



# DUEY STROEBEL

STATE SENATOR • 20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT

## Senate Bill 527

I would like to thank you, Senator LeMahieu, for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill 527 and allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 527. This bill will make two minor changes regarding the publication of unclaimed property and securities. First, this bill will raise the minimum value of unclaimed property and securities that must be published and second, this bill will provide county treasurer's an additional method to publish these notices.

Under current law, in every odd-numbered year, a county treasurer must publish a class 3 legal notice in a newspaper containing the names and last-known address of every owner of unclaimed property or security with a minimum value of 10 dollars. A class 3 legal notice requires this information be published for three consecutive weeks.

Under SB 527, the minimum value of unclaimed property and securities will increase to 20 dollars. The county treasurer will also be able to publish a class 1 notice followed by a class 2 notice. The class 1 notice will require the full name and last-known address of each owner of unclaimed property or security to be published once. The class 2 notice will announce only that the list containing the full name and last-known address of each owner of unclaimed property or security can be found on the county's website and at the county treasurer's office. This notice will be published two weeks in a row.

Senate Amendment 1 adds the Wisconsin newspapers legal notices website as a location to find the list containing the full name and last-known address of each owner of unclaimed property. The site is an archive of public notices dating back to February of 2006.

Attached to my testimony is a spreadsheet that shows the amount it currently costs counties to publish the required information as a class 3 notice. In every instance, the option to publish one Class 1 notice followed by two Class 2 notices would save counties valuable financial resources while taking advantage of technological advancements. Under this bill, it is estimated that Wisconsin Counties can save over 67,000 dollars annually, or roughly two-thirds of their current expenses. Thank you again Senator LeMahieu and all committee members for allowing me the opportunity to testify in favor of SB 527.

Respectfully submitted,

Nick Schiltz

## 2015 Unclaimed Funds Ad amounts

COUNTY		COUNTY	
Adams	88	Monroe	1123.75
Ashland	1053	Oconto	288
Barron	900.86	Oneida	245.05
Bayfield	324	Outagamie	3897.91
Brown	4591.24	Ozaukee	525
Buffalo	200	Pepin	0
Burnett	427	Pierce	490
Calumet	324	Polk	no reply
Chippewa	450	Portage	no reply
Clark	400	Price	0
Columbia	1163.2	Racine	3968.52
Crawford*	125	Richland	380
Dane	10538	Rock	162
Dodge	0	Rusk	205.21
Door *	500	Sauk	218.82
Douglas*	248.14	Sawyer*	185.4
Dunn	325	Shawano	454.22
Eau Claire	1342.97	Sheboygan	1906.08
Florence	0	St Croix	235
Fond du Lac	1403	Taylor	376.65
Forest	534.58	Trempealeau	409.77
Grant	538.23	Vernon	157.42
Green	103	Vilas	368.65
Green Lake	355.5	Walworth	1226.09
Iowa	100	Washburn	310
Iron	0	Washington	1400
Jackson	405.48	Waukesha	7303.96
Jefferson	2891.5	Waupaca	no reply
Juneau	20.5	Waushara	408
Kenosha	3246.1	Winnebago	7400
Kewaunee	302	Wood	708
LaCrosse	1214.99		
LaFayette	100		
Langlade	125		
Lincoln	1303		
Manitowoc	529.75		
Marathon	1977.21		
Marinette	533		
Marquette	200		
Menominee	0		
Milwaukee	28600		
	<b>67483.25</b>		<b>34353.5</b>

\*=average cost

Current Cost      \$ 101,836.75      \$ 67,212.26 Est. Savings in bill for 1 pub

\*\* The Wisconsin County Treasurers Association estimated the savings by taking the costs from 2015, looking at the ads ran and looking at what the reduction in cost would be from advertising unclaimed property valued at a \$20 minimum instead of a \$10 minimum and reducing the full ad publication in a paper to one



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# KATHY BERNIER

January 21, 2016

Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government  
*Testimony on Senate Bill 527*

Good afternoon, Chairman LeMahieu and committee members. Thank you for scheduling Senate Bill 527 for this public hearing and allowing me time to present testimony in favor of the bill.

