

## CHAPTER 59

## COUNTIES

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## SUBCHAPTER I

## DEFINITIONS

**59.001 Definitions.** In this chapter, unless the context clearly indicates to the contrary:

(1) “Board” means the county board of supervisors.

(2) “Clerk” means the county clerk.

(2m) “Members-elect” means those members of the governing body of a county, city, village or town, at a particular time, who have been duly elected or appointed for a current regular or unexpired term and whose service has not terminated by death, resignation or removal from office.

(2r) “Municipal clerk” means the clerk of a municipality.

(3) “Municipality” means any city, village or town.

(3m) “Municipal treasurer” means the treasurer of a municipality.

(3r) “Professional land surveyor” means a professional land surveyor licensed under ch. 443.

(4) “Treasurer” means the county treasurer.

**History:** 1989 a. 260, 268; 1995 a. 201; 2013 a. 358.

of the board, within the limitations prescribed by law, if any, at the annual meeting in November prior to the commencement of the term of office of the particular officer. Both the bond and the sufficiency of the sureties thereto shall be approved by a committee consisting of the chairperson and not less than 2 other members of the board who shall report in writing their action on all bonds.

(3) Each bond described in sub. (1) shall be guaranteed by the number of personal sureties prescribed by law, or if not prescribed, by the number fixed by the board within the limitations, if any, prescribed by law, or by a surety company as provided by s. 632.17 (2). In the case of the clerk, treasurer and county abstractor the board may by resolution require them to furnish bonds guaranteed by surety companies and direct that the premiums be paid as provided in s. 19.01 (8).

(4) If it considers the bond of any officer insufficient, the board may by resolution require the officer to furnish additional bond in a sum to be named in the resolution, not exceeding \$10,000 for the register of deeds of any county with a population of less than 150,000, and not exceeding the maximum sum, if any, fixed by law for additional bonds for other officers.

**History:** 1975 c. 152, 199; 1975 c. 375 s. 44; 1983 a. 192 s. 303 (1); 1989 a. 31; 1991 a. 316; 1995 a. 201 s. 250; Stats. 1995 s. 59.21; 1995 a. 225 ss. 137 to 144; 1997 a. 35; 2003 a. 204; 2011 a. 62, 96.

**Cross-reference:** See s. 59.38 (3) for provision for a bond by the medical examiner.

**59.22 Compensation, fees, salaries and traveling expenses of officials and employees. (1) ELECTIVE OFFICIALS.** (a) 1. The board shall, before the earliest time for filing nomination papers for any elective office to be voted on in the county, other than supervisors and circuit judges, which officer is paid in whole or part from the county treasury, establish the total annual compensation for services to be paid to the officer exclusive of reimbursements for expenses out-of-pocket provided for in sub. (3). Except as provided in subd. 2., the annual compensation may be established by resolution or ordinance, on a basis of straight salary, fees, or part salary and part fees, and if the compensation established is a salary, or part salary and part fees, it shall be in lieu of all fees, including per diem and other forms of compensation for services rendered, except those specifically reserved to the officer in the resolution or ordinance. The compensation established shall not be increased nor diminished during the officer's term and shall remain for ensuing terms unless changed by the board. Court fees shall not be used for compensation for county officers.

2. The board shall establish the annual compensation of the sheriff as straight salary. No portion of that salary may include or be based on retention of fees by the sheriff. No portion of that salary may be based on providing food to prisoners under s. 302.37 (1). This subdivision does not prohibit the reimbursement of a sheriff for actual and necessary expenses.

(b) Any officer authorized or required to collect fees appertaining to his or her office shall keep a complete record of all fees received in the form prescribed by the board and shall file a record of the total annual receipts in the clerk's office within 20 days of the close of the calendar year or at such other times as the board requires. Any officer on a salary basis or part fees and part salary shall collect all fees authorized by law appertaining to his or her office and shall remit all fees not specifically reserved to the officer by enumeration in the compensation established by the board under par. (a) to the treasurer at the end of each month unless a shorter period for remittance is otherwise provided.

