

## Section 2: Roles and responsibilities

# Chapter 4: Influencing state and federal legislation

The Michigan Municipal League provides wide-ranging public policy advocacy services – both at the state and federal levels – for MML member cities and villages.

Since the late 1960s, the MML has maintained a full-time advocacy and lobbying presence at the State Capitol in Lansing through the League's State and Federal Affairs Division (SFAD). The SFAD staff monitors, analyzes and articulates the municipal viewpoint on many of the more than 3,000 bills that are introduced in the Michigan Senate and Michigan House of Representatives during each two-year legislative session. SFAD staff interacts directly with legislative leadership, legislative committee and sub-committee chairs, individual legislators and key staff people from both legislative chambers. They communicate the municipal point of view on a host of policy issues ranging from taxation and appropriations priorities to public safety, public works and environmental concerns.

SFAD staff also interacts regularly with executive branch staff and top-level officials in the various state departments and agencies whose decisions can have an impact on municipal operations.

### **How League policies and positions on legislation are set**

The genesis of the League's legislative policies and positions on specific bills rests with the League's three standing committees:

- Legislative and Urban Affairs,
- Finance and Taxation, and
- Transportation, Infrastructure and Environmental Affairs

These committees, each consisting of 55-60 mayors, councilmembers, managers and senior staff from cities and villages throughout the state, meet at least three times per year to review and recommend League positions on specific bills before the Legislature. The committees also conduct an annual review of and recommend amendments to the League's policy statements, which guide League staff in discussions and negotiations on legislative issues.

Recommendations on legislation and League policies are then forwarded to the League's 18-member Board of Trustees for further review and concurrence. In turn, recommended amendments to the League's policy statements are then forwarded to the League's member cities and villages for review, debate and a final vote at the League's annual business meeting.

Additionally, at the start of each two-year legislative session, the League's standing committees recommend a list of specific MML legislative priorities which are discussed and given final approval by the Board of Trustees.

### **Municipal officials' role in lobbying**

The strength of the League's advocacy program comes from its base of elected officials from the state's 533 cities and villages. Our success as a lobbying unit is directly and unmistakably related to their level of active participation in an issue.

The ultimate success of the League's aggressive lobbying effort in Lansing depends directly on the willingness of municipal officials to take the time and make the effort to get actively involved in the process. Time and again, the League's

ability to influence the outcome of legislation affecting municipalities has hinged on the efforts of Michigan's mayors, councilmembers, managers and key staff people to contact their legislators and urge support for the League's viewpoint on legislation.

To ensure that legislative information is received by municipal officials and acted on in a timely manner, the League has established a legion of legislative directors, elected officials and municipal staff people who volunteer to coordinate an individual community's response to a League call-to-action in the *Legislative Bulletin* or *Environmental Impact*.

In some instances – upon receiving a call-to-action communication from the League – a local official or legislative director will personally call his or her state senator or state representative and urge that official to vote a certain way. In other instances, the legislative director will share pertinent information on legislative activities with the mayor, village president, council and manager, and coordinate a community or region-wide response to their area's senators and representatives.

This communications network – from the League to local officials to legislators – is remarkably effective. With few exceptions, state senators and state representatives respond quickly and positively to phone calls, faxes, letters and emails from municipal officials in the home district. Where once councils would simply pass a resolution and hope that the legislator read it before voting on an issue of importance to cities and villages, now municipal officials have established a direct pipeline into their legislator's office. And it works!

The technique is especially effective when legislators are urged by their municipal officials to contact League lobbyists for additional technical information and background on a particular bill or legislative issue. When legislators call the League's Lansing office at the urging of local municipal officials, League lobbyists respond with timely and insightful

information and a clear message that echoes what municipal local officials in their district have told them.

On occasion – depending on the issue – the League encourages municipal officials to travel to Lansing and meet directly with their senator and representative. Once again, this is a situation in which League staff monitors developments, interacts with legislators and staff and then makes a determination that a direct, face-to-face contact between local officials and their legislators will be of great benefit to championing the municipal viewpoint on a bill.

Most often, these meetings with legislators and municipal officials are pre-arranged, with legislators given background materials explaining the municipal viewpoint. Frequently, however, the League will ask local officials to travel to Lansing and request a non-scheduled visit with their legislator during critical committee discussion or floor debate on an important bill.

Almost without exception, these face-to-face meetings – if conducted in an atmosphere of cordiality and respect – yield positive results and help galvanize strong future relationships.

