

from the **Executive Director's Desk**



By Jerry B. Crabtree

TOI Executive Director

THIS YEAR, (2022) we stand united as an association representing the 1426 townships in Illinois. There are a few (1.3%) that remain unpaid members of our association. To these townships, I can only say that TOI welcomes you at any time to come into the neighborhood and join our efforts to collectively promote, educate and preserve the oldest form of government in Illinois—Township Government.

Township government is at times, not understood for the contribution made to local communities. Recently, several news outlets these past few months continue to point out that in Illinois we have the most units of local government compared to other states in the union. Adding to the issue is the continuous anti-township discussions that have been part of the conversation for many years. Consolidation at the township level is not the answer, nor will it solve the problems Illinois is experiencing. The number of governmental units is confusing in itself, because they are not always explained. Many on the list are not revenue producing or expending.

Most of my career in government has been dedicated to township government. My understanding of the fiscal issues concerning our government debt and fiscal responsibility is, from my perspective, the combination of many factors. Although there are fiscal reasons that are discussed to consolidate local governments, a general consolidation effort does not and will not address all of the issues. Elimination of the lowest forms does not address the problem.

The position of the **TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS OF ILLINOIS** remains that if it makes fiscal sense and the services provided to the community can be transferred, without cause, to another unit of government—consolidation is justified and necessary. The issue is providing a solid financial analysis of how to measure this and who is responsible for paying and completing the analysis.

Second, it remains the association's position that any form of consolidation **MUST** be decided by the voters and not a one size fits all approach by the Illinois General Assembly. The communities that benefit from the services provided by township government must be involved in the final decision of whether to consolidate these programs and services. This has been and will continue to be a solid position of TOI.

For discussion purposes, what happens if Townships are eliminated or consolidated? All of the programs that

are not required but still managed by townships and road districts may be eliminated. If one of the townships in a county is being consolidated with another jurisdiction and the newly created township/jurisdiction does not have the same programs, they may be reduced or eliminated. Consolidation from the perspective of saving money just does not add up. The new area or township jurisdiction has an increase in duties, decrease in staff and potentially an increase in services provided to residents.

Most of the rhetoric that is printed leaves out one important fiscal component. The funding of township government by property taxes accounts for less than 3 percent of a property tax bill. The debate that consolidation or elimination of township government will solve the property tax problem in Illinois is a moot point. The property tax burden goes well beyond the contributions made for township services.

Additionally, although Township government is both rural and urban, many of our townships (over 80 percent) represent rural areas less than 5,000 residents. Over 72,000 miles of the roads in the state of Illinois are managed and maintained by Illinois Highway Commissioners. Many programs that benefit seniors, students, communities and parks are part of township government. In the 17 years I have been with TOI, I have yet to see a unit of government readily available and fiscally adaptable to take on the responsibilities and services provided without a degree of concern. I am not saying that it cannot be accomplished, but the fiscal responsibility of township government is a solid foundation for the programs provided by this most basic unit of local government.

A fiscal check list regarding the financial vitality and existence of township government and all local governments is needed. The Illinois General Assembly needs take on property tax reform from the full perspective of the issue.

So, if you are a proponent of government consolidation make sure that you are reading a concise analysis of the fiscal and services provided report with determining if it is the answer, Rest assured that your association continues to take on the anti-township movement and provide a solid foundation of where to secure our defense of the government closest to the people and most fiscal responsibly—**TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT!**

Jerry B. Crabtree