(2) APPOINTIVE OFFICIALS; DEPUTY OFFICERS; AND EMPLOYEES. (a) Except for elective offices included under sub. (1), supervisors and circuit judges, and subject to s. 59.794 (3), the board has the powers set forth in this subsection, sub. (3) and s. 59.03 (1) as to any office, department, board, commission, committee, position or employee in county service created under any statute, the salary or compensation for which is paid in whole or in part by the county, and the jurisdiction and duties of which lie within the county or any portion thereof and the powers conferred by this

section shall be in addition to all other grants of power and shall be limited only by express language.

(c) 1. Except as provided in subd. 2. and par. (d), the board may do any of the following:

a. Provide, fix or change the salary or compensation of any office, board, commission, committee, position, employee or deputies to elective officers that is subject to sub. (1) without regard to the tenure of the incumbent.

b. Establish the number of employees in any department or office including deputies to elective officers.

c. Establish regulations of employment for any person paid from the county treasury.

2. No action of the board may be contrary to or in derogation of the rules of the department of children and families under s. 49.78 (4) to (7) relating to employees administering old-age assistance, aid to families with dependent children, aid to the blind, or aid to totally and permanently disabled persons or ss. 63.01 to 63.17.

(d) The board or any board, commission, committee or agency to which the board or statutes has delegated the authority to manage and control any institution or department of the county government may contract for the services of employees, setting up the hours, wages, duties and terms of employment for periods not to exceed 2 years.

(e) The board may provide and appropriate money for an employee awards program to encourage and to reward unusual and meritorious suggestions and accomplishments by county employees.

(3) REIMBURSEMENT FOR EXPENSE. The board may provide for reimbursement to any elective officer, deputy officer, appointive officer or employee for any out-of-pocket expense incurred in the discharge of that person's duty in addition to that person's salary or compensation, including without limitation because of enumeration, traveling expenses, tuition costs incurred in attending courses of instruction clearly related to that person's employment, and the board may establish standard allowances for mileage, room and meals, the purposes for which allowances may be made, and determine the reasonableness and necessity for such reimbursements, and also establish in advance a fair rate of compensation to be paid to the sheriff for the board and care of prisoners in the county jail at county expense. Any reimbursement paid under this subsection to an officer or employee of a county with a population of 750,000 or more is subject to the budget limitation described in s. 59.60 (7e).

(3a) COMMISSION ON AGING. The board may provide for the payment of expenses and a per diem to persons appointed to a county commission on aging under s. 59.53 (11).

(4) INTERPRETATION. In the event of conflict between this section and any other statute, this section to the extent of the conflict shall prevail.

**History:** 1973 c. 118; 1977 c. 372; 1981 c. 317; 1987 a. 181; 1989 a. 48, 107; 1991 a. 316; 1995 a. 27 ss. 3287, 9126 (19); 1995 a. 201 ss. 257 to 260; Stats. 1995 s. 59.22; 1995 a. 225 s. 146; 1997 a. 35; 1999 a. 83; 2003 a. 33; 2007 a. 20; 2013 a. 14.

Sub. (1) (a) 1.'s prohibition of increasing or diminishing certain elected county officials' compensation during their terms of office does not preclude adjustments to fringe benefits. The statute expressly protects only salaries and fees. *Cramer v. Eau Claire County*, 2013 WI App 67, 348 Wis. 2d 154, 833 N.W.2d 172, 12–1796.

The sheriff does not have unilateral statutory authority under s. 59.26 (2) to determine the total number of deputies to be appointed. This section plainly provides that a county board may establish the number of employees in any department or office including deputies to elective officers, and this section prevails over s. 59.26 (2). Thus, the county board, and not the sheriff, has the authority to regulate the number of law enforcement officers employed by the county. *Milwaukee Deputy Sheriffs' Association v. Milwaukee County*, 2016 WI App 56, 370 Wis. 2d 644, 883 N.W.2d 154, 15–1577.

