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Informational Memorandum 97-1

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EXTENDED TERMS FOR LEGISLATORS AND COUNTY OFFICERS

In recent years, every session of the Wisconsin Legislature has included constitutional amendment proposals to extend the terms of various legislative or county officials, but the history of such attempts dates back to the early years of the century.

At least as early as 1911, amendment resolutions were introduced in the legislature to extend assembly terms from two to four years. Some would have staggered the election of the assembly members; some included provisions to increase senate terms from four to six years. County officers have sought to have their terms extended from two to four years since the 1920s. Both groups were most optimistic after the Wisconsin Constitution was amended in 1967 to create four-year terms for the statewide offices of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer and attorney general, effective 1971.

Because the terms of state legislators and elected county officers are prescribed in the Wisconsin Constitution, any change requires a constitutional amendment. Article VI, Section 4, of the Wisconsin Constitution specifically includes the county offices of sheriff, coroner, district attorney and register of deeds in the two-year limit, but any elective county office created by the legislature, such as county surveyor, would be covered by the limit.

The major argument for extended terms has been the contention that shorter terms require too much time and money for campaigning and they hinder the official in fulfilling the policy and administrative duties of the office. An alternative argument is that these offices ought not be elective at all but should be filled by appointment. To a limited extent, the Wisconsin voters recognized this when they ratified a constitutional amendment in 1965 abolishing the county coroner's office in favor of an appointed medical examiner for counties over 500,000 population (Milwaukee County). A 1972 amendment made the change to a medical examiner system an option in all other counties, but proposals to make elective county offices appointive have not been as common in recent years.

Those opposed to longer terms of office have argued that the election of officials at shorter intervals makes them more responsive to the people, which some consider especially important with regard to sheriffs.

The attached chart shows the history of constitutional amendment proposals from the 1971 legislative session through the 1995 session. The amendment process requires that the constitutional change must be passed in the form of a joint resolution by two successive legislatures and ratified by the electorate in a statewide election. The constitutional rewording contained in the two joint resolutions must be identical. A total of 17 senate joint resolutions and 29 assembly joint resolutions have been introduced, but only 1995 AJR 37 and SJR 30 have passed both houses on first consideration. The majority of these proposals have dealt with county officers (20) or sheriffs specifically (18). Ten related to the assembly or to both the senate and assembly.

**Legislative Resolutions Relating to Increased Terms
For State and County Elected Officials, 1971-1995**

Session	Resolution	Primary Author	Office Effected	Disposition
1995	SJR-21	Carol A. Buettner	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-23	Alan J. Lasee	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-27	Carol A. Buettner	County Officers, Sheriff	Passed Senate, 27-5; died in Assembly
	SJR-30	Joanne B. Huelsman	District Attorney	Passed Senate, 28-2; concurred in by Assembly 72-26
	AJR-37	Peggy Krusick	Sheriff	Passed Assembly 68-26; concurred in by Senate 30-3
	AJR-38	Peggy Krusick	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
1993	SJR-15	Carol A. Buettner	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-16	Carol A. Buettner	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-23	Alan J. Lasee	Sheriff	Passed Senate, 28-5; died in Assembly
	AJR-17	Margaret Krusick	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-18	Margaret Krusick	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-54	Dean R. Kaufert	Senate, Assembly	Died in Assembly
1991	SJR-20	Alan J. Lasee	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-29	Carol A. Buettner	County Officers, Sheriff	Passed Senate, 27-6; died in Assembly
	AJR-30	Margaret Krusick	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-32	Margaret Krusick	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-42	E. James Ladwig	Senate, Assembly	Died in Assembly
	AJR-74	Cletus J. Vanderperren	Senate, Assembly	Died in Assembly
1989	SJR-13	William P. Te Winkle	County Officers, Sheriff	Passed Senate, 28-5; ASA1 Passed Assembly, 90-7; Senate failed to concur in ASA1
	SJR-15	Alan J. Lasee	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	AJR-9	Margaret Krusick	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-33	Margaret Krusick	Sheriff	Passed Assembly, 72-26; died in Senate
	AJR-35	E. James Ladwig	Senate, Assembly	Died in Assembly
	AJR-50	Robert M. Thompson	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
1987	AJR-13	Margaret Krusick	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-14	Robert M. Thompson	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
1985	SJR-12	Michael G. Ellis	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	AJR-15	James C. Holperin	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-19	Robert M. Thompson	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-56	Margaret Krusick	Milwaukee County Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-59	Margaret Krusick	Sheriff	Passed Assembly, 74-22; died in Senate

Session	Resolution	Primary Author	Office Effected	Disposition
1983	SJR-22	Daniel O. Theno	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Senate
	SJR-29	Michael G. Ellis	Sheriff	Died in Senate
	AJR-15	Robert M. Thompson	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-101	Margaret Krusick	Milwaukee County Sheriff	Died in Assembly
1981	SJR-7	William A. Bablitch	Sheriff	Passed Senate, 21-11; died in Assembly
	SJR-24	Fred A. Risser	County Officers	Passed Senate, 19-12; died in Assembly
	AJR-18	Lloyd H. Kincaid	Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-68	Marlin Schneider	Assembly, County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-75	Joseph J. Czarnecki	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
	AJR-80	Joseph J. Czarnecki	Senate, Assembly	Died in Assembly
1979	SJR-39	William A. Bablitch	Sheriff	Passed Senate, 28-3; died in Assembly
1977	AJR-40	Thomas S. Hanson	County Officers, Sheriff	Rejected by Assembly, 90-9
1975	AJR-3	Thomas S. Hanson	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Assembly
1973	SJR-21	Walter G. Hollander	County Officers, Sheriff	Passed Senate, 22-7; died in Assembly
	SJR-49	Gerald D. Lorge	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Senate
	AJR-72	David G. Berger	Assembly	Died in Assembly
	AJR-97	David G. Berger	Assembly, Sheriff, County Officers	Died in Assembly
	AJR-119	David G. Berger	Assembly, Sheriff, County Officers	Died in Assembly
1971	SJR-66	Everett V. Bidwell	Sheriff	Passed Senate, 23-6; died in Assembly
	SJR-114	Ernest C. Keppler	County Officers, Sheriff	Died in Senate
	AJR-64	Vernon R. Boeckmann	Assembly, Sheriff, County Officers	Died in Assembly