2026

Office of Government Affairs
Office of Strategy, Budget, & Performance

Expanding Our Capacity

The policy team is led by the Office of Government Affairs with support from the Office of Strategy, Budget, & Performance. Since 2024, we have expanded our capacity by adding the positions of Policy Director and Senior Policy Manager.

The policy team guides Milwaukee County's formal [policy agenda](#), which outlines a strategic framework for enhancing quality of life, strengthening the local economy, and ensuring safe and vibrant communities.

Milwaukee County successfully collaborates with businesses, nonprofit organizations, community leaders, and local, state and federal government partners to advance its policy agenda through a broad range of effective initiatives.



Katie Domina
Director of
Government Affairs



Jeremy Lucas
Policy Director



Nichole Todd
Senior Policy
Manager

Policy Strategy Team (PST)

In 2024 Milwaukee County created its first ever enterprise-wide policy strategy team to advance Milwaukee County's strategic goals by facilitating a policy planning process that directs resources and capacity to influence policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels.

PST members and department leaders actively participate in over 100 unique policy-related professional organizations. Through this participation, team members have direct access to coalitions that increase support for Milwaukee County's policy priorities.

The team consists of over 20 members who meet monthly to learn about featured policy-related topics, exchange information, and collaborate on policy initiatives. Plans in 2026 include exploring closer alignment with communications and data governance.

Sustainable Services

As an arm of the State of Wisconsin, Milwaukee County is mandated by the state to perform specific functions related to health and human services, transportation, courts, correctional services, and law enforcement.

In 2025, nearly 80% of Milwaukee County's local tax revenue went to pay for state-mandated services, leaving very little revenue to support its transit and parks systems, and other non-mandated services.

Up until 2025, Milwaukee County was the only county in Wisconsin to patrol its state highways with very little support from the state, while the state highway patrol provides this service to other counties. This created an unfair system and left fewer resources for long-term investments.

Milwaukee County's primary policy goal is to strengthen its financial partnership with the State of Wisconsin by increasing state revenue for state-mandated services.

Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) Project

In 2025, Milwaukee County sought support from the State of Wisconsin for the IJCC project, the most significant capital investment in our history, at over \$400 million.

The project's goal is to create a safer, more efficient, and community-focused environment for all justice system stakeholders through modern facilities and improved processes that will streamline court operations and deliver better public safety outcomes for generations to come.

In an effort to increase uniformity among counties, the state agreed to pay for the full cost of expressway (highway) patrol in Milwaukee County rather than provide one-time funding for the IJCC capital project.

2025-26 Wisconsin State Legislative Session

Select New Laws Affecting Milwaukee County:

- **Act 188:** Increasing competitive bidding thresholds for local public works projects.
- **Act 179:** Increasing certain court fees and surcharges.
- **Act 233:** Providing coverage under the Medical Assistance program for incarcerated individuals (pilot).
- **Act 116:** Amended to include funding for increased administrative costs as a result of the federal changes to SNAP/FoodShare.
- **AB 250/Act 15:** \$5 million appropriation for the War Memorial Center in the biennial budget.
- **Act 184:** Monitoring or recording in common spaces of residential care centers for children and youth, group homes, and shelter care facilities.
- **Act 180:** Increasing notification and assessment requirements for placement of sexually violent persons on supervised release.

The policy team regularly facilitates input on proposed legislation by subject matter experts within Milwaukee County at the request of state lawmakers.

By the Numbers

Bills Tracked	205	
Bills with Hearing	128	62%
Bills to Exec Committee	119	58%
Bills Passed	86	42%
Bills Signed	28	14%

Wisconsin Act 15: 2025-27 Biennial State Budget

Milwaukee County advanced 19 key priorities in the 2025-27 Biennial State Budget to foster a **strong partnership with the State of Wisconsin**, ensuring that the region remains the state’s most powerful economic driver while providing critical services that consistently improve health outcomes and overall quality of life.

Achievements:

- Increase in Expressway Policing Funds to the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO) from \$2 million to \$40 million per biennium.
- \$10 million increase in circuit court payments to counties.
- Partial gubernatorial veto to the substantial juvenile corrections rate increases proposed by the legislature, establishing a more affordable daily rate for counties of \$501 in FY25-26 and \$758 in FY26-27.

Challenges:

- Flat state funding for mass transit, general transportation aids, youth aids, and Birth to 3, among others.
- Insufficient funding for Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs).
- Outdated and inadequate state DOC contract rate with the Community Reintegration Center (CRC) for state-incarcerated persons.

2023 Act 12

Innovation Grants

Milwaukee County submitted applications to the State of Wisconsin Innovation Grant Program to support the transfers of service of three cultural institutions to non-profit partners:

- Marcus Performing Arts Center
- Charles Allis Museum
- Villa Terrace Decorative Arts Museum

Compliance

Milwaukee County continues to meet all applicable Act 12 compliance requirements, including the maintenance of effort certification for the airport fire department, facilities inventory, annual financial reports, and correctional worker compensation analysis.

2025 HR 1 Reconciliation Bill: Impact on Milwaukee County

This bill imposed an unprecedented shift to local governments of increased responsibility to fulfill federal program administration and compliance. This shift was most prominent in Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which will result in about 14,000 Medicaid disenrollments on 12/31/26 if Wisconsin does not receive a waiver to delay implementation, and a growing demand for Milwaukee County’s senior meal services due to reduced SNAP benefits.

The reconciliation bill also eliminated the Environmental and Climate Justice (ECJ) Block Grants Program created by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which resulted in the Milwaukee County Parks Department losing a \$1.5 million subgrant through the City of Milwaukee.

Congressional Appropriations

Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2025

Congress eliminated all member-directed appropriations from the FFY25 reconciliation bill, which passed in July 2025, deferring submitted applications to FFY26.

Record of Success

Milwaukee County has been awarded more discretionary Congressional member-directed appropriations (“earmarks”) funding than any other county in Wisconsin. Since 2021 when these appropriations were re-established through the present, Milwaukee County has been awarded **over \$20 million** to support critical projects, services, and programs, including:



\$7.85 million Clean diesel buses for Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS)



\$7 million Affordable Housing



\$2.5 million Milwaukee Mental Health Emergency Center (MHEC)

\$2 million Medication Assisted Treatment Mobile Unit



\$500,000 Washington & Veterans Park Lagoon Revitalization

\$250,000 Improvements to the Kosciusko Community Center

Threats to Federal Funding

In early 2025, the Trump administration canceled both awarded grants and published notices of funding opportunities (NOFOs), all of which had already been appropriated by Congress and signed into law by the previous administration. Through court actions, the administration was forced to reinstate the majority of these dollars, but its policies may defund already funded grant programs, including enforcing new standards of evaluation for funded projects and failure to obligate funds before appropriations expire.

Additionally, the administration’s priorities have placed core Milwaukee County services in jeopardy, including a shift from permanent supportive housing to transitional housing assistance, which would undermine Milwaukee County’s success in reducing the homeless population, and signaling its intention to remove the mass transit account from the Highway Trust Fund, which would have a catastrophic effect on transit systems around the country, including the Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS).