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Wednesday, April 15, 2020

To the Honorable President of the United States,
Donald J. Trump

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the 604 cities and villages throughout Wisconsin, we thank you for your leadership during this time of global pandemic. The mayors, managers and village presidents who are leading at the local level have a deep appreciation of the unexpected challenges you face each day. As they encounter expanding threats to the health and wellbeing of their citizens, they are also looking with concern at their capacity to sustain police, fire, EMS and other essential government services. And they turn to you for help. We ask that you work with Congress on legislation to provide additional relief with the ability to fill local budget gaps created by Covid-19-related revenue losses.

Through the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act and the Cares Act, you and the Congress have provided our citizens with critical economic support. The local governments who have responsibility for providing services to those citizens at the "street level" now ask for your support. As the economy contracts, revenues to local governments are rapidly-diminishing. At the same time, there has been no reduction in citizens' need for support from their cities. Public utility systems cannot stop functioning, even though property tax payments, government and utility fees and sales tax revenues are curtailed. Fire stations must remain manned and squad cars fully staffed even though the local revenues to support those first responders are dropping.

The pandemic is driving increased costs to provide public services. First responders must be supplied with personal protective equipment. Elections and other essential government services must be reinvented with an eye toward social distancing, requiring added costs for facilities and equipment. Infrastructure maintenance and new construction costs are higher due to the constraints of social distancing. These costs are in addition to local budgets already strained by revenue loss.

The type and amount of revenue loss varies significantly across different local government types in Wisconsin. In our largest city, Milwaukee, the city will face a critical cash flow challenge as property taxes go unpaid and other revenues (parking fees, room taxes, et al) plummet. In our rural, tourism-driven communities, reliance on tourist revenues through county sales taxes and resort taxes is in peril as these revenue streams have become nearly non-existent. All but 4 of Wisconsin's 72 counties rely on sales tax revenues, which are off dramatically. We are also deeply concerned about the state of Wisconsin's finances, which depend upon income and sales tax revenues.

Wisconsin is grateful for your leadership, and we thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jerry Deschane", is written over a light blue, stylized graphic of a city skyline.

Jerry Deschane
Executive Director