



LAKECOUNTY

FY2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



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About Lake County



POPULATION

- Population: 718,604 (2024)
- Third largest county in Illinois

Source: census.gov



HOUSING

- Housing units (2024): 271,862
- Homeownership rate (2024): 74.7%
- Households (2024): 261,032
- Median value of owner-occupied housing units (2018-2022): \$313,700

Source: census.gov



HEALTH AND RECREATION

- 31,000+ acres of land managed by Lake County Forest Preserve District, the second largest district in Illinois*
- 550+ miles of trails and bikeway connections**
- 170 lakes and rivers***
- 400 miles of streams***
- 89 distinct locations, such as homes, historic districts, and landmarks, in the National Register of Historic Places***

Sources: *Lake County Forest Preserve District ** Lake County Partners

*** Lake Co., IL Convention & Visitors Bureau

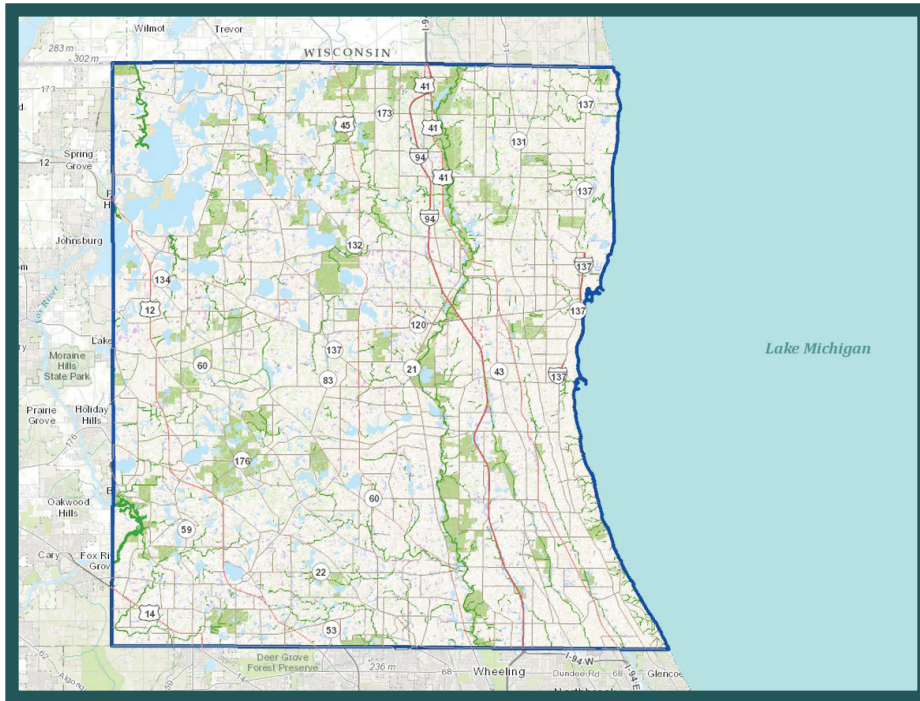


ECONOMICS

- Median household income (2024): \$107,758***
- Per capita income (2018-2022): \$53,677***
- Unemployment (not seasonally adjusted)*:
 - Lake County: 5.0%
 - Illinois: 5.5%
 - U.S.: 4.4%
- 30,000+ businesses (includes public and private businesses)**
- 90.8% of residents age 25+ have graduated high school, and 46.9% have a bachelor's degree or higher (2018-2022)***

Sources: *Illinois Department of Employment Security **Lakecountypartners.com

*** www.census.gov



Land Area: 444 square miles

Halfway between Chicago and Milwaukee

Easy access to Chicago on four Metra commuter rail lines and 32 train stations

Major waterways—Lake Michigan, Chain O'Lakes

INTRODUCTION

Lake County government strives toward fiscally stable, efficient, and transparent operations amidst uncertain political and economic climates. Maintaining strong partnerships with legislators ensures that Lake County residents continue to receive valuable, efficient, and cost-effective services.

As always, the Lake County Board appreciates the opportunity to meet with our legislators to discuss challenges we face as a County. To best address such challenges, Lake County must govern free from the restrictions of various statutes and public acts which slow down the process to ensure a high quality of life for its residents.

