

1. Introduction to Town & County Resolution Rules and Approaches

The State laws identify the rules for many aspects on municipal operations. One of the sections of the law identifies the requirements for handling citizen petitions. The requirements for resolutions in Towns and Counties are summarized here. Passing resolutions in cities and villages is discussed in the separate *City and Village Resolution Handbook*.

Town and County Resolution Rules – The WI state statues do not require towns and counties to respond to citizen petitions. This is one reason United to Amend partners typically do not collect signatures to ask for a referendum on the ballot – it holds no force. A second reason for not collecting signatures is that it is often more difficult to go door-to-door to collect signatures on a ballot initiative request – because of the distance between houses. So, for towns, and later the county, we build relationships and attend board meetings to request the board to either put **our** referendum on the ballot (our preference) or pass **our** resolution in the name of the citizens under their jurisdiction. And we ask them to “please” use **our** language in either case. There are many towns where a referendum has been put on the ballot because we asked the board to do so. And all have passed with good to great margins. We prefer the board put a referendum on the ballot and then pass the resolution. This allows us to educate the public – as part of building the movement. Also, a resolution passed with support of a citizen vote holds more clout in the mind of some legislators.

Counties Last – Also, our strategy is to get at least five to ten local municipalities (towns, villages, cities) in a county before approaching the County Board to put our referendum on the ballot. This again is part of the long-term citizen education and movement building. It has occurred more than once where we approached a local municipality (after their *county* passed our resolution) to pass **our** resolution – and the municipality suggested that it was not useful for them to pass a resolution because their County has already done so – the sell is harder. And in more than one case, a probable champion for a referendum has back away when s/he learned that the county had already passed our resolution – lost opportunity to educate and build power.

The approach to getting a County resolution is pretty much the same as for a Town. We try to identify in these documents the situations where going for a County Resolution may be different from a Town.

Because town and county boards do not have to respond to any citizen petition, we need to ensure we approach the board members with respect and consideration. Building relationships is very useful – not only for the current referendum we are seeking – but also for long-term support of local lawmakers later in the movement when we will be petitioning our state and federal legislators to help us pass our effective amendment.

In general, we prefer to have a resident of the town be the champion for the referendum – or at least the visible person seeking it. Also, we believe the ease of getting the resolution – with appropriate, desired language – is proportional to the number of residents attending the town or county board meetings. We often can help you find “Supporters” who live in the community and who might be willing to at least attend a couple of meetings.

The specific process for getting town and county resolutions passed is described in subsequent documents.