

Keep Local Emergency Management Commissions Independent

Every county in Iowa has a Local Emergency Management Commission established under Iowa Code Chapter 29C. **The Commission is a regional, multi-jurisdictional government body—not a department of county government**—composed of a representative from the Board of Supervisors, the Sheriff, and the Mayor of each city in the county. The Commission is the fiscal authority for local emergency management, and its Chair or Vice-Chair serves as the certifying official for its budget.

Why Commission Independence Matters

- **Regional hazards need regional governance** - Floods, severe weather, hazmat incidents, cyber threats, and pandemics routinely cross city and township boundaries. A countywide Commission provides one unified plan, one coordination point, shared resources, and shared priorities for all communities.
- **Balanced representation – not “super-members”** - Every jurisdiction has one seat and one vote. Granting the Board of Supervisors (or any single member) unilateral veto authority over a Commission-approved budget would create a “super-member” that can override the votes of elected city officials and the Sheriff. This would undermine statutory balance, taxpayer accountability, and the Commission’s authority.
- **Clear accountability already exists** - Commission budgets are adopted in open public meetings by elected officials, follow Iowa’s local budget laws (Chapter 24), are subject to public hearing and certification, and appear as a distinct line item on taxpayer statements. The public, cities, and the county already have full transparency and input—no additional veto layer controlled by one member is needed. Voters can hold their own elected representatives accountable.

Countywide General Supplemental Levy for Addressing Countywide Risk

Iowa Code §§ 29C.17 and 331.424(1) **explicitly authorize the general supplemental levy** as a countywide funding source for local emergency management—precisely because it funds countywide obligations that protect all people and property in the county.

- The levy is **not “the Board’s levy.”** Authority flows directly from the Legislature to the Commission, not through the Board of Supervisors.
- It is a **functional, countywide levy** used for countywide services such as substance abuse, mental health, foster care, elections, courts, and emergency management. It is not a county-government levy.
- When the **Commission selects this funding mechanism**, the Board of Supervisors’ role—confirmed by multiple Iowa Attorney General opinions—is **ministerial**: place the Commission-certified amount on the tax roll, just as it does for other independent budget-certifying entities.

No local government may veto another independent political subdivision’s lawful budget.

Cities cannot veto the county’s budget; the county should not be able to veto a budget involving cities and the Sheriff. Giving one county-level “super-member” veto power disregards the fact that city taxpayers contribute the majority of the county’s taxable valuation and population, subordinates municipal representation, and erodes regional equity.

Efficiency and Alignment with Iowa DOGE Recommendations

The Governor’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) report calls for **shared services, regional collaboration, and modernized local government structures** that avoid duplication and reduce property tax pressure. Local emergency management commissions already embody this vision—cities, the county, and the Sheriff jointly plan, budget, train, and respond together.

A unilateral Board veto would move Iowa in the wrong direction by allowing one member to rewrite a regionally approved budget after a public vote. This would **undermine public trust, discourage shared services, politicize emergency preparedness, and fracture decades of successful cooperation**. If regional models collapse, cities may be forced to create their own emergency management offices—resulting in higher costs, duplicated effort, reduced efficiencies, and poorer interoperability among responders.

This **precedent could cascade** to other regional entities such as landfill commissions, watershed authorities, joint fire districts, transit authorities, and 911 Service Boards—exactly the opposite of the collaboration the Legislature and DOGE have championed.

Requested Legislative Actions

1. **Maintain** the emergency management commission as an independent, multi-jurisdictional entity and fiscal authority under Chapter 29C.
2. **Reject** any statutory change that grants boards of supervisors unilateral veto power over commission-approved and certified budgets.
3. **Affirm** that the general supplemental levy is an appropriate countywide funding mechanism for local emergency management agencies when selected by the commission.
4. **Recognize** local emergency management commissions as model regional/shared-service structures that already align with Iowa DOGE recommendations.

Bottom Line

Weakening commission independence and granting a board-only veto would create “super-members,” fracture regional cooperation, increase costs to taxpayers, and ultimately leave Iowans less safe when it matters most.

Did You Know?

- The Polk County Emergency Management Commission’s budget represents **less than 1/3 of 1%** of the total county budget.
- Over the past 10 years, for every \$1 of local taxpayer investment in the Polk County EMA program, more than \$25 has returned to local jurisdictions in federal and state grants—a **2,400% return on investment**.