



Promoting Local Control in Wisconsin

BACKGROUND: The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) is proud to be the foremost voice of county officials representing all 72 counties in Wisconsin with the goal of affecting public policy to the benefit of county government. In Partnership with the Wisconsin County Highway Association (WCHA), the premiere county-based organization representing Public Works and County Highway Departments, both WCA and WCHA recognize and promote decision making at the local level. Both WCA and WCHA have been founded with the core principle that the most effective government is the government closest to the people.

In the spirit of that concept, both respective organizations want to promote this core concept of local decision making or “local control.” The idea behind local control is the degree to which local leaders, institutions, and governing bodies can make independent or autonomous decisions about the governance and operation of their government, in their own community, by elected leaders’ local officials who reside in that community.

CURRENT STATUS: WCA and WCHA regard local control and local decision making as the bedrock of democracy and imperative to the needs and health of any community. At an alarming rate, the ability for local units of government to “self-govern” or make decisions at the local level has been eroded. In recent years, various pieces of legislation preempting the ability to self-govern have been introduced that take decision-making powers and process away from local communities and move it into the state government in Madison.

REQUESTED ACTION: It is our long-term goal that state government ensures that its agencies and employees strive to empower local leaders and local officials. There is no law that can be passed or policy initiative that we can promote to enhance this concept. Rather, it is our view that state leaders, local leaders and employees in state agencies and at the local level must work to produce a culture that values local control and encourages decision making at the local level whenever possible. It is with this concept in mind that both respective organizations will continue a conversation not only about local decision making, but rather how decisions can best be made the local level and how local governments can best deliver services without red-tape or the overreaching arm of the state and its bureaucracies. We believe it is that conversation and culture that will lead to better government for our citizens and more effective service delivery.

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