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National League of Cities, Local Solutions Support Center Release Bold New Vision for Restructuring Local Power and Strengthening Local Democracy

*New 'Principles of Home Rule for the 21st Century' framework ensures people have the power
to make local decision locally*

WASHINGTON — Mayors and elected officials from across the country are committing to a new effort aimed at strengthening local democracy by modernizing home rule for the 21st century. The leaders gathered at the National League of Cities (NLC) today to discuss how they can take steps to advance home rule reform in their local communities. The meeting comes the same day that NLC and Local Solutions Support Center (LSSC) released a new framework, *Principles of Home Rule for the 21st Century*, for strengthening local democracy.

Home rule is a longstanding legal principle that gives people within their communities the power to decide which services they want, how best to protect their neighborhoods, how their communities should grow, ensuring that local problems are solved locally. But even though the demands on cities, towns and counties have grown in recent decades, home rule hasn't evolved to meet the challenges and complexities of the 21st century. The framework represents the first comprehensive rewrite of home rule since 1953.

"Voters are demanding practical problem-solving tailored to where they live. They value the benefits of local democracy – the flexibility of solutions that change with the times, the ability to hold politicians accountable, and the authority of local officials to act on their diverse needs," said Clarence E. Anthony, CEO and Executive Director of NLC. "The time for an updated, modern vision of home rule has arrived. We must reset the balance of power between state and local governments, and respect the decisions made by local voters and their leaders."

This updated framework comes at a time when cities are home to thriving and diverse populations, with distinct problems and needs. In 1950, around the time home rule was last updated, 64 percent of Americans lived in cities. Today, 81 percent of Americans now call cities home, and an estimated 90 percent will live in urban centers by 2050. It's where the most diverse populations of Americans live. Voters support the idea of home rule, and it's particularly important as more states wield preemption against large cities - taking away the ability of people to make decisions about the issues most directly affecting them. In fact, people and cities have lost power in every single state legislative session since 2011.

"Sixty-six years ago, states weren't interfering in the decisions cities made at the scale they are today," said Kim Haddow, Director of LSSC. "But now, we are seeing a large increase in the amount of state preemption, across more issues and often with the intent of stopping policies



that local people support and have voted for. These are policies designed to promote economic well-being, improve health and safety, and increase equity. Our cities and counties and the people living there are driving national and even global economies - we must ensure that they have legal structure necessary to participate fully in our democracy.”

Cities are increasingly putting forward innovating solutions that address the unique problems impacting their populations. Those solutions reflect the values and needs of the local populations. Home rule ensures local residents have a genuine say in the policies governing their daily lives. It protects the authority and autonomy of local elected officials -- the people elected by local voters to make local decisions.

“People living in cities are confronting a host of new challenges that require innovative, local, and tailored solutions,” said Nestor Davidson, lead author of the framework and law professor at Fordham University School of Law. “Currently, cities and states are out of alignment. Instead of trying to resolve this friction piecemeal, one legislative skirmish at a time, these principles present a long-term, holistic, and deeper fix to the city-state relationship.”

The framework is centered around four key principles for home rule in the 21st century. Those principles are:

- Home rule must affirm the full range of local government authority to solve the challenges they face.
- Home rule must particularly protect local fiscal authority, because the ability to solve local problems locally requires access to sufficient resources.
- Home rule must reframe how and when states interfere with local democracy - state legislators should always articulate and defend why they need to displace certain local policies.
- Above all else, home rule must protect the choices communities make.

The framework includes model constitutional language to advance home rule, and it is part of NLC and LSSC’s leadership in advancing local democracy and empowering communities to develop, support, and implement strategies to educate policymakers and the public about home rule. The full framework can be found here

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About Local Solutions Support Center

The Local Solutions Support Center (LSSC) is a national hub that connects, coordinates and creates efforts to counter the abuse of state preemption and strengthen the power of local democracies to advance policies that promote equity, inclusion, public health and safety, and civic participation. For more information, please visit supportdemocracy.org.

About National League of Cities

The [National League of Cities](https://www.nlc.org) (NLC) is the voice of America’s cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people. NLC works to strengthen local leadership, influence federal policy and drive innovative solutions. Stay connected with NLC on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/nlc), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/nlc), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nlc) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/nlc).



ADDENDUM: Statements from city officials

Coral Evans, Mayor of Flagstaff, AZ: “We cannot continue to allow corporations and state lawmakers to interfere with our ability to make local decisions locally. The people of Flagstaff know what’s best for our community, and they put their trust in their locally elected officials to make sure that their needs and concerns are addressed.”

Lauren Kuby, Vice Mayor of Tempe, AZ: “Local control of our issues and our decisions is not only essential to protect the interests of our community, it is a cornerstone of our democratic values and ideals. Tempe’s elected officials should be free to enact policies they feel are best for our city, free from obstruction and intervention from the state legislature.”

Matt Pacifico, Mayor of Altoona, PA and President of the Pennsylvania Municipal League: “We’ve had enormous success in Altoona in recent years, growing our local economy and strengthening our community. We’ve succeeded because of the determination and innovation of our residents and our local leaders. No one is as invested in a community’s well-being as the people living and working there, and that’s why home rule is so important. We don’t need lawmakers over 100 miles away telling us how to conduct our business. I’m hopeful that this new national conversation about home rule will allow other communities to better access local authority so that they can prosper moving forward.”

Rick Schuettler, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Municipal League: “Pennsylvania is home to communities rich in history and diverse in background – and each of those communities face local challenges that require local solutions. Pennsylvanians know their home town best - from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh, Altoona to Allentown. We’re serious about our state remaining competitive in the 21st century, and that’s why we’re committed to discussing meaningful home rule reform.”

Stephen Benjamin, Mayor of Columbia, SC: “The people of Columbia understand how to best address the issues that we face in our city. This new framework ensures that democracy and the will of the people work at all levels, including the local level.”

Luke Fuszard, Councilmember of Middleton, WI: “What we’re seeing from states and corporate lobbyists is akin to someone coming into your home, changing your music without asking, and never giving back control of the songs. Cities and towns more acutely understand the needs of their constituents and they’ve already set up the best playlist for their communities.”