

USE YOUR LOCAL VOICE

Messaging Memo



**LOCAL
VOICES
MAKING
LOCAL
CHOICES**

INTRODUCTION

The Florida League of Cities is proud to represent the Sunshine State's 411 cities in the support and defense of Home Rule. As the advocacy and Home Rule conversation has evolved, the League has modernized and evolved with it. The League recently launched its **"Building Stronger Cities: Organizing, Empowering, Delivering"** campaign that highlights the importance of local decision-making and getting residents engaged in the issues important to their community. This campaign comes at a time when Florida's cities are embracing innovation, protecting local authority and providing a better quality of life for their residents.

As you prepare for session and speak with both legislators and your community, the Florida League of Cities is providing you with tools and resources to ensure your messaging is effective and impactful.

Our communities are not without challenges, but they are at their best when policies reflect the values of those who live and work there. Through coordinated communication, we can defend local authority, enable stronger, more productive partnerships with our state government officials and ultimately, build stronger cities.

In this Memo:

- ▶ **Polling Takeaways.**
- ▶ **Armoring Your Message.**
- ▶ **Call To Action.**



POLLING TAKEAWAYS

The Florida League of Cities recently conducted statewide polling to better communicate the importance of local decision-making. Here are some of the most favorable messages we learned from this polling:

- ▶ Florida voters amended our constitution to give specific powers to cities. When Tallahassee politicians take away those powers, they're ignoring our constitution, ignoring the voters and undermining traditional American principles.
- ▶ It is important that we have "checks and balances" between state and local governments in Florida.
- ▶ Generally, the government closest to the people governs best.
- ▶ Tallahassee politicians shouldn't tell us how to spend our own local tax dollars.

ARMORING YOUR MESSAGE

Voters are naturally receptive to messaging based on Home Rule, unless it conflicts with a strongly held value or personal preference. Fortunately, recent research reveals how city leaders can armor the Home Rule message in four ways:

STEP 1: STAND WITH THE VOTERS

While invoking Florida's constitution in defense of Home Rule may not be uniquely persuasive, reminding voters how Home Rule was added to the constitution in the first place (namely, that voters placed it there) can bolster support considerably.

Messaging to consider:

- ▶ When Tallahassee politicians ignore Home Rule, they're not just ignoring the constitution; they're ignoring the will of the voters.
- ▶ Too often, the voters pass something and the politicians ignore it – just like they're doing with Home Rule.

STEP 2: PRESERVE THE BALANCE OF POWER

When it comes to the balance of power between the state and local governments, voters are generally content with the status quo. They also strongly agree that it is important to preserve a good "balance of power."

Messaging to consider:

- ▶ Local governments are preserving commonsense "lanes" of authority, while Tallahassee politicians are overstepping.
- ▶ Local governments are defending a time-tested system of "checks and balances."
- ▶ The state's aggressive new legislative policy represents a violation of the status quo.

STEP 3: DRAW A LOGICAL DISTINCTION

Voters are inclined to "keep you in your lane," and that applies equally to state government. People don't want the state meddling in minor local issues and are inherently skeptical of overreach. We can make the most of that skepticism by explaining how Tallahassee's sledgehammer solutions disrupt the normal operations of Florida's hundreds of communities.

Messaging to consider:

- ▶ The state shouldn't meddle in local issues like parking ordinances, tree trimming or home-based businesses.
- ▶ The state has no business regulating short-term rentals.
- ▶ State lawmakers shouldn't make local zoning decisions.

STEP 4: A BIGGER CLUB

If you have a bigger club, use it. There will be times when you will need to invoke another value important to voters beyond Home Rule. For example, many voters are concerned about safety. Also, many voters care about impacts to their own private property and neighborhoods.

Messaging to consider:

- ▶ When it comes to short-term rentals, the majority of public safety issues arise from out-of-town unrestricted commercial activity in residential neighborhoods. Local governments must consider EVERYONE'S property rights and the peaceable enjoyment of their homes.
- ▶ Without commonsense rules, one or two "bad apples" can drag down property values for the whole neighborhood or make an area unsafe.

Use these types of voter values to strengthen the case for Home Rule.

CALL TO ACTION

USE YOUR LOCAL VOICE

This document should provide a solid foundation on how to properly communicate the Home Rule message to different groups. But it's important that city leaders incorporate other facts and locally based examples of the impact of state preemptions: stories of businesses and residents adversely impacted. By communicating the problem and connecting with residents and state legislators, city leaders can use their positions to combat state interference and affirm local control.

Municipal leaders, with the support of business owners and constituents, can help ensure the will of the voters is followed and that local voices are making local choices.

Use these tools throughout session to help **build stronger cities**:

- ▶ Visit flcities.com and buildingstrongercities.com to find issue-specific talking points, bill summaries and more.
- ▶ Respond to the League's Legislative Alerts.
- ▶ Set up a virtual meeting with a legislator.
- ▶ Submit an op-ed to your local newspaper.
- ▶ Boost your social media engagement by tagging the League in your posts and tweets.
- ▶ Make plans to attend FLC's 2021 Virtual Legislative Action Days (March 15-19).

#LocalVoices

For more information about how you can get more involved with the Florida League of Cities' legislative action plan, please contact Mary Edenfield at medenfield@flcities.com or 850.222.9684.

**LOCAL
VOICES
MAKING
LOCAL
CHOICES**