

Sen. Jacque: Special Election Cost Relief Act clears committee

Posted on Monday, Sep 11, 2023

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MADISON... A bipartisan bill proving relief to communities for the costs of holding special elections for state offices cleared a Senate committee today in a unanimous vote.

State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere) and State Rep. Shae Sortwell (R-Gibson), who introduced the bipartisan Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act, said a Governor's call for any special election (and possible primary) outside the normal cycle currently puts municipalities on the hook for significant costs that can easily exceed a hundred thousand dollars across a single Assembly District alone, 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," Sen. Jacque said. "Under current law, unexpected special elections occur with little warning, and they can have substantial fiscal impacts on local governments that already have limited budgets."

"Regularly-scheduled elections are expensive affairs, but local officials know they are coming and must find ways to pay for them," Rep. Sortwell said. "Special elections come as a surprise, causing even greater strain on budgets, because county and local governments must account for these unforeseen costs outside of their normal budgeting and expense practices."

The Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act 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. Costs covered by the bill include rental payments for polling places, wages paid to

election officials working at the polls, printing and postage costs for absentee ballots and envelopes, and other significant election costs identified by municipal clerks in previous state surveys.

“In addition, this proposal also adds a layer of oversight to protect taxpayers,” Rep. Sortwell said. “The Wisconsin Elections Commission would determine what special election costs are eligible for reimbursement.”

“The reimbursement rate would be similar to the costs of regularly scheduled elections,” Sen. Jacque said. “That would provide local officials and taxpayers with some degree of cost relief, certainty, and control over their spending.”

The Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act ([Senate Bill 278/Assembly Bill 283](#)) has passed committee in both chambers. It must pass both Houses and be signed by the Governor to become law.