

CO-SPONSORSHIP MEMORANDUM

TO: All Legislators

**FROM: Representatives Shae Sortwell and Sylvia Ortiz-Velez
Senators André Jacque and Lena Taylor**

DATE: Friday, April 28th

RE: Co-Sponsorship of LRB-1425/1, Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act

DEADLINE: Thursday, May 4th at 5pm

Free and fair elections are the bedrock of representative government. Our hope is to offer some rational solutions we can all agree will improve our election process and empower voters in our state. We plan to introduce an election reform package this week and next week.

These bills are not intended to involve partisan politics, but rather to ensure that our elections are the best we can make them.

We are introducing the Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act to require state reimbursement of the significant unfunded and unanticipated costs that such elections force upon local governments. When the Governor calls a special election for a state office, local municipalities are currently put on the hook for unreimbursed expenses for administering the special election (and special primary, if applicable) that can easily exceed a hundred thousand dollars across a single Assembly District, regardless of turnout.

Local governments are already forced to stretch their budgets for election administration from two elections in odd-numbered years to four in even-numbered years. Under current law, special elections occur with very little control, and municipalities have to shoulder nearly all of the costs incurred. With little warning, these unexpected elections can have substantial fiscal impacts on local governments that already have limited budgets.

Under LRB-1425, a cost is eligible for reimbursement only if the Wisconsin Elections Commission determines that the cost is reasonable and the rate paid by the county or municipality 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. LRB-1425 applies to special elections called by the governor to fill vacancies for the offices of State Senate and Assembly, statewide constitutional officers, state judges, and district attorneys. 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 (a special primary or special election not consolidated with a regular election).

The Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act is a common sense fix, saving local government dollars while giving cost oversight to the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

To be added on as a co-sponsor of this legislation, please reply to this email or contact Rep. Sortwell's office at 9102 or Sen. Jacque's office at 6-3512.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill requires the Elections Commission to reimburse counties and municipalities for certain costs incurred in the administration of special primaries and special elections for state office. Current law defines "state office" as the following: governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, attorney general, state superintendent of public instruction, justice of the supreme court, court of appeals judge, circuit court judge, state senator, state representative to the assembly, and district attorney.

A cost is eligible for reimbursement under the bill only if certain conditions are met, including that the Elections Commission determines the cost is reasonable and the rate paid by the county or municipality 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. Under the bill, only the following costs are reimbursable:

1. Rental payments for polling places.
2. Election day wages paid to election officials working at the polls.
3. Costs for the publication of required election notices.
4. Printing and postage costs for absentee ballots and envelopes.
5. Costs for the design and printing of ballots and poll books.
6. Purchase of ballot bags or containers, including ties or seals for chain of custody purposes.
7. Costs to program electronic voting machines.
8. Purchase of memory devices for electronic voting machines.
9. Wages paid to conduct a county canvass.
10. Data entry costs for a statewide voter registration system.