Lake County government is cognizant of the current financial environment at all government levels and has prepared the FY2026 Legislative Agenda in that context. As such, this year's Legislative Agenda includes both comprehensive, aspirational items with potential regional or statewide effects as well as specific technical changes that make Lake County government – and in some cases all local governments – more efficient.

The guiding tenets of Lake County's Legislative Agenda are to:

1. Support legislation that grants additional permissive authorities for counties.
2. Support legislation that allows counties to expand non-property tax revenue sources.
3. Support legislation that promotes transparency at all levels of government.
4. Support legislation that encourages cost-effective government consolidation.
5. Support legislation that mitigates inefficiency.
6. Oppose unfunded mandates imposed by the state or federal government.
7. Oppose legislation that would reduce the existing authority of county government.
8. Oppose legislation that erodes existing state-appropriated County revenues.
9. Oppose legislation that weakens the County's ability to consolidate local governmental units and circumvents an existing appeals process.

Specifically, with respect to legislative policy numbers six and eight, Lake County vehemently opposes any action that will divert, redirect, or reduce any funds owed and/or due to units of local government (e.g., sales tax, income tax, and Personal Property Replacement Tax).

Additionally, Lake County's Legislative Agenda is guided by the following values adopted within the County Board's Strategic Plan:

- i. Dedication
- ii. Equity
- iii. Excellence
- iv. Innovation
- v. Leadership
- vi. Responsibility
- vii. Sustainability

Lake County, Illinois

FY2026 Legislative Agenda

PURPOSE

The intent of Lake County's Fiscal Year 2026 Legislative Agenda is to formalize the County's positions on legislation both anticipated and sought to be considered. Our elected officials may use the Agenda as a guide when considering legislation that would impact Lake County.

This Agenda describes the County's proposed initiatives and/or underlying interest in specific issues. With coordination between the Lake County Board, the County Administrator's Office, the County's legislative consultants, and the Lake County legislative delegation, the agenda explains County initiatives and informs County positions taken on specific bills once the legislative session begins. During session, the County Board, through the legislative committee, may also consider amendments to the Legislative Agenda and adjust its position on bills.

In addition to the Legislative Agenda, Lake County attempts to influence policy through other avenues, such as submitting comments on administrative rulemakings and making direct appeals to administrative officials. While the Legislative Agenda is not intended to direct such action, it serves as a resource to inform important County efforts.

THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA AS A "NIMBLE TOOL"

Members of the Lake County Board agree that the issues described within this Legislative Agenda represent their collective endorsements. The Lake County Board recognizes that many other unforeseen issues will become known throughout the legislative year. While it is important to have approval from the Lake County Board for additional endorsements before any position becomes official, it is also important for the Legislative Agenda to be a "nimble tool" that appropriately supports an ever-changing landscape during the legislative process. As such, the manner in which the Legislative Agenda may be used to adjust and/or react to the fast-paced legislative process is outlined below.

PROCESS TO AMEND LAKE COUNTY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The County Board may revisit the Legislative Agenda at any point as a body, or through its Legislative Committee. The Legislative Committee may be convened on an as-needed basis with the County's legislative consultants and County staff when the following circumstances present themselves:

Legislative action is expected that would significantly impact a County policy and/or operation, which the County Board has previously provided general direction, but which the County Board had not provided specific direction. (This might occur via the Legislative Agenda or other approved policies.) As such, time-constraints may preclude the County Board from having an opportunity to provide the needed direction. In these situations, the County Board Chair, the County's legislative consultant, and County staff may turn to the Legislative Committee for direction on such legislation so that the County can advocate accordingly. The County Board will be informed whenever such Legislative Committee direction has been provided and may choose to revisit such direction at a future County Board meeting via a request to the County Administrator.

Amendments to the Legislative Agenda should be adopted with the goal, such that modifications require consistency, when applicable, with the criteria outlined below:

- A. Uniformity with the County Board's Strategic Plan;
- B. Expected relevance in the upcoming or present legislative sessions;
- C. Uniqueness of issue or impact to Lake County;
- D. Viability or likelihood of achieving a goal;
- E. Opportunity for providing or preserving funding for Lake County; and
- F. High probability of metrics of success to allow the position to be removed from future legislative agendas, if achieved.

These criteria, which provide important guidance and direction, are not intended to prohibit departures in unique circumstances as determined by the County Board and/or Legislative Committee, such as when adoption of a County position is important to support its regional partners, even when the legislation is otherwise of limited consequence to the County.

