

TO: County Board Executive Committee
FROM: Carrie Springer, Legislative Lobbyist
RE: 2019-2020 Session Summary

The 2019-2020 state legislative session was an unusual one compared to the past couple of sessions. It was the first time with split party control since 2010. This yielded far fewer bills signed into law than the last two sessions. The 2019-2020 session produced 185 new acts compared to 370 for the 2017-2018 session and 392 in the 2015-2016 session. Governor Evers also fully vetoed 20 bills passed by the legislature.

As always, the state budget was the most important piece of legislation. It was signed in July after Governor Evers made almost 80 changes to the state budget passed by the legislature. There were some attempts to override some vetoes, but they did not receive enough votes. This memo doesn't include budget details, but I can resend the budget summary memo from last year for anyone who would like to see it again.

The regular session was cut short by COVID-19 and left many bills stranded, even some with strong bipartisan support. For example, the Speakers Task Force on Water Quality released 12 bills and many had broad support, including a bill to increase funding for county conservation staff. The bills passed the Assembly in February, but stalled in the Senate over cost concerns and then ran out of time because of COVID. There is talk that the Senate may come back into session after the election to pass some of the bills from this task force and other bills that passed the Assembly and are waiting action in the Senate.

The legislature did come back briefly in April after COVID hit to pass a package of bills in response to the pandemic. (2020 WI Act 185). Most of the bills dealt with providing government flexibilities (both state and local) to respond to COVID, changing statutes to use federal funds, and moving deadlines to help residents such as expanding the Low-Income Energy Assistance Program application period. One bill allowed retirees to come back to work for local governments to help with the pandemic response without stopping their WRS annuity and another bill allowed for some flexibilities on late fees for property taxes.

Highlights of county related bills outside of the budget bill

Act 8 (AB 188/SB 168) – Clean up bill for the juvenile justice bill passed in the previous session to close Lincoln Hills and create a network of county-based juvenile facilities. This bill was mainly a technical one that moved timelines and made other changes need to implement 2017 Act 185, the bill directing the state to close Lincoln Hills.

Act 26 (AB 471/SB 465) – Provides grants for NextGen 911.

Act 42 (AB 193/SB 178) – Allowing local government to do a biennial budget.

Act 71 (AB 257/SB 233)- Allows ETF to withhold a WRS participant's annuity for court restitutions. It also allows counties to recoup funds lost to fraud.

Act 76 (AB 119/SB 122) – Provides grants for homeless shelters by directing WHEDA to transfer \$500,000 each year to support the grants. It also instructs DHS to apply for a waiver to allow intensive case management for homeless individuals in the MA program.

Act 126 (AB 310/SB 291) – Allows counties to use construction estimates when going to referendum to increase levy limits. This and other changes in this bill mean local governments can put referendums on the ballot during any regularly scheduled election. Currently then can only be in November.

Act 141 (AB 692/SB 623) – Increases the amount the state can send to counties for snowmobile trails.

Act 145 (AB 736/SB 662) - A somewhat minor technical bill that cleared up some language regarding shoreland zoning. The bill makes it clear that county boards may enact general zoning ordinances in all or part of a town. The WCA and the Towns Association worked together on this bill.

Areas of concern

A number of bills were considered this session that were concerning for the County, but did not become law. These issue areas may have to be monitored in future sessions. They include:

- **AB 277/SB 276** – Zoning exemptions for moving rock from quarry sites and preempting local control. This bill did not pass this session, but the state budget did include similar provisions and Dane County requested a veto of the language. It was vetoed.
- **AB 283/SB328** – Requiring a referendum on a vehicle registration fee even if the county or municipality already have it in place.
- **AB 681/ SB 641** – Requiring a supermajority for ordinances that only affect towns.
- **Adoption package** – A task force put together a package of bills in an attempt to help facilitate more adoptions in Wisconsin. Unfortunately many of those bills went against best practices, elevated the rights of foster parents above those the biological parents, had the potential to increase county costs, and needed clarifications to prevent confusion in the court system. Eve

Dorman, the Dane County Legal Director for Permanency Planning, provided excellent testimony on the large package of bills when they were considered in committee. The bills also drew criticisms from many child advocacy groups and Wisconsin tribal governments. The only bill with broad support – AB 564/ SB 533, providing increase adoption assistance – passed both houses and was signed into law as Act 92. I can provide more information or Eve Dorman’s testimony if you are interested in this issue area.

- **“Tougher on Crime” package** – Another package of bills was introduced at the beginning of 2020 and dubbed the “Tougher on Crime” package. All nine of the bills were problematic, but Dane County was particularly concerned with two of them – AB 806/SB 753 to increase the number of crimes that would place juveniles in the Serious Juvenile Offender program and AB 853/SB 769 to increase penalties for car theft. Both bills go against best practices and would have dramatically increased county costs. The car theft bill also would have introduced mandatory minimums into the juvenile system for the first time. The Serious Juvenile Offender bill passed both houses and luckily was vetoed by the governor.

Finally, there were also a number of bills that many Dane County residents would support and are included in the Dane County Agenda that did not make it through this session. Some notable examples that may see action next session due to their growing support statewide include:

- **AB 303/SB 288** - creating a nonpartisan redistricting process
- **AB 750/SB 683** - allowing medical marijuana
- **AB 1036** - removing 17-year olds from the adult corrections system along with other juvenile justice reforms.