



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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YOUR TOWNSHIP

Reformers Are Threatening the Township Way of Life

*Lawmakers Want to Make Community-Based
Local Government Unconstitutional*

You live in a township, and you like it, right? When it snows, the roads are plowed. When spring arrives, the local crews are out fixing up the roads. And if you have a problem, you know that a township supervisor is just a phone call away.

Well, all of that could dramatically change if a piece of legislation, known as House Bill 2431, starts gaining traction.

The proposal, sponsored by Rep. Thomas Caltagirone of Berks County, calls for a constitutional amendment to establish Pennsylvania's 67 counties as the basic level of government. Our township — the very place you and your family call home — would be abolished along with cities and boroughs. The counties would take over all municipal operations, including roads and bridges, land use and zoning, sanitation, health and safety, and law enforcement.

Where is the proof?

The bill is intended to reduce duplicated services and save tax dollars, Caltagirone said recently. Meanwhile, others are hoping to reform government in Pennsylvania through a



Government that is closest to the people is the most responsive government there is. However, Rep. Thomas Caltagirone doesn't see it that way. The Berks County lawmaker has introduced legislation that would amend the state Constitution to abolish municipalities like our township and replace them with bigger, county-based governments.

constitutional convention.

So far, however, no reformer or reform group has proven that the bigger, centralized government model is more effective or efficient than Pennsylvania's current system, which is made up of nearly 2,500 community-based local governments. Among them are 1,455 townships, which come in all shapes and sizes and represent rural, urban, and suburban residents.

We, as your elected representatives, believe that the commonwealth's founders knew exactly what they were doing when they established this community-based system and that government that is closest to the people — like this township — is the most responsive and cost-effective. Therefore, our township strongly opposes House Bill 2431, as does the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, a Harrisburg-based public-policy organization that represents our community and others like it throughout the commonwealth.

"For years, people have been saying that Pennsylvania has too many local governments. So-called reformers refer to townships as 'fiefdoms' and 'relics of the past,' and they complain about duplicated services and the rising cost of government," PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko says. "But you know what? No one has ever proven that bigger, centralized government is better — or even more cost-effective — government.

"In fact, the opposite is true. Just look around this state, and you'll see the evidence," he adds. "Townships aren't failing, declaring bankruptcy, or imposing widespread tax increases. Instead, it's the bigger governments — places like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Reading — that are in real financial trouble. Townships have been doing more with less — and doing it successfully — ever since the days of William Penn, and they are still around for a very good reason: They work."

It's not about self-preservation

PSATS President John Haiko also disagrees with critics who say that township supervisors and other local leaders oppose House Bill 2431 and similar measures because we want to preserve our power and jobs.

"This isn't about self-preservation at all," Haiko says. "It's about making a good thing better: townships. There, you'll find committed elected leaders and employees who would much rather put off buying a piece of equipment than raise taxes. These people, who live and work in the communities they represent, are more committed to pinching pennies, increasing their efficiency, and working together to stretch tax

dollars than anyone else in government today."

In fact, a recent PSATS survey revealed that 82 percent of the townships that responded are involved in cooperative projects with neighboring municipalities. These efforts are saving tax dollars and enhancing government efficiency.

Townships, however, continue to come under fire. Special-interest groups, zeroing in on the number of local governments in Pennsylvania, contend that the commonwealth would be better served by a centralized system of fewer, bigger, and theoretically more efficient governments.

This, however, goes against the grain of what the public says it wants.

Give the people what they want

According to a Lincoln Institute survey of registered Pennsylvania voters, 80 percent of the respondents said that their local government should not be replaced with a countywide government; 81 percent said that merger decisions should be made locally and should not be required by the state; and 70 percent said that their municipality should not merge with a surrounding municipality.

"Pennsylvania has so many local governments because that's what the taxpayers want," says Lowman Henry, chairman and CEO of the Lincoln Institute.

Wendell Cox, a government consolidation expert who has studied Pennsylvania, says that state lawmakers should listen to their constituents and reject proposals that would force local governments to consolidate with larger, urban areas. Why? No one would benefit, especially taxpayers, Cox says. The only thing that forced consolidation would do, he predicts, is spread the higher costs and inefficiencies of the larger jurisdiction over a larger area.

Cox's conclusion: "When you amalgamate, it's not the best that emerges; it's the worst."

PSATS' David Sanko agrees: "I don't dispute that government is broken — in Harrisburg and Washington — and that's where we really should be focusing our attention. Bigger, centralized government doesn't work. It never has. It didn't in the Soviet Union, and it won't in Pennsylvania."

If you value grassroots governing, please support our township by calling or e-mailing our state representatives and senators and voicing your opposition to House Bill 2431. Lawmakers want — and need — to hear from their voters. Therefore, the more voices we can rally in protest to this legislation, the better our chances are of protecting and preserving Pennsylvania's community-based decision making and government.

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