



---

# TONY KURTZ

---

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Rep. Tony Kurtz**

**Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Local Government  
Assembly Bill 925**

Thank you Chairman Novak and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify before you today on Assembly Bill 925, relating to: local grant writing and compliance assistance and making an appropriation.

As you all know, we've made tremendous strides in helping local government this session. However, there are some things that are still more difficult for smaller cities, towns and villages who do not have the numbers of full-time staff like their larger counterparts. One of those areas is the difficulty that comes with applying for, navigating the process of, and staying compliant with state and federal grants for funding projects that require significant investments.

Assembly Bill 925 creates a pilot program beginning in 2024 and ending in 2027, that would provide \$3 million annually from the new Local Government SEG account to provide up to a \$5,000 grant to a city, town or village with a population of under 10,000 to obtain grant writing and compliance assistance services. This funding may only be used for grant services related to public works, transportation infrastructure and public safety grant opportunities.

Assembly Bill 925 requires DOR to submit a report at the end of the pilot program to the Joint Finance Committee evaluating the program.

I'm happy to be joined by the Wisconsin League of Municipalities and the Wisconsin Towns Association who are both supportive of this bill and will have members testifying today.

Thank you for your time today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.



---

# MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

**Testimony on AB 925  
Assembly Committee on Local Government  
January 24, 2024 | 328 NW**

Chair Novak and members of the Assembly Committee on Local Government:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 925, legislation that would continue our efforts to ensure smaller town and municipal governments have the ability to pull down state and federal grant dollars.

While Representative Kurtz and I worked through the Shared Revenue Bill, we heard an all-too-common theme – smaller local governments have a tremendous disadvantage when it comes to obtaining grant money because they don't have the resources to write them in-house or pay for outside help.

Our proposal to address this issue is a pilot program, funded with unappropriated dollars from the Local Government SEG fund that was created under the Shared Revenue Bill.

Assembly Bill 925 would give towns and municipalities with a population of less than 10,000 people the opportunity to apply for grant assistance grants of up to \$5,000 in each year from 2024 through 2027. The grant application, administered by the Department of Revenue, must be simple, clear, and reasonably accessible to local governments with limited resources.

Upon the completion of this three year pilot program, the Department of Revenue will submit a report to the Joint Committee on Finance evaluating the program.

Throughout the Shared Revenue Bill process, we had a very distinct goal in mind – incentivize communities to focus on needs, not wants. We wanted local taxpayers to know that the government services that they cannot provide for themselves would be the priority of their local governments – not elective programs that government was never intended to provide.

For that reason, these grant assistance grants could only be used to obtain services for grants related to public works, transportation infrastructure, and public safety.

From someone who represents a very rural district that has zero communities over 10,000 population, I can't even begin to tell you how important this funding would be.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 925.





131 W. Wilson St., Suite 505  
Madison, Wisconsin 53703  
phone (608) 267-2380; (800) 991-5502  
fax: (608) 267-0645  
league@lwm-info.org; www.lwm-info.org

To: Assembly Local Government Committee  
From: Toni Herkert, Government Affairs Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities  
Date: January 24, 2024  
RE: Assembly Bill 925 – Related to Local Grant Writing and Compliance Assistance

Chairman Novak, Vice Chair Donovan, and members of the Local Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Assembly Bill 925 related to local grant writing and compliance assistance for municipalities who may lack technical staff and expertise to qualify for federal or state grant opportunities. The League of Wisconsin Municipalities represents nearly 600 municipalities, both large and small, urban, and rural throughout the state.

Out of the cities and villages in the state 512 have populations below 10,000 residents and have varying degrees of staff to deliver critical services and run essential programs. What we have heard time and time again is that most communities in this size range cannot afford to have staff dedicated solely to pursuing grant funding for potential projects. The City of Oconto, population of 4,600, communicated that small communities often operate with limited staff and limited funding. The city administrator continues by stating that grants are incredibly beneficial and are often the only way for small municipalities to secure large projects or infrastructure.