#### **How the League and its staff works to impact the outcome of legislation**

The League's State and Federal Affairs Division staff in Lansing closely monitors the development and introduction of many of the more than 3,000 bills that are introduced each two-year legislative session in the Michigan House and Senate. This work requires daily, one-on-one interaction with legislative leaders, the chairpersons of Senate and House committees and individual legislators in both legislative chambers who are working on issues of interest to cities and villages.

League staff also nurtures professional relationships with key staff people in both the governor's office and the Legislature who play a pivotal role in the conceptualization, development, drafting, amending and final passage of the bills that

the League is following. In addition, League staff maintains extensive contact with representatives of other interest groups such as the Michigan Townships Association, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Manufacturers Association, organized labor groups and other local government associations such as the Michigan Association of Counties and the County Road Association of Michigan.

Success in the legislative arena often means building and maintaining coalitions comprised of a wide range of individuals and interest groups who share a desire to see a particular bill passed and signed into law or delayed for further consideration.

Whenever a bill that will have a significant impact on cities and villages is introduced in the House or Senate, League staff analyze the legislation, ascertain its effect on municipal operations and develop a list of influential individuals and organizations with whom the League can partner to advance the municipal viewpoint and secure the desired outcome.

Michigan is one of a handful of states with a full-time legislature. For Michigan's 38 state senators and 110 state representatives, lawmaking is a very demanding full-time job. Generally, the Legislature is in session at least three days per week (usually Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) most weeks of the year. And while the Legislature does recess for an average of a few weeks each spring, two months in the summer, and a few weeks at the end of each calendar year, the business of discussing, ascertaining the impact of, amending and building support for thousands of legislative bills continues without pause throughout the year.

That means that the work of the League's State and Federal Affairs Division also continues, without pause, throughout the year.

League staff are frequently at the table when bills are discussed and amendments are drafted. During each legislative session, the League participates in dozens of work groups, task forces, sub-committees and other activities where legislation is analyzed and final agreements are made.

League staff members also consult regularly with municipal constituent groups such as the Michigan Association of Mayors (MAM), the Michigan Local Government Management Association (MLGMA), the Michigan Association of Municipal Attorneys (MAMA) and the Michigan Chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA), among others. These organizations help SFAD staff to gauge the impact of legislation (and regulatory decisions) on cities and villages.

In the last few years, the League has also undertaken an ambitious public relations program designed to bring additional public attention to the legislative issues of its members.

A typical legislative day will find League lobbyists at the Capitol building by early morning to testify before Senate and House committees and talk with individual legislators. Depending on the legislative schedule, League lobbyists may be scattered at several House committee meetings or stationed outside the senate chamber to talk one-on-one with senators prior to and during the senate session. By early afternoon, the venue changes slightly as League lobbyists attend one of several senate committee meetings while simultaneously monitoring floor action in the house chamber. Breakfasts with coalition partners, lunches with legislative staffers and an occasional dinner meeting are all part of a routine day for League lobbyists at the Capitol.

### **Michigan Municipal League publications**

The League's State and Federal Affairs Division produces a number of publications to keep member cities and villages up-to-date on current legislative and regulatory developments in Lansing.

- **Legislative Link** – Produced by the League staff in Lansing, the *Legislative Link* is a brief one-page weekly update on the “happenings” in Lansing and Washington. This communication is sent via email and/or fax.
- **FAX Alerts/Advisories** – Produced by MML staff and distributed via the League's FAX Network, MML FAX Alerts are direct calls to action urging municipal officials throughout the state to immediately contact their state senators and state representatives and urge them to vote a certain way on pending legislation that is moving through a legislative committee or on the floor of the Michigan Senate or Michigan House.

League staff also periodically distributes, via the League's FAX Network MML FAX Advisories, information updates and communications of a less urgent nature that are of interest to municipal officials. The League is relying more and more on its fax network as a means of communication because of its timeliness.

- **Targeted FAX alert and advisories** – Occasionally, League staff prepares and distributes via FAX, special advisories, alerts and calls to action tailored to individual municipal officials. Most often, these communications are sent to municipal officials whose legislators can provide critical votes on key legislation.
- **Michigan Municipal Review Articles** – Each issue of the MML's magazine features detailed columns from State & Federal Affairs on issues of interest to members, as well as highlighting key legislators and their work in the legislature on behalf of local government

### **About the Authors...**

Michigan Municipal League State & Federal Affairs Division (SFAD)