



## **A Guide to Presenting Legislative Priorities**

### **PREPARE IN ADVANCE**

Familiarize yourself with the talking points below. Select the talking points that feel most natural and personalize your message.

**NOTE:** This document is not intended to be read or shared as-is.

Prepare local examples that relate to your key issues. It is important to share real-world scenarios and localize the impact. This is key for successful advocacy.

This is an opportunity to highlight your municipality's COVID-related successes and challenges. It's also an opportunity to remind the delegation of how immediate and diverse a city's response can be to the wants and needs of its community.

### **GENERAL TIPS FOR OPENING**

- Introduction should include your name and city position.
- Begin by expressing gratitude for the opportunity to present and/or thanking the delegation for their public service.
- Make eye contact. Be energetic. Be positive.
- Extend yourself as a partner and ally. Express an interest in coalition-building and good governance.
- When preparing your comments, be respectful of the amount of time given for your presentation. Try to be as efficient and effective as possible in the time you're given.



## **GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT THE FLORIDA LEAGUE OF CITIES**

- The Florida League of Cities is the united voice for Florida's 411 municipal governments.
- Created in 1922, the League was founded on the belief that local self-government is the keystone of American democracy.
- The League's mission is to promote local self-government, to serve the needs of Florida's municipal governments and encourage local voices to make local choices.
- Advocacy and educating the public are key components of the League's mission.
- Did you know that more than half of Floridians live in a municipality?

## **GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

- Each year, municipal officials from across the state volunteer to serve on one of the League's five legislative policy committees.
- The League's policy committees develop the League's Legislative Action Agenda, which addresses priority issues most likely to have a statewide impact on daily municipal operations and governance (the Agenda can be found on the League's website and could be handed out to attendees).
- The priorities in the League's Legislative Action Agenda are considered and approved by the full League membership.
- Policy committee members help the League understand the real-world implications of proposed legislation and are asked to serve as advocates throughout the legislative process.

## **GENERAL STATEMENTS ABOUT HOME RULE/LOCAL CONTROL/LOCAL DECISION-MAKING**

- In Florida, local self-government is not a gift of the state legislature...it is the expressed will of the people.
- The Constitution clearly declares that cities shall have power "to conduct municipal government."
- The citizens shifted authority to the cities for a good reason — because the old way didn't work.



- **Intrusion on Home Rule from the state or federal government undermines the constitutional right of citizens to govern themselves.**
- **Home Rule gives each city the flexibility to craft its laws specifically to its own unique needs.**
- **Self-determination is the ability to let local voices make local choices for their communities. Cities are citizen-driven representative democracies with citizen engagement, citizen input and citizen leadership.**
- **As the government closest to the people, a city has a unique bond with its citizens. Florida's constitution grants cities the full authority to take action to respond to the needs of their citizens, unless prohibited by law.**
- **City leaders want to partner with state and federal leaders to protect cities' ability to control their own destiny, because it puts control of communities in the hands of citizens and the local leaders they elect.**
- **Cities are committed to creating a stronger partnership with state government and working collaboratively to benefit all Floridians.**
- **Each one of Florida's 411 cities is unique. But no matter their size or demographics, all cities have the same goal: to deliver diverse, high-quality services in an efficient and responsive manner; enhance the quality of life of their citizens; and promote education, employment and economic development.**

## **2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES**

### **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: SHORT-TERM RENTALS**

**The League supports legislation that enhances the authority of local governments to regulate short-term rentals based on the wants and needs of their communities.**

**The League also supports legislation providing for a collaboration between the Florida Department of Business & professional Regulation and cities to ensure that short-term rental properties abide by state and local regulations, are properly licensed and insured and comply with state and local taxation requirements as well as industry-accepted safety practices.**



- Cities were preempted from regulating short-term vacation rentals in 2011.
- Cities with an existing ordinance at that time were "grandfathered" and allowed to keep what was already in place.
- Cities without an ordinance lost the ability to regulate the location of these properties resulting in a proliferation of short-term rentals in areas that had traditionally been long-term residential neighborhoods.
- This is a local zoning issue. Commercial activity in neighborhoods is regulated for a good reason: to protect residents and ensure the right infrastructure is there.
- Currently available solutions for cities are inadequate and will not solve the problems that many communities are facing.
- The restoration of zoning authority will allow cities to implement smart, targeted solutions to problems caused by short-term rentals and will ensure the preservation of traditional residential communities and neighborhoods.

## **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: SALES TAX FAIRNESS**

The Florida League of Cities supports legislation to update Florida's sales and use tax laws that apply to online sales from out-of-state retailers.

