



January 23, 2026

Via Email Delivery

The Honorable Jonathan Martin
Florida Senate
315 Senate Office Building
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Re: **SB 1444 Preemption to the State**
1/27/2026 agenda, Senate Community Affairs

Dear Senator Martin:

On behalf of the Florida League of Cities and the municipalities we represent, I respectfully write to share municipal concerns regarding SB 1444. Cities recognize the intent to reduce regulatory burdens where appropriate. However, several of the bill's broad preemption provisions, as currently drafted, raise significant concerns about public safety, neighborhood quality of life, and local enforcement authority. We are committed to working with you and stakeholders to refine the bill in a way that protects core local responsibilities while advancing its objectives.

Preemption of Local Regulation of Religious Services and Gatherings

SB 1444 broadly prohibits local regulations of religious services and gatherings and requires such activities to be allowed in residential and commercial zones. While cities fully support the free exercise of religion and the accommodation of bona fide religious services, the bill does not define what constitutes a "religious service" or "religious gathering," creating ambiguity that could be exploited and may undermine local enforcement of generally applicable public-safety measures. Without clear guardrails, individuals could claim a wide array of large, late-night gatherings such as house parties or social events as "religious" to evade noise, crowding, or safety ordinances, unintentionally shielding non-religious activities from reasonable local oversight.

Preemption Affecting Private Clubs

SB 1444's preemption related to private clubs raises serious concerns for municipalities, particularly where facilities designated as "private clubs" operate within or adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Cities have experienced situations in which uses marketed as private clubs expand operations well beyond what was contemplated in their zoning approvals—offering restaurants, event venues, tournaments, reciprocal memberships, and nonresident access—resulting in increased traffic, parking demand, noise, and late-night activity that directly impacts surrounding residents. Local governments already face significant challenges addressing these impacts due to ambiguous definitions and fact-intensive enforcement determinations, and the bill's broad preemption would further limit a city's ability to respond when a club's operations functionally resemble commercial or entertainment uses.

Cities are also concerned that this provision could apply to fraternities or similar organizations located in residential neighborhoods near college campuses, where a private-club designation could be used to shield high-occupancy events and recurring parties from reasonable zoning and nuisance regulations. Compounding these concerns, SB 1444 creates a



private cause of action for alleged violations and waives sovereign immunity, exposing cities to litigation and monetary liability for attempting to regulate or enforce standards against private clubs, even where neighborhood impacts are substantial and ongoing.

Preemption of Local Permitting

SB 1444's permitting preemptions raise significant concerns related to local building oversight, floodplain management, and compliance with state and federal requirements. Cities play a critical role in ensuring that repairs and construction comply with the Florida Building Code and local floodplain regulations, including standards tied to participation in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). Broad preemptions that limit local permitting and inspection authority risk undermining these safeguards and could place communities at risk of noncompliance.

In addition, SB 1444 prohibits local enforcement agencies from requiring a building permit for work valued at less than \$7,500 on a single-family residential parcel, while allowing permits for electrical, plumbing, structural work, and improperly divided larger projects. In practice, this threshold may be difficult to enforce and susceptible to circumvention, as local governments would be responsible for identifying when multiple related repairs—often performed incrementally or by different contractors—constitute a single, larger undertaking. Without clear aggregation or tracking standards, the exemption could limit a city's ability to ensure appropriate inspections and address cumulative unpermitted work that materially alters a structure.

Parking Impacts and Home-Based Businesses

SB 1444's expansion of the preemption related to home-based businesses raises significant neighborhood compatibility concerns. While cities support reasonable home-based economic activity, the bill would limit local authority by allowing the parking of commercial trucks and vehicles on residential properties of two acres or more and the storage of heavy machinery and trailers on properties exceeding five acres, regardless of surrounding residential context. In many neighborhoods, the presence of commercial vehicles or heavy equipment, and trailers can alter neighborhood character, create noise and safety concerns, and negatively affect adjacent property values, leaving cities with limited ability to address site-specific impacts or protect residential investment.

Conclusion

SB 1444 raises important questions about the appropriate balance between state preemption and local authority. Cities share the goal of reducing unnecessary regulation but remain concerned that several provisions, as currently drafted, may unintentionally limit municipal ability to protect public safety, manage neighborhood impacts, and respond to abuse of broadly defined exemptions.

The Florida League of Cities looks forward to continuing to work with you and other stakeholders to refine the bill through clearer definitions, practical safeguards, and reasonable limits on preemption that preserve necessary local enforcement tools.

Thank you for your attention and leadership. Please feel free to reach out if we can be helpful as discussions continue.

Sincerely,



David Cruz
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Florida League of Cities, Inc.