



The citizens of Saint Louis would be well-served if the position of public administrator is changed to an appointed role, as it has been in neighboring Saint Louis County for many years.

David Stokes is a policy analyst at the Show-Me Institute, which promotes market solutions for Missouri public policy.

TESTIMONY

February 20, 2013

SAINT LOUIS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR SHOULD BE APPOINTED

By David Stokes

Testimony Before the Missouri Senate Jobs, Economic Development, and Local Government Committee

To the Honorable Members of This Committee:

My name is David Stokes and I am a policy analyst for the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan Missouri-based think tank that supports free-market solutions for state policy. The ideas presented here are my own. This testimony is intended to summarize research that the Show-Me Institute has conducted and reviewed regarding the structure of local government.

The question in the proposed change is whether or not the public administrator of the City of Saint Louis should be appointed instead of elected, as is the current case. In my opinion, the citizens of Saint Louis would be well-served if the public administrator is an appointed position.

In general, it is possible to have both too many and too few elected officials. If you have too many, particularly in the executive branch, decision-making can be hampered and the public is left

confused about authority. If you have too few, you risk giving too much power to a limited number of individuals.

Christopher Berry and Jacob Gersen, of the University of Chicago, documented how local government spending increases when an entity has a very small number of officials in the executive branch.¹ Spending then decreases as the government adds more executive officials, and then increases again if it adds too many. (The final look of the spending graph is a “U.”) The reason behind this is that there is an optimal amount of elected officials for the public to effectively track. Too few, and the public finds it difficult to hold a limited number of officials accountable for a wide variety of issues. Too many, and the public cannot effectively track the decisions that so many elected officers make.

The Berry and Gersen model does not provide the ideal number of elected officials for every size city or county. The proper amount varies because of a

number of factors. But, suffice it to say, the public administrator of the City of Saint Louis should not be elected. The public administrator position is important. It provides a valuable public service. However, whoever holds the position does not make the types of decisions that require the position to be directly responsible to the voters. The position neither makes important policy decisions nor serves as a check on other offices.² It executes duties as statute dictates. The holder of the position can execute those duties just as well if they are appointed and responsible to the judges that run the court.

Politics may only play a small role in the office at it currently exists, but there is no reason for it to play any role. The citizens of Saint Louis would be well-served if the position of public administrator is changed to an appointed role, as it has been in neighboring Saint Louis County for many years. I believe other counties in Missouri should also consider that change.

NOTES

¹ Berry, Christopher, and Jacob Gersen. "The Fiscal Consequences of Electoral Institutions," University of Chicago, John M. Olin Law and Economics Working Paper no. 344, June 2007.

² Stokes, David. "General Guidelines For Charter Governments: Testimony Before the Franklin County Charter Commission," Show-Me Institute, October 2008.

***Join the fight for liberty in our state.
Become a Show-Me Institute supporter:
www.showmeinstitute.org/donate***



4512 West Pine Blvd. | Saint Louis, MO 63108 | 314-454-0647 | www.showmeinstitute.org

View State Government Spending:
showmeliving.org

Read Our Blog:
showmedaily.org

Use Our Interactive Database:
showmeideas.org

Find Us on Facebook:
facebook.com/showmeinstitute

Follow Us on Twitter:
twitter.com/showme