

League of Wisconsin Municipalities: Statement on local referendums

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League of Wisconsin Municipalities Executive Director Jerry Deschane issued the following statement today after eight municipalities throughout the state of Wisconsin conducted local referendums in regard to financing police and fire/EMS services on the April, 2022 ballot. The municipalities included the Village of Butler, City of Fort Atkinson, Village of Pleasant Prairie, Village of Melvina, City of Algoma, City of Seymour, Village of Browntown and the City of Washburn.

“In yesterday’s election, there were eight city and village levy limit referendums throughout the state of Wisconsin. Seven out of eight of those referendums passed. Our current system of funding local governments is in need of serious repair. Of those eight referendums, six were in regard to hiring additional police, fire or EMS, or building and operating a new public safety building. Wisconsin is the only state in the country that funds local police and fire/EMS services solely by property taxes. We cannot rely exclusively on property taxes to fund these critical services that enable our society to function. We must find a new way for local governments to be properly funded in the state of Wisconsin. To those who would say ‘the system works’ because these local governments were able to go to a referendum to raise property taxes, we would point out that is a poor solution. No other state places such an overwhelming majority of the local government and school funding burden onto the property tax. Both the challenge (increasing first responder calls) and the “solution” (raising property taxes) will become even more problematic as Wisconsin’s population ages. There will be even more demand for critical life-saving services in the same communities that are least able to absorb property tax increases. It’s time for a better alternative.”