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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Shared Revenue,  
Elections and Consumer Protection*

*Senator André Jacque*

*August 29, 2023*

Chairman Knodl and Colleagues,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as the author of Senate Bill 278, the Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act.

A Governor's call for any special election that does not coincide with a regularly scheduled election currently puts local municipalities on the hook for significant unreimbursed expenses for administering the special election (and special primary, if applicable) that can easily exceed a hundred thousand dollars across a single Assembly District alone, regardless of turnout.

That's why we are re-introducing the Local Government Special Election Cost Relief Act to require state reimbursement of the significant unfunded and unanticipated costs that such elections force upon local governments.

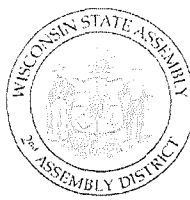
Senate Bill 278 applies to special elections called by the Governor to fill vacancies for the offices of State Senate and Assembly, statewide constitutional officers, state judges, and district attorneys. If the special election or special primary is consolidated with a regularly scheduled statewide election, the state would only reimburse the costs directly associated with the vacancy (a special primary or special election not consolidated with a regular election).

Local governments are already forced to stretch their budgets for election administration from two elections in odd-numbered years to four in even-numbered years. Under current law, special elections occur with very little control, and municipalities have to shoulder nearly all of the costs incurred. With little warning, these unexpected elections can have substantial fiscal impacts on local governments that already have limited budgets.

Under Senate Bill 278, a cost is eligible for reimbursement only if the Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) determines that the cost is reasonable and the rate paid by the county or municipality for the cost does not exceed the rate customarily paid for similar costs at a primary or election that is not a special primary or election.

Among the costs covered by the bill are rental payments for polling places, election day wages paid to election officials working at the polls, costs for the publication of required election notices, printing and postage costs for absentee ballots and envelopes, data entry costs for a statewide voter registration system, and other significant election costs identified by municipal clerks in previous state surveys. Identical legislation has previously passed the Senate unanimously the first session I brought it forward, and has already cleared the Assembly Campaigns and Elections Committee unanimously this session.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 278. I'd be happy to answer any questions.



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# SHAE SORTWELL

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 2<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Hearing Testimony**  
**Senate Committee on Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection**  
**August 29, 2023**  
**Senate Bill 278**

Chairman Knodl and members of the Shared Revenue, Elections, and Consumer Protection Committee, thank you for affording me with the opportunity to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 278, regarding aids to counties and municipalities for certain special election costs.

Senate Bill 278 has a simple aim: to relieve counties and municipalities of the uncertainty and costs associated with special elections for state office.

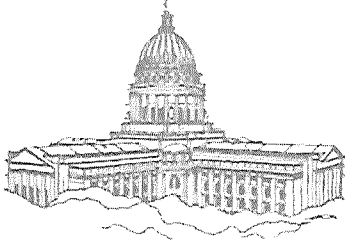
The cost of executing regularly scheduled elections has been a subject of debate. Elections are expensive affairs. Special elections cause even greater strain on county and local budgets. Naturally, special elections come as a surprise, and local governments must account for them outside of their normal budgeting and expense practices.

The monetary and resource costs add up quickly, particularly for very small municipalities. It is difficult for these small municipalities to take on the costs of special elections with several other budget priorities.

Other than the ten listed items in the bill that are eligible for reimbursement, this bill also adds a layer of oversight to protect taxpayers. The Elections Commission must determine what costs are in line with those of regularly scheduled elections in order to be eligible for reimbursement.

This legislation has the support of the City of Milwaukee, the League of Women Voters, and the Wisconsin Counties Association and passed its Assembly committee unanimously.

I want to thank the committee for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have.



# LENA C. TAYLOR

Wisconsin State Senator • 4th District

HERE TO SERVE YOU!

**Senate Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection  
SB 278 Testimony of Senator Lena C. Taylor  
8/29/2023**

Chairman Knodl, Vice Chairman Feyen and members of the Senate Shared Revenue, Elections and Consumer Protection, thank you for holding a Public Hearing on Senate Bill 278, relating to aids to counties and municipalities for certain special election costs and making an appropriation.

We understand that the costs of special primaries and special elections, for state office, can be expensive for counties and municipalities. No matter the political side of the aisle, we can all agree that the strain on local budgets is real. In years past, we've heard from a number of local officials, that the costs to administer these elections, can break local budgets.

Frankly, voters are also impacted by reduced or inadequate election information, polling locations, well publicized voting information, etc. Bottom line there are direct and indirect activities and expenses that are incurred to ensure fair and open elections.

In the last few years, we have had special elections both in the City and County of Milwaukee, to include the office of Mayor and 10th Supervisory District, respectively. Regular elections are costly, but at least you have the ability to plan for them. A resignation, unfortunate death or incapacitation of an elected official can stretch underfunded local governments. Couple those costs, with the need for special state level elections, and we place these counties and municipalities in a tailspin.

The goal of SB 278 is simple. We need to assist counties and municipalities with the costs associated with special primaries and special elections, for state office.

In the past 15 years, we have had more than 30 special elections for the Assembly at the state level. As a reminder, when a county, school district, or special purpose district holds a special election at a time other than a regularly scheduled election, all costs of the election are the responsibility of the jurisdiction calling the special election (all costs of the ballots, supplies, notices and other materials, including the cost of the polling place and election inspector(s)).

It is fitting for the Election Commission to bear those expenses for executing a special primary or special election for state office. While this legislation allows for the included costs, identified in the bill language, we know that there are other expenses that come with executing these elections. This is the least we could do and I encourage your support of SB 278.