



# Legislative Report

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## *Individual legislative proposals flood the Capitol*

**T**HE HEADLINES AROUND THE STATE have been dominated with reports about ongoing budget talks and the progress—or lack thereof—that has been made in the State Senate on the matter. But outside of the financial planning and budget-making apparatus, there's a whole world of legislative activity that has permeated the State Capitol. And much of it impacts township government.

The Township Officials of Illinois are tracking 120 bills that deal with township government. And I can assure you, most of them are not friendly in nature. As we go to press, the House and Senate are nearing the first major deadline. It's the last chance that legislators can get their bills out of committee in their own chamber. If they don't get a bill called, or if they get it called but can't get the votes to pass it, it dies, sort of. They can always resurrect the proposal as an amendment to another bill later in session. But this deadline represents the first weaning process, and clears the deck (hopefully) of a lot of bad stuff. Once we get past this late-March committee deadline, we can draw a breath and see what remains alive. That's where our real focus comes in.

At this point on the legislative calendar, legislators, staff and lobbyists scurry from one committee to another in an effort to derail legislation contrary to their cause, or pass that which is favorable. But several committees list more than 100 bills each that could be considered in a given hearing—all within just an hour or two for deliberation on all of them. No one (except the chair or top staff) knows for sure which bills are slated to be called for a hearing. Covering so many bills at one stop leaves those of us with an agenda to execute nearly powerless to get cogent analyses across to lawmakers. We wind up placing our focus on those bills that do the most damage and have the most likelihood of advancing, and we zero in on them.

Let me give you the scenario we're dealing with right now. Concerned about the legislature imposing more costly public notification or mandated website laws? Well, there are 14 bills in this process that do so. How about the hottest topic of the day ... consolidating whole townships or township offices? There are 11 bills that do just that, in one form or another. There are

another 11 bills that impact township highway commissioners, 12 that impose some type of property tax freeze on local governments, and the list goes on and on.

In the big picture, the negotiations over crafting a "grand bargain" that would start in the Senate and then move to the House of Representatives, townships are also impacted. Senate Bill 3, one of a handful of bills that has actually emerged from the bargain and passed to the House, contains a provision that has drawn TOI's opposition. It would allow a vote by referendum to eliminate township highway commissions in those that have less than 15 miles of roads. TOI has taken a position for the past year that we would be neutral if legislation drew the threshold at 10 miles.

But there are also other provisions in Senate Bill 3 that deal with consolidation of townships that actually make sense. While they are a departure from the status quo, they set forth a path for elimination or consolidation of townships with participation and approval from the township boards that are involved. In other words, rather than all of those 11 bills mandating consolidation that I mention earlier, this proposal allows for a democratic process that prevents one unit of government from abolishing another—a hostile takeover, so to speak.

So as we slog on during this committee deadline phase, we'll try to clear as much anti-township clutter as we can, realizing that sheer volume prevents us from detailing the nuances of each of the bills, or having a reasoned dialogue with members of the committee who are actually voting on them. And once the deck is a little clearer, we can start to have those grown-up conversations about those that have survived the process.

By next month's issue, we'll have a list of bills still standing that comprise our agenda. And we'll be asking you for help by contacting your legislators to convey our position on those where help is needed. So stay tuned, this process is far from over.

