



MARY FELZKOWSKI

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony for SB 187

Senator Mary Felzkowski

Committee on Transportation and Local Government

April 7, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Petrowski and Committee Members,

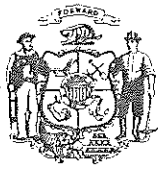
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 187, which will allow village trustees to further serve their communities.

Even before becoming a state, small rural communities have been the backbone of Wisconsin. These towns and villages, often founded by immigrants searching for a new home and new opportunities, quickly sprang up across the state to support the farming, mining, and lumber industries. Many of these places continue to persevere to this day, and still make up the majority of communities in many of the legislative districts throughout the state, including the 12th Senate District.

In some of these communities throughout the state, especially smaller villages and towns, it can be difficult to find employees for positions that are vacated due to resignations, retirements, or staff situations requiring long-term absences. Unfortunately, current law stipulates that town and village board members are generally ineligible for any position that the board has authority to fill. However, current law does allow for an exception that can be used by towns, allowing town board members to become community employees as long as their wages do not exceed \$15,000 each year. We would like to amend current law to allow the same exception for village board members.

SB 187 authorizes village trustees, much like their town board counterparts, to be hired as community employees and receive an hourly wage up to \$15,000 each year without violating state laws. This would allow village trustees, who already play a vital role in our communities, to step in and fill other necessary positions that keep our villages operating at their best. For many small communities, both in my district and throughout Wisconsin, this bill will go a long way towards ensuring villages remain staffed and running smoothly.

I am grateful to my Assembly author, Rep. Mursau and his staff for their hard work on this legislation. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



Jeff Mursau

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 36TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government SB 187- Village Officers Serving as Village Employees

April 7, 2021

Chairmen Petrowski and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 187, which allows village officers to serve as village employees.

Senator Felzkowki and I are introducing this legislation after a constituent contacted my office and made me aware that our current statutes prevent a person who serves as a village officer from gaining employment by the village. The example he shared was that a crossing guard position was open in the small village where he lives. The only person who expressed interest in the position was a retired individual who also served as a village board member. Unfortunately, the individual was ineligible to apply because state law prohibits a village officer from working for the same village in which they represent, and therefore the crossing guard position went unfilled for some time.

Under current law, members of town, village, county board or city council are generally ineligible for any office or position that the board or council has the authority to fill. However, **a specific statutory provision authorizes a town board member to receive an hourly wage, not exceeding \$15,000 each year, as a town employee. This bill extends this same provision to members of a village board.**

This simple change will give smaller communities some flexibility in filling necessary positions that have been vacated by village staff who have quit, retired, or need to take a leave of absence for an extended period of time.

Once again, thank you for holding a public hearing on this important piece of legislation. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



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To: Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
From: Curt Witynski, J.D., Deputy Director, League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Date: April 7, 2021
Re: SB 187, Allowing village trustees to be hired as village employees

The League of Wisconsin Municipalities supports SB 187, allowing village board members to be employed by the village and receive an hourly wage, not exceeding \$15,000 each year, as a village employee. The bill mirrors a current law provision allowing town board members to be hired by the town and earn wages up to \$15,000 annually.

The league worked with the authors on drafting this bill because we regularly hear from our members about the challenges small communities face when trying to fill vacancies in positions such as deputy clerk, crossing guard, caretaker of the cemetery, and seasonal help with mowing or plowing. In small villages, like towns, often the most qualified or most logical, or sometimes the only person available to fill a village job opening is a board member.

This bill is necessary because common law rules and statutory provisions prohibit a municipal governing body member from being employed by the community while serving on the governing body. This bill is limited to villages. It would not apply to cities.

We urge the committee to recommend passage of SB 187. Thank you for considering our comments.