Under current law, in every odd-numbered year, a county treasurer must publish a class 3 legal notice (once a week for three consecutive weeks) in a newspaper containing the names and last-known address of every owner of unclaimed property or security with a value of \$10 or more in that county.

This bill, which has received bi-partisan support, raises the minimum value of unclaimed property or security required to be published from \$10 to \$20. Additionally, the bill allows for the option to follow current law regarding publishing a class 3 notice OR, allows the treasurer to publish a class 1 notice (which would require publishing the full name and address of each owner of unclaimed property or security once) followed by a class 2 notice (published for two consecutive weeks) announcing only that the list containing the full name and last-known address of each owner of unclaimed property with a value greater than \$20 is available on the county's website and at the county treasurer's office.

Assembly Amendment 1 to this bill simply adds the Wisconsin newspapers internet website as a place where the class 2 notice must be made available. We worked with the Newspaper Association and agree that this site, which archives all legal notices in the state is an appropriate place for these notices to be posted as well.

We as legislators are familiar with the concept of having to do more with less. This is certainly the case with county government. However, SB 527 gives us the chance to provide common sense reform and cost-savings to county government while still requiring the same level of service, and even improving the communication of services as in the notice of unclaimed property. The Wisconsin County Treasurers Association has compiled some data regarding the cost of publishing a class 3 notice vs. the cost a class 1 notice followed by a class 2 notice. Their results show a cost saving across the state to county government, if every county chose the option under this bill, of roughly \$67,000.

The Treasurer's Association and Counties Association will testify to more specific implications of this legislation, but I encourage you to support SB 527 as an opportunity to allow to County Government to maintain and improve their level of service while realizing cost savings.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and committee members for your interest in this bill and for holding this hearing. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government

**FROM:** Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Deputy Director of Government Affairs

**DATE:** January 26, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Support for Senate Bill 527

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) supports Senate Bill 527, which provides long-overdue flexibility for counties as it relates to the publication of legal notices. At a time when local governments are being asked to do more with less, this bill is a common sense proposal aimed at saving local taxpayer dollars, while maintaining the county's responsibility to keep residents informed.

Under current law, in every odd-numbered year, a county treasurer must publish a class 3 legal notice—the notice must be published in its entirety for three consecutive weeks—in a newspaper containing the names and last-known address of every owner of unclaimed property or security with a value of \$10 or more.

Counties are not requesting that this legal notice requirement be eliminated. However, due to the evolution of technology, counties believe taxpayer savings will be generated and the public will be better informed if the class 3 notice requirement is altered. SB 527 allows counties to continue publishing a class 3 notice for unclaimed funds, but also gives county treasurers the option to publish a comprehensive class 1 notice followed by a class 2 notice announcing that the list containing the full names and last-known address of each owner of unclaimed property with a value greater than \$20 is available on the county's website and at the county treasurer's office.

According to county treasurers, the cost to publish a comprehensive class 3 notice relating to unclaimed funds varies considerably from county to county. Based on a county survey, these costs range from a few hundred dollars to tens of thousands depending on the size of the county. SB 527 will generate cost savings at the local level while maintaining the county's commitment to public transparency.

WCA respectfully requests your support for Senate Bill 527. Thank you for considering our comments.



Date: January 26, 2016

To: Committee on Elections and Local Government

By: Pamela Reeves, Waukesha County Treasurer and  
Past-President of Wisconsin County Treasurers Association

Re: **SB 527 – Notice of unclaimed funds held by County Treasurer**

Thank you Chairman LeMahieu and Committee Members for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Pam Reeves. I am the Waukesha County Treasurer and I speak to you today representing both Waukesha County and the Wisconsin County Treasurers Association.

SB 527, deals with the required notice of unclaimed funds held by county treasurers. This bill has several benefits. It saves money for counties and will increase access to citizens who are searching to see whether they may have unclaimed funds to collect.

Unclaimed Funds come from various entities and County Treasurers are statutorily required, every two years, to publish a list of unclaimed funds that have been turned over to them. The list contains the Owner's Name, Amount and Last Known Address for each monies or security. Generally, unclaimed funds are most often uncashed checks.

