



# CITY OF WEST LIBERTY

Address: 111 W 7<sup>th</sup> Street., West Liberty, IA 52776

Phone: (319) 627-2418 | Fax: (319) 627-4847

City Hall Hours: Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm

<https://cityofwestlibertyia.org>

From the City Manager, City of West Liberty, Iowa

February 23, 2026

The Honorable Members of the Iowa House of Representatives  
Iowa State Capitol  
Des Moines, Iowa

RE: Opposition to House Study Bill 689 – Protection of Local Authority on Emergency Management Commissions

Dear Representatives,

On behalf of the City of West Liberty, I respectfully submit this letter to express our strong opposition to House Study Bill 689 (HSB 689). This legislation, as written, directly harms West Liberty's ability to represent our residents, protect local taxpayers, and participate meaningfully in countywide emergency management governance.

Under current Iowa law, the Emergency Management Commission is a balanced, legislatively-created joint city/county authority where mayors, a representative of the county Board of Supervisors, and the county sheriff each hold an equal vote in adopting the agency's budget<sup>(?)</sup>. This structure—a true intergovernmental partnership—has worked effectively for more than three decades and has been essential to ensuring that all communities, large and small, have an equal voice in countywide planning, preparedness, and emergency resource allocation.

**HSB 689 would dismantle that long-standing partnership. As stated in the legislative communication, the bill:**

- Creates a special exception for the countywide general supplemental levy—the simplest, most transparent, and most commonly used funding mechanism for emergency management agencies—and
- Grants the County Board of Supervisors unilateral veto power over the Emergency Management Commission's budget.

**In practical terms for West Liberty:**

1. Our residents and property taxpayers would continue to pay their full share of the Emergency Management Agency (EMA) budget,
2. But our Mayor's vote—our city's voice—would be rendered meaningless



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This is not a minor procedural change. It fundamentally subordinates every mayor in Muscatine County to the Board of Supervisors and transforms a balanced, collaborative commission into a structure where one elected body can override all others <sup>(5)</sup>. Such an imbalance contradicts the Legislature's original intent and undermines the cooperative governance model that has kept Iowa's emergency management system among the strongest in the nation.

## **Why This Matters for West Liberty Specifically**

### **1. Local Needs Must Be Represented Equitably**

West Liberty has unique demographics, public safety needs, and hazard-planning considerations. Losing equal voting authority means these local conditions may be outweighed—or ignored—by decisions made solely by county-level officials whose priorities may differ from those of our urban, bilingual, and economically diverse community.

### **2. Taxation Without Representation**

If HSB 689 passes, West Liberty taxpayers would continue to provide their proportional share of EMA funding without retaining meaningful representation in budget approval. This contradicts fundamental principles of fair taxation and intergovernmental accountability.

### **3. Emergency Preparedness Requires Local Insight**

Our city, with its mix of residential neighborhoods, major employers, agricultural industries, and transportation corridors, has specific emergency response demands. Equal representation ensures our voice is heard when planning for severe weather, infrastructure incidents, community sheltering, or countywide disaster coordination.

### **4. The Change Reduces Transparency and Public Trust**

The current system's shared governance promotes trust. Handing veto authority to a single governing body risks creating a less transparent, less collaborative budgeting process, ultimately weakening public confidence in emergency preparedness decisions.

## **Request for Legislative Action**

On behalf of the City of West Liberty, I strongly urge you to vote against HSB 689 and preserve the balanced, collaborative, and effective governance structure that has safeguarded Iowa communities for decades.



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Our residents' safety, their tax equity, and our city's rightful voice in countywide decision-making depend on maintaining equal representation on the Emergency Management Commission.

Thank you for your attention and for your service to the people of Iowa. I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss this matter further or provide testimony as needed.

Respectfully,  
Lee Geertz  
City Manager, CPM  
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CC: West Liberty City Clerk- Shari Hoffert  
West Liberty Mayor- Mark D Smith  
Muscatine County Emergency Management-Chris Jasper