



Legislation Text

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060331
SUBSTITUTE 1

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Substitute resolution directing the Election Commission to place an advisory referendum on the consolidation of certain City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County government functions on the November 7, 2006, ballot.

This resolution directs the Election Commission to provide, on the November 7, 2006, general election ballot, an advisory referendum on whether the City of Milwaukee and other interested or relevant parties should study the feasibility and potential cost savings of the City assuming responsibility for government functions currently performed by Milwaukee County through dissolution of the County and creation of a consolidated city/county form of government.

Whereas, In recent years, the City of Milwaukee has faced a number of fiscal challenges, including rising employee health care costs, a State Legislature-imposed tax levy "freeze" and declining inflation-adjusted state shared revenue payments; and

Whereas, Despite these fiscal restraints, the City has been able to maintain a high level of service to City residents without increasing the property tax rate; and

Whereas, While Milwaukee County faces a number of the same fiscal challenges as the City, it is experiencing an ongoing and worsening budget crisis caused in large part by escalating fringe benefit costs, particularly pensions and health care for retired County employees; and

Whereas, In order to balance its budgets, the County has chosen to underfund its pension system and to make substantial cuts in the services it provides to County residents; and

Whereas, According to the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Milwaukee County is on the verge of fiscal insolvency, with its budget deficit projected to grow from less than \$10 million this year to \$81 million in 2007 and approximately \$250 million by 2011; and

Whereas, On June 29, 2006, Governor Jim Doyle announced the creation of a state task force of public- and private-sector leaders that will determine the severity of Milwaukee County's financial problems and recommend solutions by December, 2006; and

Whereas, There is widespread community concern about Milwaukee County's declining ability to provide public services in such key areas as parks, transit and law enforcement; and

Whereas, Many services provided by City and County agencies are similar, if not identical; and

Whereas, One way to achieve operational and cost efficiencies in government is to have only one unit of government (for example, the City of Milwaukee) provide the services previously provided by two units of government (the City and Milwaukee County); and

Whereas, The consolidation of city and county services and functions, sometimes referred to as “metropolitan government” or “unified government”, has been successfully implemented in a number of other major U.S. cities, including Indianapolis, Louisville and Nashville; and

Whereas, By dissolving Milwaukee County and having the City of Milwaukee perform most or all of its functions, duplication of services could be eliminated and the cost of providing services could be reduced; and

Whereas, Part of the State Legislature’s intent in imposing the local government tax levy “freeze” was to encourage greater efficiencies in the provision of local government services, a prime example of which is the efficiency gained by having a single level of government provide most or all services previously provided by two different governmental units; and

Whereas, The cost savings that could result from dissolution of Milwaukee County and consolidation of services under the City of Milwaukee could go a long way in addressing metropolitan Milwaukee’s image as a high-tax area - an image which hurts Milwaukee’s ability to retain and attract businesses and residents; and

Whereas, City of Milwaukee residents deserve an opportunity to express their opinions on whether the City, other units of government and other interested organizations should study the feasibility and potential cost savings of the City assuming responsibility for performing functions currently performed by Milwaukee County, through dissolution of the County and creation of some form of metropolitan or consolidated government; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, By the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee, that the Election Commission of the City of Milwaukee is directed to provide, on the November 7, 2006, general election ballot, an advisory referendum on whether the City of Milwaukee and other interested or relevant parties should study the feasibility and potential cost savings of the City assuming responsibility for most or all functions currently performed by Milwaukee County; and, be it

Further Resolved, That the following referendum question shall be submitted to a vote of the electors at this election:

“Shall the City of Milwaukee, with assistance from other units of government and other interested organizations, study the feasibility and potential cost savings of the City assuming responsibility for government functions currently performed by Milwaukee County and, if such a consolidation of functions is feasible and financially beneficial, work with the State of Wisconsin and other municipalities in Milwaukee County to dissolve the County and created a consolidated city/county form of government?”

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