

Dear :

Last year, I proposed that the State of Wisconsin take over all responsibility for the operations of the courts system. In return, I suggested that state aid payments to the counties be reduced by an amount equal to the total amount picked up by state government. In other words, there would be no net increase costs for the state government.

The reason for the proposal is simple. Currently, the state funds certain parts of the system such as salaries for judges and district attorneys. The county funds other parts such as clerks, commissioners, bailiffs and courtroom space. The county governments, however, do not control management of the system.

Since the courts system is run by the Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court and the Director of State Courts and since state statutes drive many of the decisions, it seems reasonable to have all of the responsibilities under the direction of state government. Besides the on going battle over adequate funding levels and reimbursement for county government, it just makes sense to have control of the system all in one place as a part of state government.

The Wisconsin Counties Association put together a group to work on this issue, too. In addition, I spoke with the Governor and with several legislative leaders who are interested in the idea.

The problem is getting agreement on the true costs of such a transfer and what positions and responsibilities should be included in such a transfer. To address this issue, I propose that the Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) prepare a report with recommendations on how to implement a transfer to state government.

Because I know that requests for audits from the LAB must come from members of the State Legislature, I ask that all of the members of the State Assembly and State Senate from Milwaukee County be willing to co-sign the attached letter to the co-chairs of the Joint Committee on Audits. Your help allow us all the information that we need to make a thoughtful decision on the future of the courts system.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Scott Walker

Milwaukee County Executive

Dear Co-Chair :

We ask that you approve a report from the Legislative Audit Bureau that will review the courts system and prepare recommendations on how the responsibilities and funding of the system. This can include comments on the possibility of state to county governments being reduced as the state government takes over equal amounts of costs from the courts system.

Several county officials are calling for this change and the Wisconsin Counties Association formed a task force last year to also review this subject. The largest barrier to enactment of this change to the system is not opposition, but the lack of an agreement on how to implement the change and what areas should be covered in such a plan.

Having an audit of the true costs of the courts system – both those currently funded by the state government and those funded by county governments – will be keep to actually implementing any transfer to the state. This information will allow everyone involved in this debate to understand the true results of such a change to the funding and operations of the courts system.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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