



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

RESPONSIBLE STIMULUS PLAN:

**INVEST IN PEOPLE.
IMPROVE INFRASTRUCTURE.
BOOST OUR ECONOMY.**



April 6, 2021

Assembly Committee on State Affairs

Testimony on Assembly Bills 232, 240, 241 and 243

Thank you Chair Swearingen and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bills (AB) 232, 240, 241 and 243. These bills are part of our Responsible Stimulus Plan and I appreciate the opportunity to support our efforts on behalf of the people of Wisconsin.

The Responsible Stimulus Plan reflects the legislature's priorities to invest in people, improve infrastructure and boost our economy as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a thoughtful, thorough plan to work with the Governor to dedicate massive Federal investments from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) into the things that matter most to the people we serve.

Both houses of the legislature have spent considerable time and effort to develop a real plan after listening and understanding the needs of our people, communities and industries. This plan provides relief and investment to all communities, of all sizes, statewide. Our plan puts money back into the hands of the people.

AB 232 provides relief to families statewide by returning 10% of their 2020 property taxes to them. This legislation will directly and immediately help our citizens who are working hard to recover and rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic.

AB 240 will fulfill the one-time funding for the actual building of the statewide interoperable communications system and the updates needed on existing systems. This public safety system is critical for our state and the unexpected federal aid Wisconsin is receiving through ARPA is the perfect opportunity to upgrade our critical emergency response and public safety infrastructure. The bill directs \$53.2M to upgrade WISCOM and ESInet infrastructure as well as GIS mapping to improve the accuracy of the systems and improve response times. The bill also directs a grant to northwest Wisconsin to expand mental health bed capacity and improve local law enforcement responses to mental health crises, which is a critical need in northern Wisconsin.

AB 241 directs the Governor to dedicate \$500 million of ARPA funding to repay debt or pay for necessary capital building projects. Many Americans have paid off debt with the stimulus funds from our Federal government. Wisconsin should follow their example.

AB 243 makes many strong investments in our water infrastructure and environmental protections. This bill solves the lead lateral problem once-and-for-all by committing \$40 million to replacing lead service lines on private properties. It also allocates \$18.5 million for nonpoint source programs, \$2 million for well compensation grants and another \$500,000 for well testing and public education. These are all strong priorities for Wisconsin's water and natural resources.

Again, please accept this testimony in support of legislation that will support the people of our state who are working to recover and move forward after the last unprecedented year in our history. I believe these bills will make a real difference.

I apologize that I was not able to attend in person due to a meeting of the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC). However, I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of these bills.



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 55TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

*Testimony before the Assembly Committee on State Affairs
Representative Rachael Cabral-Guevara
April, 6th, 2021*

Hello, Chairman Swearingen and members of the Committee. Thank you for your time in allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 232, an important bill that will provide assistance to households in the form of tax relief to property owners across Wisconsin.

COVID-19 has impacted every corner of this state, with hundreds of businesses in my district alone receiving PPP loans, many people claiming unemployment for the first time in their lives, and others struggling to pay rent or their mortgage. People are not looking for a handout, they are looking for a leg up. One of the simplest things government can do is provide relief to hardworking Wisconsinites.

Additionally, these ARPA funds are much better used in the hands of the people of Wisconsin and not in the hands of government. This bill uses one billion dollars from the state recovery funds in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to provide the equivalent of a 10% return of net property taxes levied on all real property in the state. The Department of Revenue (DOR) would use 2020(21) levies and work with counties and municipalities to send the payments to taxpayers. State ARPA funds totaling \$20 million would be set aside for DOR and local governments to administer the program. Delinquent property taxpayers could have their payments intercepted. DOR would have 60 days after the effective date of the bill to send payments to local governments and local governments would have 20 days after that to send payments to taxpayers.

Thank you again for your time. I am hopeful you are able to support this important bill helping people across the state who have been struggling financially due to COVID-19.



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April 6, 2021

TO: Assembly on State Affairs
Representative Swearingen, Chair

FR: Susan Quam, Executive Vice President

RE: Written Testimony on AB 232

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Assembly Committee on State Affairs for reading our testimony. Unfortunately we are not able to attend the hearing today.

The Wisconsin Restaurant Association represents over 7,000 restaurant locations statewide. Our organization represents all segments of the restaurant and hospitality industry; our membership includes food establishments of all types and sizes, such as seasonal drive-ins, supper clubs, diners, locally owned franchisees, fine-dining and hotels/resorts. Over 75 percent of our membership are independent restaurants. Regardless of ownership type, all restaurants are the cornerstones of their neighborhoods and communities. Restaurants not only provide great food, drink and hospitality, they support schools, teams, charities and churches with fundraising and donations. They provide meeting places to celebrate, mourn and organize, or just provide a safe, tasty meal for a busy family.