In addition, to accommodate any requests that may arise after approval of the Legislative Agenda, the County Board Chair and County Administrator, or their designee, may periodically provide legislative testimony and/or letters of support or opposition based upon any perceived benefit or detriment to Lake County. In doing so, such testimony and/or letters will be guided by the principles and values stated herein.

Lake County, Illinois

FY2026 Legislative Agenda

To summarize, the process for requesting an amendment to the County's adopted Legislative Agenda is provided below:

Amend the formal Legislative Agenda: The approved County Legislative Agenda may be amended at any point through the Legislative Committee and County Board based on consistency with articulated criteria.

County Position on Specific Legislative Bill(s): The County may take a position on a specific bill through action by Legislative Committee based on significant impact to County policy or operation; County Board is to be informed on such direction, and County Board may revisit thereafter via a request to the County Administrator.

How does a member of the Board or standing committee seek a County position on specific legislative bills?

1. attend the Legislative Committee and request that it take a position on a bill; or
2. ask the standing committee, for which the bill's subject is pertinent, to request, on behalf of the Committee, that the Legislative Committee take a position on a bill.

Submission of a witness slip on the County's behalf regarding a specific legislative bill

The County Board Chair, County Administrator, or their designee, County legislative consultant may submit a witness slip on the County's behalf on specific legislation when the County's Legislative Agenda is clear about what the County's position is or following specific action by the County Board or Legislative Committee on a specific bill. Nothing herein prohibits an individual member of the Lake County Board to submit a witness slip on a specific bill in their individual personal capacity.

APPLICABILITY

The Legislative Committee and County Board will only take positions on matters directly related to County business.

POSITIONS

1. **Sponsor:** Lake County sponsored initiatives.
2. **Support:** Seek to support partner organizations in their sponsorship of the initiative. These proposals are broad based with impacts that extend beyond Lake County. It is most appropriate for a coalition or statewide organization to lead these initiatives, and Lake County will support their efforts as well as the proposals.
3. **Oppose:** Seek to oppose legislation or initiatives that impact Lake County. These proposals are broad based with impacts that extend beyond Lake County. It is most appropriate for a coalition, state or federal organization to lead these initiatives, and Lake County will support their opposition efforts.

Topic: Freedom of Information Act

Issue: The Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”) requires public bodies to respond to each request from members of the public within five business days. Requesters can submit an endless number of requests per day, week, or year under the law with very few limitations. As FOIA requires the public body to weigh public interest against the burden of requests, it is possible for FOIA requesters to inundate public bodies, especially using AI, with FOIA requests that, individually, do not meet the burdensome threshold but collectively severely hinder regular business and services provided by the public body.

Recommendation: Sponsor an amendment to 5 ILCS 140, Freedom of Information Act, to address vexatious requesters who send numerous, broad, and repetitive requests, and requests written by “bots.” Proposed legislation will add definitions for a “Vexatious Requester” and a “Bot Request”; language that a public body may deem a request as unduly burdensome if it is a bot request that is one of multiple requests from the requester to the public body within a 24-hour period; language that a public body may submit a request for review to the Public Access Counselor (PAC) for relief from a requester that the public body alleges is a vexatious requester and outlines the process for the public body, the requester, and the PAC; language that any individual deemed a vexatious requester must identify themselves as such when submitting FOIA requests; and language that if the PAC finds the public body to have submitted a frivolous request for relief from a requester, the PAC may order the public body to respond to the FOIA request and fines may be assessed.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Excellence
- Responsibility

Topic: Property Tax Appeal Board Hearing Locations

Issue: Lake County received notification in 2023 from the Property Tax Appeal Board (PTAB) that all commercial and industrial appeals for hearings will be set for in-person in Springfield, Illinois. Lake County has requested fewer than ten live hearings over the last three years. It is a significant financial burden on intervenors and Lake County staff to attend hearings scheduled at PTAB’s Springfield offices. Based upon the evidence submitted by all parties the county works to resolve every value dispute. PTAB’s insistence on hearing these types of cases in person, and in there Springfield office, leads to weighing value reductions against cost incurred to defend.