- Changes are needed to ensure in-state retailers are treated equitably and that the Florida sales and use tax law is equally enforced.
- Florida is one of only two states that have not fixed their sales and use tax laws to level the playing field for local businesses.
- The issue of fairness is an important one. Local businesses, which sponsor youth sports teams or sponsor local activities for communities, are forced to collect and submit sales taxes on items they sell in their communities.
- The cost of these goods then can be higher because the out-of-state or international seller is not collecting or remitting sales taxes. This gives these "foreign" businesses an unfair competitive advantage.
- Local businesses ultimately become nothing more than local showrooms for goods ultimately bought online.
- It's time we protected our local retailers. And that the dollars spent by Floridians benefit Floridians.



## **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY: AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

The Florida League of Cities supports legislation that requires ALL monies from the Sadowski State and Local Housing Trust Funds be used ONLY for Florida's affordable housing programs.

In 1992, the Florida Legislature enacted the Sadowski Act to ensure a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing. The source for this funding is the documentary stamp tax revenue collected on the transfer of real property in Florida.

Unfortunately, for almost a decade, the Sadowski Funds have been "swept" by the Legislature and used for other projects, depriving our state of building desperately needed affordable housing.

- Florida is currently in a housing crisis, and the pandemic has made this problem even bigger.
- Everyone needs housing that is affordable so they can pay for transportation, medical care, clothing, and food.
- Affordable housing is for our workforce, the disabled, the elderly and our veterans.
- There are close to a million households with "very low income" in Florida paying more than 50 percent of their income for housing.
- Fully devoting money in the Trust Fund to affordable housing will add tens of thousands of jobs and can help stabilize communities. As a result, cities will have more funds available for public safety, schools, and transportation.
- It's crucial that our legislature gives affordable housing the attention it desperately deserves by fully funding the Sadowski Trust Funds.

## **OTHER ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE: PROPERTY TAX PROTECTION**

There is a sudden push among some leading statewide advocacy groups to cut funding sources for Florida's cities. These cuts are being promoted as tax relief to citizens and businesses. However, these cuts will only hurt the same groups of people they claim to help.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Florida's cities were on the front lines in responding to the needs of their residents and businesses.



- Essential services like water, trash, sewer and more were not impacted, despite the daily threat of COVID-19 on the health of city employees.
- Cities were able to respond quickly, efficiently and were nimble enough to pivot resources to different areas as community needs changed.
- The COVID pandemic resulted in increased expenses for local governments due to a significant increase in the services we've provided.
- During the pandemic, we not only kept essential employees, first responders and front-line workers employed to ensure the critical services our residents rely on were provided, we had unexpected increases in costs resulting directly from the pandemic.
- While the state distributed some of their CARES Act funds directly to counties, there was no requirement that counties share their allocation with cities.
- In fact, only one Florida city received direct aid from the CARES Act.
- Many cities like mine have already tightened out belts and expect to do so further even as the demand for the vital services we provide to local citizens and businesses increases.
- As the 2021 Legislative Session approaches and you look for ways to provide relief to your constituents, know that cuts to local governments will only hurt the same groups of people your trying to help.
- I ask that you not provide fiscal relief on the backs of our businesses, front line workers, first responders and families by cutting our revenues.
- Instead, allow local dollars to be spent locally by those of us who know our communities best.
- If cities want to cut their own taxes, that decision should be left to the cities themselves to decide.
- We value our partnership with the state and look forward to continuing to work together to help Florida's economic recovery.

## **OTHER ISSUE OF IMPORTANCE: CYBERSECURITY**

The Florida League of Cities supports legislation dedicating state resources for the development and enhancement of municipal cybersecurity.

Local governments are routinely entrusted with gigabytes of personally identifiable, confidential, and proprietary information about the businesses and citizens who live and operate within their jurisdictions.

Recent high-profile cyber incidents in the public sector have highlighted the emerging and costly challenges that cities face in protecting this data.



The hidden impact on local government operations when a system is compromised can include longer response times for police and fire personnel, delays in service delivery to utility customers, or holdups in the permitting process for businesses. These costs are more significant than any potential ransom payment.

The loss of personally identifiable, confidential, and proprietary information about businesses and citizens have their own critical and personal cost impacts, but also contribute to the public losing trust in its government.

Local governments urgently need help from the state in three primary areas:

- Technical assistance – Outside experts should be retained to conduct threat assessments.
- Training – Local governments should increase training for employees and develop response plans in the event of a cyber breach.
- Infrastructure improvements – Cities and counties must devote resources to improving critical cyber-infrastructure.

## GENERAL CLOSING REMARKS

- Thank you again for your public service and commitment to bettering our state.
- Many of you have shared the importance of having information related to the local impact of proposed legislation. To that end, we hope you will call upon us for this data before you make decisions affecting our mutual constituents. We are here to help.
- In closing, I'd like to assure you that we look forward to working with all of you throughout the upcoming legislative session. Let's work together to enhance the quality of life in our communities.
- Florida's cities stand ready to help legislators and work cooperatively to serve the citizens of Florida.

**LOCAL VOICES MAKING LOCAL CHOICES**

