



---

# MARY FELZKOWSKI

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

**Testimony on SB 855**  
**Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue**  
**March 6, 2024 | 411S**

Chair Hutton and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 855, 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.

Senate Bill 855 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 recently had 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 Senate Bill 855.



---

# TONY KURTZ

---

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

**Rep. Tony Kurtz**

**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Universities and Revenue  
Senate Bill 855**

Thank you Chairman Hutton and members of the committee for the opportunity to share my testimony with you on Senate Bill 855, 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.

Senate Bill 855 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.

Senate Bill 855 requires DOR to submit a report at the end of the pilot program to the Joint Finance Committee evaluating the program.

Wisconsin League of Municipalities and the Wisconsin Towns Association are both supportive of this bill and will have members testifying today.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I apologize I'm unable to be there in person today, but please feel free to reach out to my office if you have any questions.



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: March 6, 2024  
RE: Senate Bill 855 – Related to Local Grant Writing and Compliance Assistance

Chair Hutton, Vice Chair James, and members of the Senate Universities and Revenue Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Senate Bill 855 related to local grant writing and compliance assistance for municipalities who may lack technical staff, time, and specific 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 seen repeatedly 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 referenced 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, some directed through existing state delegated programs. As a result, 130 individual grant websites are linked on the Office of Rural Prosperity's website. A small community is often not able to wade through the myriad of information just to find a specific grant, determine eligibility, prepare a competitive project, and apply.

Our goal is to make certain the influx of grant funding opportunities is spread throughout the state hitting every community in every corner moving Wisconsin forward. These grant resources can revitalize our cities and villages, increase safety, decrease borrowing, insulate ratepayers, and ultimately 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.

However, 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. SB 855 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. SB 855 will enhance competitiveness in the national grant arena and unlock opportunities for community development, infrastructure projects, and essential services.

The League would like to thank the authors Senator Felzkowski and Representative Kurtz 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 SB 855. 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).

# City of Peshtigo

Telephone 715-582-3041  
Fax 715-582-4322

331 French Street • Suite A • Peshtigo, Wisconsin 54157

February 29, 2024

Cathi Malke  
Mayor, City of Peshtigo  
331 French St.  
Peshtigo, WI 54157  
[cathim@cityofpeshtigo.us](mailto:cathim@cityofpeshtigo.us)  
715-582-3041

Dear Senator Mary Felzkowski (R-Tomahawk) and Representative Tony Kurtz (R-Wonewoc),

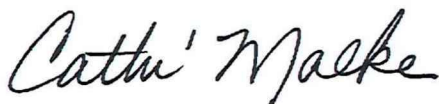
Thank you for having the foresight to initiate an important Assembly Bill 925 and its Senate companion Bill 855. As Mayor for the City of Peshtigo, I am writing to show my sincere gratitude and support. Peshtigo is a small community with limited financial resources and man power to compete against larger municipalities for funding for needed projects.

The City of Peshtigo relies heavily on obtaining grant dollars for projects as we are a bedroom community with many residents on a fixed income. To make improvements without raising taxes in today's economy can be the difference for our elders putting food on the table and meeting daily needs.

The City of Peshtigo fully supports this initiative, totally recognizing its potential to enhance our competitiveness towards increased opportunities for community development and infrastructure projects. If adopted, this bill would allow smaller communities the ability to obtain grant writing and compliance assistance services that would make our city more competitive.

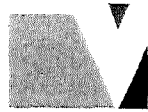
Thank you in advance for your time, dedication and service. Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Cathi Malke  
Mayor, City of Peshtigo





February 27, 2024

My name is Andy Kurtz and I would like to voice my support of SB 855. 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 as 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 a small staff. 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 able to pursue funding and those projects may never happen.

Thank you for your time and consideration.