The only reasonable interpretation of the phrase "created under any statute" under sub. (2) (a) is that the phrase modifies the string of nouns that comes before the word "employee," namely, "office, department, board, commission, committee, and position." What must be "created under any statute" are the various kinds of offices and positions, not employees. *Lipscomb v. Abele*, 2018 WI App 58, 384 Wis. 2d 1, 918 N.W.2d 434, 17–1023.

The verbs "provide, fix, or change" under sub. (2) (c) 1. a. establish a broad power for county boards to determine compensation levels for all unclassified county positions. However, under sub. (2) (a), the power is controlled by the power of the Milwaukee County Executive under s. 59.794 (3) to exercise day-to-day control of any county department or subunit of a department. In other words, the Milwaukee County

Board of Supervisors can provide, fix, or change the pay of unclassified employees, unless and until board action interferes with the Milwaukee County Executive's day-to-day control of a county department or subunit. *Lipscomb v. Abele*, 2018 WI App 58, 384 Wis. 2d 1, 918 N.W.2d 434, 17–1023.

The Milwaukee County Executive's day-to-day control power under s. 59.794 (3) (a) has the express intent of removing and clarifying some authority of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors (Board) under sub. (2) and increasing and clarifying the authority of the Milwaukee County Executive. The Milwaukee County Executive's day-to-day control power prevents the Board from taking actions that effectively direct what duties may or must be accomplished by employees or officers or how they may or must perform those duties, even when a Board action may result in a compensation change. *Lipscomb v. Abele*, 2018 WI App 58, 384 Wis. 2d 1, 918 N.W.2d 434, 17–1023.

A county ordinance implementing a collective bargaining agreement providing for the payment to county employees, upon their leaving government employment, compensation for accumulated sick leave, earned both before and after the effective date of the ordinance, is valid. 59 Atty. Gen. 209.

A county board may not adopt a step-salary plan for elective offices related to experience of the officeholder as compensation is for the office, not the officer, and the officer is entitled to the compensation as an incident of the office. 61 Atty. Gen. 165, 403.

When it is the duty of a county traffic officer to testify or assist in the prosecution of county traffic offenses, the officer is not entitled to witness fees but may be paid additional compensation if a court appearance takes place outside regular working hours. 62 Atty. Gen. 93.

A county board may not deny a salary to an elected official during a period of sickness. A board does not have power to establish sick leave and vacation benefits for elected county officials. 65 Atty. Gen. 62.

The authority to establish salaries for the staff employed by a county's 51.42/51.437 board lies with that board, subject to the general budgetary control of the county board. 65 Atty. Gen. 105.

Discretionary authority to grant increases to elected county officials based upon performance or length of service may not be delegated to a committee of the county board because the board itself lacks the authority to establish such a compensation scheme. 80 Atty. Gen. 258.

**59.23 Clerk. (1) DEPUTIES; SALARIES; VACANCIES.** (a) Every clerk shall appoint in writing one or more deputies and file the appointment in the clerk's office. The deputy or deputies shall aid in the performance of the duties of the clerk under the clerk's direction, and in case of the absence or disability of the clerk or of a vacancy in the clerk's office, unless another is appointed therefor as provided in par. (c), shall perform all of the duties of the clerk during the absence or until the vacancy is filled. The board may, at its annual meeting or at any special meeting, provide a salary for the deputy or deputies.

(b) In each county the clerk may also appoint the number of assistants that the board authorizes and prescribes, and the assistants shall receive salaries that the board provides and fixes.

(c) If a clerk is incapable of discharging the duties of office the board shall appoint an acting clerk within 90 days after the board adopts a resolution finding that the clerk is incapable of discharging the duties of the office. The acting clerk shall serve until the disability is removed. If the board is not in session at the time of the incapacity, the chairperson of the board may appoint an acting clerk, whose term shall not extend beyond the next regular or special meeting of the board. A person appointed as acting clerk or appointed to fill a vacancy in the office of clerk, upon giving an official bond with sureties as required of a clerk, shall perform all of the duties of the office; and thereupon the powers and duties of the deputy of the last clerk shall cease.