Recommendation: Support legislation that requires the Property Tax Appeal Board (PTAB) to conduct Commercial and Industrial Hearings in the county where the property is located if such hearing is requested in person or to offer online hearings options for all parties to appear and participate remotely.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Excellence

Topic: Illinois Homes Tax Credit Act

Issue: The limited financial resources dedicated to housing are heavily reliant on federal sources. The level of federal support is trending down, while the needs around housing are rising. The proposal aims to address the lack of affordable housing in Lake County with the creation of the Build Illinois Homes Tax Credit Act. If enacted, the legislation would create a state financing mechanism to address the housing needs of Illinois residents. The creation of a state tax credit would unlock financing enabling the creation of additional affordable rental housing units.

Recommendation: Support the creation of the Build Illinois Homes Tax Credit Act. Provides that owners of qualified low-income housing developments are eligible for credits against the taxes imposed by the Illinois Income Tax Act or taxes, penalties, fees, charges, and payments imposed by the Illinois Insurance Code.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Equity

Topic: Local Health Protection Grant (LHPG) Funding

Issue: There is a need for an increase in state funding for local health departments by \$10 million (for a total of \$31.1 million), restoring and enhancing the Local Health Protection Grant. The grant supports essential state-mandated public health services such as food safety inspections, communicable disease control, and environmental health programs. The funding ensures a foundational level of capability across all local health departments in Illinois and supports the ability to respond to disease threats across the state. This need is urgent following a \$5 million cut in FY2025 (\$115,000 cut to the Lake County Health Department), especially as local public health departments confront resurging threats like measles, syphilis (including congenital cases), pertussis, RSV, Mpox, and foodborne illnesses such as Salmonella and Listeria. This increase would both restore the cut funds and put additional funding towards mandatory services.

Recommendation: Support legislation to increase current state appropriations under the Local Health Protection Grant Program, authorized by the Department of Public Health Powers and Duties Law of the Civil Administrative Code of Illinois (20 ILCS 2310). It would restore and increase statewide funding from \$21.1 million to \$31.1 million annually for local health departments.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Equity

Topic: Decriminalizing Homelessness

Issue: Lake County is at a critical juncture in addressing the growing crisis of homelessness. As the number of individuals and families living unsheltered continues to rise, our response must be rooted in compassion, data, and best practices - not criminalization. Unhoused residents in many communities across the state are experiencing significant wait times for emergency shelter.

Criminalizing behaviors associated with homelessness - such as loitering or camping - does not solve the underlying crisis. It burdens local law enforcement and the judicial system, increases costs to taxpayers, and further destabilizes already vulnerable individuals. Studies show that punitive approaches prolong homelessness and exacerbate mental health and substance use challenges.

Decriminalization is not about excusing unlawful behavior - it is about recognizing that homelessness is not a crime, but a crisis of housing, health, and equity. A public health approach, not a punitive one, is essential.

Recommendation: Support an amendment to the Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act that prohibits the State or a unit of local government from creating or enforcing policies or ordinances imposing fines or criminal penalties against people experiencing unsheltered homelessness for occupying or engaging in life-sustaining activities on public property. The amendment also provides exceptions to maintain access to property or address risks to public health and safety and creates a necessity defense for charges alleging violation of laws criminalizing life-sustaining activities while the individual was experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Support for this amendment will decriminalize behaviors such as loitering, sleeping in public, or other behaviors directly tied to homelessness.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Equity
- Excellence

Topic: Waukegan Coal Plant Environmental Remediation

Issue: The Waukegan coal power plant, located along Waukegan's Lake Michigan lakefront, was decommissioned in the summer of 2022. Coal ash is a toxic byproduct of coal combustion that has plagued the Midwest for decades. Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio are among the states with the most coal ash dump sites in the United States. Due to the coal industry's dependence on waterways for operation, coal ash dump sites are often found along lakes and rivers. This proximity has led to groundwater and surface water contamination, devastating harm to fish and wildlife, and dangerous human health impacts.

The Waukegan coal power plant owner's current plan is to leave and cap a coal ash pond which currently resides on the property. The long-term existence of the pond creates risk to the surrounding area, residents, and the waters of Lake Michigan.

To ensure appropriate protection of the environment, the coal ash pond on the site should be completely removed at a minimum. Additional efforts should be employed to further minimize or eliminate short and long term environmental impacts.

Recommendation: Support legislation that mandates the complete removal of the coal ash ponds of the former coal plant. Support Waukegan's legislative efforts that focus on additional environmental remediation of the former coal plant site.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Excellence

Topic: Solid Waste Agency of Lake County's (SWALCO) Legislative Program

Background: In alignment with the Strategic Plan's Sustainable Environment priority, Lake County is supportive of SWALCO's initiatives that focus on reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainability.