I am sure you all know the toll the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on the entire hospitality and tourism industry. The vast majority of restaurants have seen steep declines in their sales, price increases in supplies and services and in some places, severe restrictions on their ability to be open and safely serve customers. There is a light at the end of the tunnel and restaurateurs are now hopeful for a busy tourism season. No matter how busy our members get this summer, it will still not make up for the losses incurred in 2020.

Our members have testified before you many times this year and you have heard their stories about how dire the economics of our industry are. Our staff team has taken many calls from restaurant owners **who tell us they cannot pay their property taxes**. Many of them have to choose between paying their food and alcohol bills or paying their huge property tax bills. Other restaurant owners are in better shape and have been able to pay their property taxes, but it is a struggle for them to stay out of the red.

AB 232 is a good start in helping business owners who are struggling. These relief payments will help pay the other bills they have and build back their businesses and prepare for the "new normal."

The WRA hopes as the legislature continues to look at ways to help struggling businesses recover, it also looks at ways to help those who were forced to close their businesses or have been impacted so severely they cannot pay their property taxes. These businesses are not failing because they made poor business decisions. They are failing because of a pandemic that forcibly took away their customers.

Thank you for your consideration.



Property Taxpayers United
for Fairness and Reform
Since 1985

TO: Assembly Committee on State Affairs
FROM: John Jacobson, Government & Member Relations, WPT
Date: April 6, 2021
RE: Assembly Bill 232

Good afternoon, Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chairman Vorpagel, and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of Assembly Bill 232. Thank you, as well, to Representative Cabral-Guevara for authoring this proposal.

Wisconsin's property taxes rank among the highest in the nation, with WalletHub's 2021 report listing the Badger State's as the sixth highest in the United States. Additionally, Wisconsin also ranks seventh nationally for its increasing dependence on property taxes to pay for local services. In a normal year, this tax is already one of the largest out-of-pocket costs to families and small businesses across the state. In a pandemic year, that expense has only been exacerbated.

The state has already recognized the importance of providing assistance to keep struggling individuals in their homes. Unfortunately, that recognition and assistance has only been afforded to keeping renters in their homes. Struggling property and home owners have been categorically left out of Wisconsin's COVID relief efforts until the introduction of this legislation. We believe the time is past due to help those who carry the burden of paying the largest tax in the state to fund our local governments and services.

Providing the relief outlined in this legislation through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds will not only spur local economic activity and provide an opportunity for individuals to bring their outstanding mortgages or property tax balances current, but it will ensure minimal impacts on local government finances, as those entities are also receiving unprecedented sums of federal relief funds.

The time is past due to help those who fund our local governments and services by shouldering the largest tax burden in Wisconsin. We applaud this legislation and urge the members of this committee to recommend passage.

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Wisconsin Property Taxpayers is a nonpartisan membership organization consisting of thousands of small business, farm, and property owners in every corner of the state. Founded in 1985, the organization is committed to providing its members with up-to-date information, legislative advocacy, and exclusive cost-saving

Testimony before the Committee on State Affairs
Nathan Gustafson, Fox Crossing, WI resident

Good afternoon Chairman Swearingen and members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of Assembly Bill 232.

This bill is one of the most effective ways we can spend dollars from the American Rescue Plan. Returning money to property tax payers that the government had taken from them is some of the best relief they can get.

As a resident of Fox Crossing, I can attest to the need for property tax relief. Not only have home assessments driven the cost of living up, but we also recently have had referendums which, in the end, will come back to the taxpayer to foot the bill. With all of this happening in the middle of a pandemic, it only compounds the need for this money to go to hardworking taxpayers.

Another thing to consider is that this bill will not only have a positive impact on residential property tax payers; it will assist our local businesses as well. I know many people in the Neenah area who have been struggling to keep their businesses afloat, several of whom took out PPP loans and whatever other assistance they qualified for. However, despite the additional assistance, they are still staring at their tax bills and wondering how they can possibly afford to pay them.

By utilizing one billion from ARPA for the purpose of property tax relief, I know individuals, families, and businesses will be far better equipped to more rapidly recover from the economic downturn caused by COVID-19 and lockdowns across the state and country.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 232. As a Wisconsin resident, I can confidently say this bill would give people across the state a sigh of relief.