A Guide to Presenting 2024 Legislative Issues

FLC | FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES

LOCAL VOICES MAKING LOCAL CHOICES

NOTE: This document is not intended to be read or shared as-is.

GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Each year, municipal officials from across the state volunteer to serve on one of the Florida League of Cities' five legislative policy committees:

- Finance, Taxation & Personnel
- Land Use & Economic Development
- Municipal Administration
- Transportation & Intergovernmental Relations
- Utilities, Natural Resources & Public Works.

The League's policy committees develop the League's Legislative Platform, which addresses priority issues most likely to impact daily municipal operations and governance statewide.

The priorities in the League's Legislative Platform are considered and approved by the entire League membership.

Policy committee members help the League understand the real-world implications of proposed legislation and are asked to serve as advocates throughout the legislative process.

GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT LOCAL DECISION-MAKING

In Florida, local government is the express will of the people.

The Florida Constitution states that cities may exercise any power for municipal purposes except as otherwise provided as law.

Citizens granted broad Home Rule powers to the cities for a good reason – because the old ways didn't work.

Interference with local government decision-making undermines citizens' power to govern themselves. Corporate special interests are pressuring state government to undermine local democracy with increasing frequency.

Local self-government empowers local voices to make local choices. Cities are citizen-driven representative democracies with citizen engagement, citizen input and citizen leadership.

As the government closest to the people, a city has a unique bond with its citizens. Florida's constitution enables cities to respond to their citizens' unique needs and preferences.

City leaders want to partner with state and federal leaders to protect cities' ability to control their destiny because it puts control of communities in the hands of citizens and the local leaders they elect.

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2024 Legislative Issues

MUNICIPAL UTILITIES

- The League OPPOSES legislation that would restrict municipal utility fund transfers.
  - It hurts rural and financially challenged communities.
  - It creates uncertainty for utility infrastructure projects, and these are critical.
  - It might even hurt existing bond obligations.
- This type of legislation hits small and financially challenged municipalities the hardest.
  - Municipalities need a reasonable rate of return on their utilities to pay for government services.
  - Rural municipalities and those that are fiscally constrained have a weak property tax base.
  - Bills that target municipal utilities would devastate the government services in these areas.
  - We'd like you to support an exemption for small and fiscally constrained municipalities.
- Surcharges on extraterritorial customers are already in law, and this type of legislation cuts them in half.
  - A longer transition period is needed.
  - Any reduction in the currently authorized surcharge should be phased in over a 10-year period.
- Restricting fund transfers will create uncertainty for municipal budgets.
  - Investor-owned utilities can make a reasonable rate of return for their shareholders.
  - Municipal utilities should be allowed to make a reasonable rate of return to benefit the public.
- Municipalities shouldn't be punished for serving others.
  - It's unreasonable and unfair to further reduce the transfer rate if the utility serves extraterritorial customers.
  - With few exceptions, municipal utilities make sure that utility revenues are reinvested sensibly in utility operations, maintenance and infrastructure BEFORE considering any transfers to the general fund.
  - We're asking you to kill parts of legislation that require more reductions in the transfer rate based on extraterritorial service.

SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY

- The Florida League of Cities is AGAINST legislation that increases sovereign immunity limits.
- We want to protect taxpayers.
  - Increasing the sovereign immunity limits to unreasonably high levels puts cities at risk of a huge financial burden.
  - Increasing limits would raise insurance premiums and strain taxpayers. The insurance market in Florida is incredibly volatile. Securing adequate insurance is difficult.
- Thirty-three states have capped sovereign immunity. States like California and New York have no caps, but also have the highest tax rates in the country.
  - Last session, legislation proposed increasing caps from $200,000 per person to $2.5 million per person, and $300,000 per incident to $5 million per incident, making Florida the state with the highest caps in the nation.
- We're looking for an equitable balance.
  - The law already balances the needs of those who've been harmed and the ability of cities to provide services.
  - Raising the limits would upset this balance.
- We want to avoid more frivolous lawsuits.
  - If people can collect more money against cities, it invites lawsuits.
  - This situation could drain our public resources.
  - It could take away our attention from important issues.

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SOVEREIGN IMMUNITY (continued)

- This legislation could harm vital programs.
  - Cities provide essential services such as police and fire which have an inherent high degree of liability risk.
  - Capping liability allows cities the continued ability to provide these essential services.
- Our budgets are already stretched thin.
  - An increase in sovereign immunity limits would only make things worse.
  - This change would especially hurt smaller cities that already have limited resources.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- The Florida League of Cities SUPPORTS legislation that will enhance recruitment efforts to attract talent into the law enforcement profession.
- The Florida League of Cities SUPPORTS legislation that eases barriers to reciprocity for sworn law enforcement officers relocating to the state of Florida.
- Florida's law enforcement academies have seen declining enrollments in the last few years. As a result, there is a significant gap between the number of "new" graduates and available law enforcement jobs when also accounting for retirements.
  - This labor shortage has negatively impacted law enforcement agencies in a number of different ways.
- A shortage of officers means police departments compete with other cities and counties for employees.
  - Police departments big and small have struggled to attract and retain qualified officers as fewer qualified applicants are available to fill these positions.
  - The cost of attracting new officers and retaining existing officers has significantly increased in the last five years.
  - Many agencies have seen officers jump from city to city due to higher salaries and benefits offered in neighboring jurisdictions. This "brain drain" has disproportionately impacted smaller, rural jurisdictions that do not have the tax base to compete with other larger agencies.
- The Florida Legislature has consistently promoted public safety and smart crime initiatives, but there is still more to do.
  - Offering recruitment bonuses for out-of-state officers has been a positive first step.
  - Identifying ways to allow officers from other states to quickly transition to similar roles in Florida can help solve this problem.
- Recruiting more individuals to the profession is vital.
  - A funding program to cover the cost of the law enforcement academy is an investment in public safety and the state of Florida.

GENERAL CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you for your public service and commitment to bettering our state.

Many of you have shared the importance of having information related to the local impact of proposed legislation. To that end, we hope you will call upon us for this data before you make decisions affecting our mutual constituents.

We are here to help.

In closing, we look forward to working with you throughout the upcoming 2024 Legislative Session. Let's work together to enhance the quality of life in our communities.

Florida's cities stand ready to help legislators and work cooperatively to serve the citizens of Florida.

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