*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**A closer look at local government spending in Wisconsin**

As a pandemic and economic turmoil underscore the value of critical local government services, Wisconsin ranks 15th among the states in local government spending, but 3.6% below the per capita national average.

That’s according to a new report from the Wisconsin Policy Forum: “Dollar for Dollar: Where Does Wisconsin Rank in Local Government Spending?” This report, which looks at state and local spending in Wisconsin and nationally through 2017, was commissioned by the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Wisconsin Realtors Association, and the Greater Milwaukee Committee.

It’s important to note that Wisconsin leans more heavily than most states on its local governments to provide some key services. As such, these rankings reflect the duties and responsibilities that local governments in Wisconsin and other states are assigned, not merely how efficient they are. Local governments in Wisconsin tend to rank higher in spending on certain key services such as police, libraries, and health and public welfare, while the state does not rank as highly.

For example, while Wisconsin’s local governments rank 12th highest in the country for spending on police, state-level spending is dead last, and the state ranks 23rd when the two are combined.

Another factor to consider is that Wisconsin has more local governments than most states. This is due in part to how the state was settled in the 19th century, but also reflects a more recent increase in the number of special districts statewide. Some spending may also be dictated by factors such as climate, geography, and population that are outside the control of elected officials.

“Wisconsin has a long and proud history of local services and local control,” the report says. “In charting a path forward, policymakers should not necessarily feel bound by that tradition any more than they should be indifferent to it. Yet understanding Wisconsin’s unique approach may help them both to preserve and improve on it.”

*This information is provided to Wisconsin Newspaper Association members as a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education. Learn more at wispolicyforum.org.*