

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: March 7, 2022

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Joseph Czarnezki, Chairman, Committee on Intergovernmental Relations

From: Alec Knutson, Director, Office of Government Affairs  
Emily Petersen, Government Affairs Liaison, Office of Government Affairs

Subject: Informational Report on matters responsive to the 2022 Adopted Budget

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**Background**

Pursuant to File No. 22-49, this update is being provided in response to the request that the Office of Government Affairs provide an informational report regarding legislative and executive-related matters responsive to or within the 2022 Adopted Budget.

Included in the 2022 Adopted Budget was the request that the Office of Government Affairs begin conversations with other urban counties in Wisconsin regarding the potential of forming an Urban Counties Association of Wisconsin so that an organization exists which represents the interests of urban counties. Government Affairs staff was requested to provide a status report no later than the April 2022 meeting cycle.

**Status Update**

The Office of Government Affairs will continue to work with our counterparts, specifically in counties with populations over 100,000, as was previously indicated by the committee, to continue conversations in pursuit of this policy goal. Government Affairs is drafting a communication to transmit to all counties with a population of more than 100,000 to gauge interest. Currently, there are roughly 16 counties that exceed a population of 100,000. Once completed, that communication and responses to it, will be attached to future reports.

**Next Steps & Follow-Up**

The Office of Government Affairs continues to work on developing the intended scope of the project. To limit the scope of analysis, Government Affairs focused its research on two primary considerations: types of associations and operational costs. It is our hope that the Committee can provide Government Affairs guidance on how to proceed in these avenues for future reports.

*Types of Associations*

As Government Affairs continues to explore the process of creating an Urban Counties Association, it is important to understand the scope of services and capabilities an Urban Counties Association would offer its member organizations. Statewide associations, with large memberships, can offer a variety of services: lobbying coordination, conferences and continuing education, research, publications, and legal counsel. Meanwhile, some statewide associations are

less comprehensive and offer a forum for groups with similar interests to coordinate on policy goals and lobbying efforts. This latter type of association takes fewer resources to establish and operate, but it offers less benefits to its members.

As this committee previously indicated interest in collaborating with Dane County on this initiative, it may be worthwhile to note that Dane County's resolution requests the establishment of an association that "over time, could establish dues and staffing, develop a legislative agenda to advocate with state and national governments, and hold an annual conference to bring best practices and innovation in policy and programs to the attention of elected officials in populous counties." If the County decides to establish a similar type of association, additional resources may need to be dedicated to a project that matches this scope.

### *Costs*

Depending on the type of association the County envisions establishing, costs can vary greatly. If it is the County's desire to establish a forum for large counties to discuss state and federal policy issues and develop a coordinated response, an evaluation of staff time would need to occur, which could be significant and affect the ability of current staff to execute Government Affairs' daily responsibilities and duties. Currently, Office of Government Affairs staff routinely meets with counterparts in other counties to discuss issues that uniquely impact our counties and assist one another in developing responses. Dues generated by an association could be used for additional resources such as hiring administrative staff, contracting for research or legal functions, or securing contract lobbyists at the state and federal levels. Importantly, the level of interest from other large urban counties would determine the affordability of a cost-sharing agreement for these services.

If the intent is to replicate a statewide association, with similar services and benefits, costs would be significantly higher and additional revenue sources beyond dues would be required. Initial startup costs would be required for the initial few years this association to hire administrative staff, plan conferences, organize educational opportunities, contract with separate lobbying firms for state and federal advocacy, conduct membership engagement, and identify resources for policy research and legal services. In addition, this approach would require identifying individuals who are responsible for leading the organization.

Depending on how the County wishes to proceed, it may be useful to consider which additional resources may be necessary to allocate to carry out this request.

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Manager, Office of the County Clerk  
Kelsey Evans, Committee Clerk, Legislative Services Division  
Joseph Czarnezki, Chair, Intergovernmental Relations Committee  
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