1. Household Chemical Waste, Extended Producer Responsibility
 - a. The "Household Hazardous Waste Stewardship Act" proposes transferring collection costs of hazardous products to their producers after consulting with stakeholders and IEPA, and a filing date in January 2025.
2. Food Scrap Diversion
 - a. The bill would require food scrap generators within 20 miles of a facility to divert food scraps from landfills beginning in 2027 for large generators and phasing in more generators over the next 6 years.
3. Compost Market Development
 - a. The proposal aims to develop new markets for compost in Illinois by focusing on large-scale uses like farmland and stormwater management, leveraging federal grants for climate change to support the initiative.
4. Extend the Consumer Electronics Recycling Act (CERA)
 - a. CERA sunsets on December 31, 2026 and as a result SWALCO will be working with the Illinois Product Stewardship Council to draft a bill to remove the sunset provision and possibly make other changes to the law.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Sustainability

Topic: State Task Force Recommendations

Issue: The proposal aims to address the statewide lack of affordable housing through legislative recommendations of the Ad-Hoc Missing Middle Housing Solutions Advisory Committee, promoting strategies to increase the supply of affordable housing statewide.

Multiple recommendations are made in the Report of the Ad-Hoc Missing Middle Housing Solutions Advisory Committee that could result in legislation promoting strategies to increase the supply of affordable housing statewide. Outcomes include increased production of affordable housing statewide.

Recommendation: Monitor for any bills filed as a result of the Report's publication and – after evaluating relevant details - take positions on each.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Equity

Topic: Impacts of Federal Policy Changes HR1 and PRWORA Reinterpretations

Issue: Changes under the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBA/HR1) and the reinterpretation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) risk excluding or disenrolling vulnerable residents from health insurance, Medicaid, and essential care and services. Policy changes would disproportionately affect immigrants and low-income residents, leading to health inequities and increasing the burden on the Lake County Health Department (LCHD/CHC) without corresponding flexible funding or Medicaid reimbursement for those who will lose coverage. With these federal legislative changes, many more Lake County residents will need health services from LCHD/CHC, which given their current lack of providers, they will not be able to accommodate. Thus, many residents won't get care which leads to them seeking higher intensity, and costly, care services at the emergency departments. Chronic health conditions will become worse, which will lead to greater overcrowding of emergency departments and hospitals which will impact ALL Lake County residents.

Recommendation: **Monitor** and report back on any bills related to the negative impacts of OBBA/HR1. **Monitor and support** legislation and sustainable and flexible state funding that mitigates the harmful impacts of proposed changes in OBBA/HR1 and reinterpretations of PRWORA (Public Law 104–193). These federal changes will reduce program eligibility and funding across multiple safety-net services, impacting county operations (health department, and potentially other departments) and the health of Lake County residents.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Equity

Topic: E-Vehicle Fire Standards

Issue: Currently, there are minimal State or Federal Standards as it relates to extinguishing fires that occur on or in an Electric Vehicle. Current methods employed by fire fighters result in excessive use of water, the use of creative methods, and potential environmental impact from water runoff.

Recommendation: Work with our Federal Legislators and support the creation of standards using industry experts.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Sustainability

Topic: Railway Safety for Local Communities

Issue: Recognizing the importance of public safety and environmental health in counties across the country where rail lines are located, the Federal Railroad Administration must address key concerns around blocked crossings, freight train lengths and the routing of hazardous materials through local communities.

The railroad industry plays a critical role in the transportation of goods across the nation. However, certain practices and conditions associated with train operations raise concerns regarding environmental impact, public safety, and community well-being. Idling freight trains contribute to air pollution and adversely affect the air quality in nearby communities. The routing of hazardous materials throughout the country creates significant risks to public safety and the environment. Additionally, the operation of long freight trains can divide communities, impede emergency response times, and increase the risk of derailments, posing threats to both residents and infrastructure.

Additionally, the placement of grade separations increases the capacity and safety of our roadways. Capacity is increased by allowing constant flow in all directions, and roadway safety is improved by reducing vehicle-vehicle and vehicle-pedestrian conflicts. As crossing traffic is removed from the intersection, the chance of collisions is lowered.

