

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: April 29, 2022

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

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

Subject: Informational Report on the Office of Government Affairs

Background

The Office of Government Affairs (OGA) represents the interests of Milwaukee County before Local, State, and Federal governments. There are two staff members in OGA: one to represent the County Executive and one to represent the County Board. The Office frequently coordinates to advance Milwaukee County’s policy positions.

Activities undertaken by the County Board’s Government Affairs Liaison are governed by policies adopted by Milwaukee County. In the event that the county board cannot meet in a timely matter to adopt a position on a policy that is pending before a legislative body, “which directly impacts on Milwaukee County, notice of such situation shall be given to the chair of the county board and the chair of the committee on intergovernmental relations, who shall give immediate direction on said matter. Final direction will subsequently be given by the committee on intergovernmental relations and, if deemed necessary, by the county board” ([MCGO 1.25\(4\)](#)).

In summary, the Government Affairs Liaison represents the interests of Milwaukee County or the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors through the express direction of adopted policy or under direct guidance from the Chair of the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations and the Chair of the County Board, which is consistent with the ordinances. The Government Affairs Director represents the positions of Milwaukee County, along with interests of the Milwaukee County Executive.

Partnerships

By request of the Chair of the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, OGA reports on our ongoing partnership with WCA in [File No. 22-16](#).

Milwaukee County, through the 2022 Adopted Budget, maintains a membership in the [Wisconsin Counties Association](#). The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) represents the interests of its member counties and provides services such as insurance (Wisconsin County Mutual Insurance Corporation), education, legal guidance, and research. WCA also connects Milwaukee County stakeholders with subscriptions to news services like WisPolitics and the Wheeler Report which provide multiple updates throughout the day on legislative proceedings and events. Annually,

member counties convene to adopt a legislative agenda for WCA, which they represent before State government.

WCA is governed by a 14-member Board of Directors, divided by region. Milwaukee County belongs to the Southeast region, which consists of four Directors. According to the bylaws, due to population size, two of those Director positions are reserved for Milwaukee County representatives. The County Board Chair appoints these two representatives to WCA. The remainder of the director positions are voted on at the WCA district meetings that occur throughout April and May. The Milwaukee County Executive is a member of the Wisconsin County Executives and Administrators Association (WCEA).

In 2020, Milwaukee County adopted [File No. 20-576](#) “calling upon the State of Wisconsin and all Wisconsin counties to make positive policy changes which will work toward eliminating systemic poverty and inequality” in collaboration with WCA. Since then, WCA has worked with Milwaukee County to feature diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at its annual conference and in its publications. Every two years, the WCA Board of Directors approves a legislative agenda. Many of the policy priorities included in the 2021-2022 [legislative agenda](#) overlap with Milwaukee County’s own policy platform, including the pursuit of a local option sales tax, equitable disbursement of county-collected court fees, increase funding for mass transit aids, amongst others.

Milwaukee County also maintains a membership in the [National Association of Counties \(NACo\)](#). NACo represents county priorities in front of federal policymakers, provides research and analysis of relevant legislation, and advocates for “healthy, safe, and vibrant counties.” NACo is also governed by a Board of Directors. Milwaukee County is represented on the NACo Board of Directors and the NACo Large Urban County Caucus by the Milwaukee County Executive.

NACo is comprised of ad hoc committees, task forces, policy steering committees, and other standing committees that meet to discuss and analyze policy and to help determine the legislative agenda. Historically, Milwaukee County Supervisors have served in different capacities on these entities to advance county priorities at the federal level. In addition, Government Affairs staff are also members of the National Association of County Intergovernmental Relations Officials.

[Wisconsin Public Transit Association](#) (WIPTA) and [Transportation Development Association](#) (TDA) are additional organizations that the Office of Government Affairs works with to advocate at the state and federal level on transportation related issues. WIPTA is a membership organization that focuses on all Wisconsin Transit systems, working to proactively to improve transit systems throughout the state. TDA is a broad-based membership organization that includes businesses, labor unions, citizen groups, and units of government that advocates for all transportation types.

The [Intergovernmental Cooperation Council](#) (ICC), created pursuant to [Wisconsin State Statutes 66.0301](#), includes the Milwaukee County Executive, along with the mayor, village president or administrator from each of the 19 municipalities within Milwaukee County. The ICC convenes monthly to identify opportunities for intergovernmental collaboration and discuss potential advocacy efforts for changes in state and federal law. The ICC also serves as a mechanism for members to share best practices in the delivery of public services, with a focus on saving county taxpayer dollars through cooperative efforts.

Pending Legislation

The Government Affairs Liaison regularly provides legislative updates to the Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, which can be reviewed in [File No. 22-17](#).

One of the most comprehensive policy platforms that Milwaukee County maintains is the Fair Deal ([File No. 19-161](#)). The Fair Deal establishes the following lobbying platform:

- An opportunity to provide County government with additional options for local control over their own financial destiny, with new, additional revenue, and a reduction in the reliance on property taxes, through enabling legislation and a binding County-wide referendum.
- Increased, fair, contributions from the State of Wisconsin (the State) toward the provision of current and new State-mandated services provided by local governments.
 - State shared revenue payments and other State aids should, at a minimum, match the rate of inflation required to provide cost-effective public programs and services.
- Full reimbursement of the tax levy costs incurred by the Office of the Sheriff to provide expressway patrol services. Milwaukee County is the only county mandated by the State to patrol the expressways that are vital arteries in the State's economic engine.
- An equal split of Circuit Court and Register of Deed fees collected by the County, and, currently, disproportionately remitted to the State.
- Acceptance of Federal funds to expand Medicaid coverage for 80,000 State residents, help reduce local government health care costs, and provide \$190 million per year of additional revenue to the State.
- Ensure that 2017 Wisconsin Act 185 (relating to juvenile correctional facilities, youth aids, etc.) provides adequate funding by the State to avoid a funding gap for counties operating said facilities.
- Rejection of any reduction or offset for existing funding in the above recommendations below the amounts received in the 2019 Adopted Budget or future budgets.

The overarching pursuit of the Fair Deal, and many of Milwaukee County's other policy positions, is to improve our fiscal health, maintain services, and return revenue to the County. One of our most significant efforts is the pursuit of a local option sales tax and a reduction of reliance on property taxes, which has been established through [File No. 21-547](#), but also through [File Nos. 19-831](#), [19-161](#), and [18-751](#). There was no legislation introduced in the 2021-2022 State legislative session in support of that effort, although progress was made on [developing the idea with legislators](#). Milwaukee County continues to lobby on this topic and seek out solutions that address our need to obtain financial security, address deferred maintenance, and improve our public services. We will continue to focus on this effort during the recess period before the new State Legislative session [begins](#).

Milwaukee County sets its own legislative agenda through the adoption of policy, as outlined above. Adopted policies can be found at the County Legislative Information Center (CLIC).