**(2) DUTIES.** The clerk shall:

(a) *Board proceedings.* Act as clerk of the board at all of the board's regular, special, limited term, and standing committee meetings; under the direction of the county board chairperson or committee chairperson, create the agenda for board meetings; keep and record true minutes of all the proceedings of the board in a format chosen by the clerk, including all committee meetings, either personally or through the clerk's appointee; file in the clerk's office copies of agendas and minutes of board meetings and committee meetings; make regular entries of the board's resolutions and decisions upon all questions; record the vote of each supervisor on any question submitted to the board, if required by any member present; publish ordinances as provided in s. 59.14 (1); and perform all duties prescribed by law or required by the board in connection with its meetings and transactions.

(b) *Recording of proceedings.* Record at length every resolution adopted, order passed and ordinance enacted by the board.

(c) *Orders for payment.* Sign all orders for the payment of money directed by the board to be issued, and keep a true and correct account of such orders, and of the name of the person to whom each order is issued; but he or she shall not sign or issue any county order except upon a recorded vote or resolution of the board authorizing the same; and shall not sign or issue any such order for the payment of the services of any clerk of court, district attorney or sheriff until the person claiming the order files an affidavit stating that he or she has paid into the county treasury all moneys due the county and personally collected or received in an official capacity; and shall not sign or issue any order for the payment of money for any purpose in excess of the funds appropriated for such purpose unless first authorized by a resolution adopted by the county board under s. 65.90 (5).

(cm) *Apportionment of taxes.* Apportion taxes and carry out other responsibilities as specified in s. 70.63 (1).

(d) *Accounts.* File and preserve in the clerk's office all accounts acted upon by the board, and endorse its action thereon, designating specifically upon every account the amount allowed, if any, and the particular items or charges for which allowed, and such as were disallowed, if any.

(de) *Property.* To the extent authorized by the board, exercise the authority under s. 59.52 (6).

(dg) *Dogs.* Perform the responsibilities relating to dog licensing, which are assigned to the clerk under ch. 174, and the dog fund specified in ch. 174.

(di) *Marriage licenses, domestic partnerships.* Administer the program for issuing marriage licenses as provided in ch. 765 and the program for forming and terminating domestic partnerships as provided in ch. 770.

(e) *Reports of receipts and disbursements.* Record the reports of the treasurer of the receipts and disbursements of the county.

(f) *Recording receipts and disbursements.* Keep a true and accurate account of all money which comes into the clerk's hands by virtue of the clerk's office, specifying the date of every receipt or payment, the person from or to whom the receipt or payment was received or paid, and the purpose of each particular receipt or disbursement, and keep the book at all times open to the inspection of the county board or any member of the board.

(g) *Payments to treasurer.* Keep in the manner prescribed in par. (f) a separate account of all moneys paid the treasurer by the clerk.

(h) *Books of account.* Keep all of the accounts of the county and all books of account in a manner that the board directs. Books of account shall be maintained on a calendar year basis, which shall be the fiscal year in every county.

(i) *Chief election officer, election duties.* As the chief election officer of the county, perform all duties that are imposed on the clerk in relation to the preparation and distribution of ballots and the canvass and return of votes at general, judicial, and special elections.

(L) *Duplicate receipts.* Make out and deliver to the treasurer duplicate receipts of all money received by the clerk as clerk, and countersign and file in the clerk's office the duplicate receipts delivered to the clerk by the treasurer of money received by the treasurer.

(m) *Certified copies; oaths and bonds; signatures.* 1. Make and deliver to any person, for a fee that is set by the board under s. 19.35 (3), a certified copy or transcript of any book, record, account, file or paper in his or her office or any certificate which by law is declared to be evidence.

2. Except as otherwise provided, receive and file the official oaths and bonds of all county officers and upon request shall certify under the clerk's signature and seal the official capacity and authority of any county officer so filing and charge the statutory fee. Upon the commencement of each term every clerk shall file the clerk's signature and the impression of the clerk's official seal in the office of the secretary of state.