It is no secret that there are significant funding opportunities available due to the Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act (IIJA also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) and the Inflation Reduction Act. Those acts were followed by guidebooks of 110 and 184 pages, producing numerous application and instruction packages, spread across several federal agencies, and directed through some existing state agency delegated programs. The result is over 130 individual websites on the Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity's website. A small community is not able to wade through the myriad of information just to apply.

Our goal is to make certain those funding opportunities are spread throughout the state hitting every community in every corner moving Wisconsin forward. These grant resources can revitalize our cities and villages, increase safety, and promote our communities thereby increasing the ability to attract more businesses, more families, more tourists, and more young people to work, live, and play in Wisconsin.

But these grants are competitive. The Village of Wrightstown, population 3259, states that the complexity of application processes and compliance requirements often pose significant barriers for communities with limited resources. However, AB 925 provides a significant step towards overcoming these challenges. Annually from 2024 to 2027 \$3 million will be available from the Local Government Fund, created in Act 12, to provide grants of \$5,000 for small communities to utilize to secure grant writing and compliance assistance. AB 925 will enhance competitiveness in the national grant arena and unlock opportunities for community development, infrastructure projects, and essential services.

*YOUR VOICE. YOUR WISCONSIN.*

The League would like to thank the authors Representative Kurtz and Senator Felzkowski for authoring this important legislation to make certain communities of all sizes have the opportunity to implement generational infrastructure upgrades and support critical public safety personnel in all corners of the state. We respectfully request that the committee support AB 925 and bring it to a vote very soon. Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at your convenience at [therkert@lwm-info.org](mailto:therkert@lwm-info.org).





January 24, 2024

My name is Andy Kurtz and I am here in support of AB 925. I am the Planning & Community Development Manager for Vierbicher. Vierbicher is headquartered in Reedsburg, WI and has 5 locations statewide. Our focus is on planning, public funding, community development and civil engineering. We serve communities statewide providing expertise and resources needed for the community.

Prior to joining Vierbicher in October of 2023, I served at the Administrator for the Village of Marathon City for nearly a decade. My goal is to speak to the committee with experience both from a small community and a consultant perspective.

Today there are multiple federal and state programs available to rural and small communities in Wisconsin, which is a great opportunity. However, the programs differ in eligibility requirements, application process / dates, and administration requirements.

Local government in many small communities in Wisconsin operate with small staffs. A Clerk and a Treasurer or a Clerk /Treasurer are the primary office staff and some communities have an Administrator. In all these communities they are focused on the day-to-day operation of their community and their statutory responsibilities for public records, open meeting law, elections, etc.

It is difficult for these communities to find time to become experts in USDA, CDBG, HUD, EDA, DNR and other state and federal loan / grant programs let alone assess eligibility, complete the applications and if awarded administer the funding program. It is even more difficult for small communities to allocate their limited budget resources to hiring consultants to assist them in these processes.

AB925 gives an opportunity to communities under 10,000 population to eliminate one of the barriers associated federal and state funding programs. The bill would enable communities to fund professional assistance to assess and apply for state and federal funding programs through a \$5,000 grant. As a result, more communities will have the opportunity to evaluate and pursue federal or state funding to undertake community projects ranging across transportation, public safety and public works that have been deferred or cancelled due to costs.

