



February 10, 2026

Senator Ronald M. Winterton
Utah State Senate
350 North State, Suite 320
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114

Re: Opposition to S.B. 266, County Governance Revisions

Dear Senator Winterton:

The Tooele County Council writes to express our concerns with S.B. 266 as elected officials serving under the council-manager form of government. Five years ago, the voters of Tooele County chose this structure through a public vote. Since that time, it has proven effective, accountable, and responsive to the needs of our community. For that reason, we respectfully oppose S.B. 266.

Our residents intentionally selected a governance model that separates policy leadership from daily administration. The Council sets the vision, establishes priorities, and represents the voice of the public. The professional county manager carries out those policies, oversees operations, and ensures departments function cohesively and efficiently. This structure is not about shifting authority away from elected officials; it is about ensuring that day-to-day services are led by a qualified professional with the experience and long-term perspective necessary to manage a growing county.

Tooele County has formally adopted in our county code the separation of duties and powers between the legislative body and the executive administration. This clear delineation provides transparency, accountability, and stability. It ensures that elected officials remain focused on policymaking and community priorities while professional administration manages operations in an efficient and coordinated manner. Altering that balance at the state level would disrupt a structure our voters approved and that we have deliberately implemented in local ordinance.

In the past five years, Tooele County has successfully negotiated complex professional agreements, completed large-scale projects, and strengthened service delivery across departments. Hiring a professional manager with experience and extended vision has allowed us to plan strategically, manage resources responsibly, and maintain continuity. This leadership has been essential in coordinating departments such as solid waste, planning and development, public safety support services, parks and recreation, and roads, services our residents rely on every single day.

The day-to-day operations of county government are not abstract policy matters; they are road maintenance, permitting timelines, recreation programming, emergency coordination, and stewardship of public facilities. These functions require consistent oversight, operational expertise, and unified direction. A professional manager provides a clear line of accountability and ensures that service delivery remains efficient and non-politicized.

S.B. 266 would fundamentally alter this balance by vesting executive authority directly in the council while restricting the delegation of those duties to the manager. For a legislative body that serves part-time, assuming full-time executive administration would reduce efficiency and blur lines of responsibility. More importantly, it would move Tooele County away from the model our voters chose.

We agree that transparency and accountability in employment agreements are important. As a constructive alternative, we would support aligning county manager contracts with Utah state code governing city manager agreements, which requires contract renegotiation every four years. This approach maintains accountability through regular review while preserving the structure our residents approved.

We are always willing to work collaboratively on improvements. If changes to the council-manager model are being considered, we respectfully request the time and opportunity to engage in thoughtful discussion before significant structural adjustments are imposed. Governance structures affect long-term service delivery, accountability, and public trust, and they deserve careful, deliberate consideration.

Tooele County's experience over the past five years demonstrates that the council-manager form can deliver measurable results, professional administration, and improved service to our residents. We respectfully ask that the Legislature preserve the flexibility for counties to operate under the governance structure their voters selected.

We value our partnership with you and remain available to meet and discuss these concerns further.

Sincerely,

Paul A. ...
Tooele County Council Chair.