Recommendation: Lake County urges Congress and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), in collaboration with local and other relevant stakeholders, to take immediate action to address delays that result in idling freight trains, which have harmful environmental impacts in our local communities, and create blocked at-grade crossings, which adversely impact public safety and harm economic development. This should include funding for counties or recommendations on the strategic placement of grade separations, and mandating reasonable lengths of freight trains as determined by comprehensive federal studies and assessments that identify risks associated with long freight trains, including public safety impacts and any increased risks of derailment.

To enhance public safety and minimize the risks associated with the transportation of hazardous materials, Lake County urges the FRA to undertake a study to determine safer, innovative methods of routing these materials through the country. Current practices have shown to be detrimental to our communities based on recent events. The study should incorporate: (1) a full assessment of railways in relation to critical infrastructure and explosive materials including fueling stations and gas lines, (2) an assessment of community communication with an emphasis on first responders, (3) a review of safety standards for rail cars, (4) should consider the use of advanced technology and risk assessment tools to determine the safest and most efficient routing options for hazardous materials, and (5) a current assessment of track conditions.

Lake County will support federal bills that increase the safety of our railways.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership
- Responsibility
- Sustainability

Topic: Affordable High-Speed Internet

Issue: In Lake County, IL, access to affordable high-speed internet is a critical issue that impacts education, employment, healthcare, and overall quality of life. Despite advancements in technology, many residents—particularly in underserved areas—lack access to quality, affordable internet, hindering their ability to participate fully in a digital society. Before the freeze of the Affordable Connectivity Program on February 8, 2024, approximately 19,133 households in Lake County were enrolled in the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), highlighting the program's importance in providing financial assistance to families in need. However, it is estimated that approximately 19,400 households (8%) still did not have a broadband subscription of any kind, including through a cell phone's data plan. Affordability remains a significant barrier to broadband access and device ownership, driving digital inequity among low-income families. Without access to high-speed internet (defined as >100/20 Mbps), many households may be unable to perform essential activities such as remote work, online learning, telehealth, and accessing other key social services.

Recommendation: **Support** the reauthorization of the Affordable Connectivity Program, or a similar federal initiative, which will provide financial assistance to eligible residents, ensuring they can access high-speed internet at home at an affordable price.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership

Topic: Increase to the federal weight limit on heavy trucks

Issue: Legislation has been proposed that would raise the federal weight limit of heavy trucks, and establish a “pilot program” for states to test truck weights that exceed the current limit of 80,000 pounds. The increased weight limit is a concern for the county highway system as the heavier trucks will place more stress and strain on the roadway pavement and bridges, which could result in shorter lifespans. Also, there are safety concerns to consider with heavier vehicles traveling on the roadway system and the potential negative outcomes for other vehicles when crashes/collisions occur.

Recommendation: Lake County **Opposes** legislation that would increase the weight limits on heavy trucks.

Guiding Tenet(s) of the Legislative Agenda: Oppose unfunded mandates imposed by the State or Federal Government.

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership

Topic: Firearm Regulation

Issue: Lake County recognizes that changes are necessary in State or Federal regulation as it relates to firearm safety and control due to the prevalence of gun violence in our Nation.

Recommendation: Lake County **Supports** legislation that:

1. Bans the sale or possession of assault rifles
2. Mandates firearm safe storage
3. Reforms the FOID Card process
4. Mandates training related to the sale or possession of firearms
5. Provides funding for gun violence prevention initiatives

Value(s) of the County Board Strategic Plan

- Leadership

Topics of Importance

The following topical areas are of high importance to Lake County Government, and are the primary areas of focus for our Legislative Team. When bills are filed or acted on at the State or Federal level related to these areas, an update will be provided at the next available Legislative Committee for discussion and position as necessary.

- Local Government Distributive Fund
- Reduction or Elimination of Sales Tax Surcharge
- Extended Producer Responsibility–Related
 - a. Carpet Stewardship
 - b. Single Use Plastics
- Toxic Pavement Sealants
- Lead Pipe Abatement
- Lake County-Impacted Voter Referendums
- Federal Health Benefits in our Jail System
- State and Local Tax Deduction
- Ethylene Oxide (EtO) Regulations
- Bird-Friendly Building Design
- Metra Funding-Related
- Route 53 Greenway
- Residential PACE Financing
- Green Amendment

Notes

DRAFT

Lined area for notes on page 30.

Lined area for notes on page 31.

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Lake County, Illinois