I support AB925 and its goal of providing funding for communities to seek help in assessing and securing federal and state funding for transformational projects in their communities in public works, public safety and transportation. Without this funding assistance, many small communities in Wisconsin will not be in a position to pursue funding and those projects may never happen.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



# State of Wisconsin • DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE

2135 RIMROCK ROAD • Mail Stop 624A • P.O. BOX 8933 • MADISON, WISCONSIN 53708-8933 • 608-266-6466 • FAX (608) 266-5718  
<http://www.revenue.wi.gov>

*Tony Evers*  
Governor

*Peter W. Barca*  
Secretary of Revenue

## **Information Only Testimony on Assembly Bill 925 January 24, 2024 Peter Barca, Secretary of the Department of Revenue**

Good morning, Chairman Novak, ranking member Baldeh and members of the Assembly Committee on Local Government. I would like to thank Representative Kurtz and Senator Felzkowski for sponsoring this piece of legislation. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony for information only on Assembly Bill 925, creating a grant program for locals within the Department of Revenue.

AB 925 creates new laws for a local grant writing assistance program. Under this legislation the department is to provide, in each year from 2024 through 2027, grants of up to \$5,000 to political subdivisions with populations of less than 10,000 for grant writing and compliance assistance services.

Certainly, we applaud the sentiment behind this legislation and the valuable resource it will provide to local municipalities. I want to bring your attention to the resource needs of the State and Local Finance (SLF) Division. This division would be charged with administering the grant program. Within SLF, the Local Government Services Bureau (LGS) has been stretched increasingly thin. Over the last three biennia, the Bureau has implemented numerous law changes in shared revenue alone, the Bureau has implemented two major programs (personal property aid and video service provider aid), two sub-programs (mass transit grant reduction and fallen protective services officer insurance premiums), major adjustments to existing programs (such as expenditure restraint incentive program and levy limits), and the distribution of American Rescue Plan Act grants to smaller Wisconsin communities. Additionally, the Bureau has been tasked with administering the new changes brought on by Act 12 including, innovation grants, innovation planning grants, new shared revenue formulas, and the repeal of personal property tax. LGS has yet to receive additional staff and resources to accomplish these new responsibilities.

In the 2023-25 budget, the Governor asked for 5 new staff for SLF, but those positions were not approved by the Joint Committee on Finance. As a result, an unimaginable workload exists in the SLF division, especially at this time with all the wonderful new initiatives that have passed this session. This bill will result in another program for SLF to administer, therefore, additional resources would certainly be needed.

In order to effectively facilitate this legislation and provide gold-star customer service to your municipalities, the department requests \$77,600 including 1.0 FTE, and one-time costs of \$56,400 for computer programming.

Thanks again for your consideration. As always, I'm available for any questions.

**Testimony in Favor of AB 925**  
**Betty Manson**

Chairman Novak, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 925. My name is Betty Manson, and I am Clerk for the town of Plymouth in Juneau County. I am also on the Board of Directors for the Wisconsin Towns Association.

I want to begin by saying how appreciative local governments are for the grant opportunities that are available. Grant funding plays a pivotal role in addressing the diverse needs of our communities, from maintaining and reconstructing our roads to providing necessary emergency services. Many local governments, however, face significant challenges in navigating the complex grant application process. Limited resources and expertise hinder the ability for some to compete for funding, causing them to fall behind their neighbors.

I have been on both sides of the grant process – applying for grants on behalf of my town and scoring applications as a member of the statewide review committee for the Local Road Improvement Program. I can tell you that even the grants that appear simple never are, and we see large variations in the quality of applications submitted. Even similar town road applications will be of vastly different quality. Some towns will realize that including pictures, for example, may help demonstrate need. Others will not. Some towns are able to craft detailed and well-defined narratives that walk through need and economic impact. Others are not. This system is creating winners and losers. Those communities with the staff, knowledge base, and resources to create quality grant applications stand out above the communities without those abilities or resources.

AB 925 provides an opportunity to even the playing field in competitive grant programs and provide all communities an opportunity to put their best foot forward. This targeted support will enable small local governments to strengthen their grant applications, enhance their capacity to compete for funding, and ultimately, increase their chances of securing vital resources. By investing in grant writing assistance, we are not only empowering local officials but also fostering a more efficient and competitive grant acquisition landscape.

Thank you again for your consideration of this bill and the opportunity to testify before you today.