



## FOCUS TEAM: MUNICIPALITIES

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Ruder Ware attorneys routinely provide counsel to city, county, town, village, and other municipal officials throughout Wisconsin. We work in partnership with elected officials and in-house municipal attorneys to provide legal advice on issues affecting their day-to-day operations, including compliance with Wisconsin's Open Meetings Law, Public Records Law, and all aspects of municipal law.

In our capacity as legal counsel for numerous municipalities, school districts and Vocational Technical Adult Education (VTAE) Districts, we understand how local governing bodies work and are personally familiar with the policies and procedures that must be followed by them. Through this experience, we have become very familiar with the roles and duties of governing bodies. Our full-service firm provides sound, cost-efficient legal advice in the following areas:

- **Municipal/Governmental Law.** We serve as general counsel for various municipalities and render legal advice regarding general municipal matters.
- **Open Meetings Law.** Compliance with the Open Meetings Law is essential for all local government bodies. We work with officials on compliance with the basic principles of the Wisconsin Open Meetings Law and provide guidance on compliance with the law. In addition, we counsel our clients on the requirements and valid reasons for meeting in closed session.
- **Public Records Law.** Local news media have aggressively used this law to seek records from local governments. We regularly work with officials on compliance with the Wisconsin Public Records Law, including the obligations of each local official under the law.
- **Conflict of Interest/Ethics Code.** The conduct of elected officials is subject to tremendous scrutiny today. We work with elected officials to address the Conflict of Interest Law, the Code of Ethics for Local Officials, the limitations placed on local officials by the laws, and situations that could result in a violation of the law.
- **Municipal Litigation.** We represent municipal clients on all matters involving municipal litigation, including zoning disputes, administrative law matters, environmental law matters, and other general municipal matters.
- **Municipal Finance.** We represent counties, municipalities, public facilities boards and other issuers of tax-exempt and taxable debt often acting as bond counsel, underwriter's counsel, issuer's counsel or trustee's counsel in municipal finance transactions. We've counseled local governments on state and local general obligation bond issues, revenue bond issues for municipal utilities and industrial development revenue bond issues in addition to special assessment and improvement districts for the development of roads, streets, water, and sewer. Ruder Ware is recognized by underwriters and has been listed in "The Bond Buyer's Municipal Marketplace" for over a decade.

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- **Real Estate.** We provide counsel in all aspects of real estate transactions, including purchases, sales, and preparation of lease agreements. We represent public employers in litigation matters involving real estate, such as zoning and ownership disputes and annexation.
- **Collective Bargaining.** We act as chief spokesperson or as counsel for boards handling their own bargaining. We regularly negotiate the terms and conditions of labor agreements as part of the collective bargaining process under the Municipal Employment Relations Act. We work alongside our clients at every stage of the bargaining process. We review and provide analysis of the in-place collective bargaining agreements, policies, and/or work rules. Prior to the commencement of bargaining, we work with our clients to draft and submit proposals to employee organizations. Three of our attorneys have contributed to a book published by the State Bar of Wisconsin entitled Public Sector Labor Relations in Wisconsin. This book is currently the only comprehensive treatise covering all aspects of public sector labor relations in Wisconsin.
- **Bargaining Support Data Development.** Utilizing our in-house research center, we prepare comparative and economic data to support an employer's position in collective bargaining, mediation, and interest arbitration. As part of the process, we prepare and verify costs associated with bargaining unit proposals and settlements.
- **Impasse Resolution Procedures.** We represent public sector employers in utilizing the impasse (i.e., mediation and arbitration) procedures set forth under Sections 111.70 and 111.77 of the Wisconsin Statutes.
- **Grievance and Contract Interpretation.** We prepare and draft initial legal opinions on grievance matters and represent employers in arbitration proceedings. We submit briefs and arguments to an arbitrator in support of the client's position after grievance arbitration hearings.
- **Representation Before Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission and State and Federal Courts.** We represent clients before the Wisconsin Employment Relations Commission as well as state and federal courts in matters such as bargaining unit determination, declaratory rulings, and prohibited practice complaints.
- **Union Election Campaigns.** We review union election petitions and consult with local government officials regarding eligibility for union representation and union election campaigns.
- **Family Medical Leave Compliance/Unemployment Compensation/Workers' Compensation.** We review policies and procedures to ensure compliance with state and federal Family and Medical Leave Acts and counsel employers on compliance. In addition, we represent employers involved in litigation with the Department of Workforce Development, Department of Labor, and state and federal courts with respect to compliance with the Family and Medical Leave Act, unemployment compensation, and workers' compensation matters.
- **Employment Discrimination Litigation.** We provide counsel to local government employers for compliance with state and federal equal opportunity laws, including how to protect against claims of discrimination and harassment. We represent local government employers in defense of complaints of discrimination in all courts and administrative agencies.
- **Police and Fire Commission Proceedings.** We counsel police and fire chiefs and commissions on the proper level of employee discipline and assist with commission hearings.
- **Layoffs and Consolidation of Services.** When staff changes are unavoidable, we advise local government units on the legal and contractual issues related to layoffs, reductions in force, subcontracting, and consolidation of services.

Annually Ruder Ware hosts a seminar series addressing timely topics and issues facing local government officials. As an added service, our firm offers electronic legal updates at no cost to all elected officials. As a full-service law firm, our attorneys are capable of providing counsel on additional areas affecting the operations of local governments, such as business transactions, litigation, and individual estate planning needs of teachers and administrators.

As part of a full-service law firm, our attorneys provide clients with a one-stop approach to their legal needs. Ruder Ware, the largest Wisconsin law firm headquartered north of Madison, also provides legal counsel in Business Transactions, Litigation & Dispute Resolution, and Trusts & Estates. ◆

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