



# Legislative Report

By Taylor Anderson

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**L**OCAL GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION is not a new topic. Not to the Township Officials of Illinois and not to the average Illinois citizen. It's a topic often seen in the headlines or on the nightly news and usually its portrayed in a very positive light. The media focuses on the number of units Illinois has versus other states and then makes vague, unproven claims about reducing taxes via consolidation or elimination of those units of government.

But you knew already this.

You already know that when it comes down to it, local governments and townships specifically, are some of the most efficient and well run units of government. That these governments are the ones that are out in communities, providing the services, the ones getting the job done. You know, that regardless of the number of townships or any other local government, citizens will still expect and demand a high level of services to

be delivered when they need them.

You also know that fewer local governments doesn't automatically equal savings. That providing services costs money, that those cost continue to rise and that not all units of local government provide services at the same rate. Shifting services to a more expensive unit of government wouldn't save taxpayers' dollars; it could actually end up costing them more. The asphalt would still need to be paved and the snow would still need to be plowed and fewer local governments won't change that.

By the time you read this article, you will also likely know that two bills aimed at consolidation have been signed into law. SB 3 (now Public Act 100-0107) and HB 607 (now Public Act 100-106). Both Bills were opposed by the Township Officials of Illinois as we tried to work with legislators to address our concerns with them.

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**Don't wait until the last minute!**

SB 3 was the large omnibus consolidation bill which granted broad authority to counties to consolidate units of government within their borders as well as set procedures for consolidation for other local governments including townships. TOI's opposition to SB 3 stemmed from a few main concerns. The first, road districts fewer than 15 miles in length may be abolished after a resolution is adopted by the board and a voter approved referendum. The second, was a one size fits all approach to the consolidation of conterminous townships, which could limit the input from township officials. Lastly, tucked away in the middle of the bill is a provision that abolishes road districts that do not exceed 4 miles in total length (HB 607 has this same provision, but the length is based upon centerline mileage).

But what you may not know, or remember, is the many versions of bills that sought to do far more and in a far worse manner. For the faults that it does have, SB 3 manages to create a process for consolidation which, for the most part is clear and thought out. Unlike SB 3 the other pieces of legislation provided no or limited opportunities for township officials to weigh in on potential elimination or consolidations measures.

Under the new law each merging township would have to pass a resolution to consolidate and hold public hearings, ensuring that citizens can share their thoughts and concerns with the township board and vice versa, before a referendum was placed on the ballot. Some lawmakers and others actually opposed the addition of

this crucial step instead preferring to completely bypass the township board. It's also important to keep in mind that SB 3 does not mandate consolidation but instead leaves the determination to the voters of each community to decide for themselves. Yet there are still those who believe a forced, top down approach, mandating consolidation at the State level is the correct path.

We all know consolidation is neither as easy nor as straight forward as many would have us believe. It's a tricky process that involves a lot of moving parts and after it's done you had better hope it was done right, because there are no second chances. While SB 3 may not be perfect, it at least sets forth a reasonable process allowing input from everyone while at the same time not mandating consolidation. Which isn't to say more work isn't needed on the issue, because there is. As nowhere in the law does it currently specify that evidence must first be provided that a consolidation would actually save money nor prevent a consolidation from occurring in the case where cost could increase. However, TOI is committed to continue to work on these and other issues with our legislative allies.

SB 3 isn't perfect but it's better than it could have been. Sometimes Springfield gets it wrong, sometimes Springfield gets it right, and sometimes it's just enough of a mix between the two that we live to fight another day.

But then again, I bet you already knew that.



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