First benefit of SB527 –

**SB527 will reduce the size of unclaimed funds publications by increasing the dollar threshold of monies and securities that must be reported from \$10 to \$20.** Currently, any monies or securities with a value of \$10 or more are reported. This bill raises that threshold to \$20. This is estimated to reduce the number of records reportable by 5-10%.

Second benefit of SB527 -

**SB527 provides an option that'll reduce publication costs. Rather than publish the entire list of unclaimed funds three consecutive weeks, there would be an option to publish the entire list once (Class 1)... followed by a notice published the next two consecutive weeks (Class 2).** The notice would direct readers to the URL for the treasurer's webpage and to the treasurer's office for a full posted list of unclaimed funds owners. This is just an option. A county would still be able to publish the entire list as a Class 3 notice and then choose whether or not to have the list available elsewhere.

Third benefit of SB527 -

**SB527 will increase public access to unclaimed funds information.** A county can choose to publish the entire list only once and then post the list on their webpage. We all know, hardcopy newspapers, whether read or unread, end up in the recycling bin never to be seen again. Whereas an Internet posting is available 24/7 to anyone who has computer access. In addition, a posted notice in the Treasurer's office would also be available year-round.

It should be mentioned too, and it's been brought forward in Amendment 1, that the Wisconsin Newspapers Association maintains an online database of legal notices from most of the newspapers around the state. Once a legal notice is published, it's searchable and accessible on their website. It takes just one publication of the full unclaimed list to have its contents be searchable on the Wisconsin Newspaper website.

How much would this save counties if SB527 is enacted? In 2015, Wisconsin County Treasurers combined spent close to \$102,000 for publication costs. Those costs would be reduced by close to two-thirds, if counties all choose to publish their full lists once and then a Class 2 notice with an internet URL and directions of where the list is posted. **The reduction in publication, combined with the \$20 raised reporting threshold, could easily equate to over \$60,000 of savings for Wisconsin counties on the years when they publish.**

Let's not forget that SB527 would make unclaimed funds records more accessible to the public. It's just a win-win for everyone. Please pass SB527.

**TO:** Senate Committee on Elections and Local Government  
**FROM:** Beth Bennett, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association  
**DATE:** January 26, 2016  
**RE:** Senate Bill 527

Good afternoon Chairman LeMahieu and committee members. My name is Beth Bennett, and I am the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. On behalf of our 221 member newspapers, I am submitting written testimony on Senate Bill 527.

We take this responsibility seriously and are committed to the broad dissemination of notices to the public. These notices include advertisements for bids, notices of land use hearings and other hearings, financial reports, meeting proceedings, new ordinances and other local, county and state governmental actions.

Printing public notices in our member newspapers provides a critical link between the citizens of Wisconsin and their government. However, we also know that many people want to access public notices online. That's why the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, and our member papers, also provides access every single public notice in the state through the [wisconsinpublicnotices.org](http://wisconsinpublicnotices.org) web site.

Through this searchable online database your constituents can access every public notice from around the state. Searches can be filtered by key words, city, county, date and publication. Not only is this a wonderful tool for businesses and citizens alike, it serves as an archive for all public notices from across the state.

The [Wisconsinpublicnotice.org](http://Wisconsinpublicnotice.org) website is updated, maintained and managed by the WNA at no additional costs to the taxpayers as part of our public notice reimbursements, which is also determined by the state in most cases.

I want to thank the co-author of the bill, Representative Bernier, for reaching out to the WNA and developing a simple amendment to SB 527 and its assembly companion, AB 694 that reaffirms the important role public notices and [Wisconsinpublicnotices.org](http://Wisconsinpublicnotices.org) play in informing Wisconsites of unclaimed property, while also providing some relief for county treasurers.

This simple amendment would ensure that citizens would also know that unclaimed property listings can also be found online at [wisconsinpublicnotices.org](http://wisconsinpublicnotices.org)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today. As you further consider SB 527 I ask that you also adopt Senate Amendment 1 to Senate Bill 527. I thank you for your time today, and consideration on this matter.