

Volume #50, Report #18, Article #6--Wednesday, January 26, 2011**LOCALS: STATE HAS TO HELP TO GET COOPERATION**

If [Governor Rick Snyder](#) and lawmakers want local governments to cooperate more on local services, then they must remove some of the legal roadblocks that keep communities from doing more, officials with the Michigan Municipal League said Wednesday.

There have been open clues that revenue sharing to local governments will be cut, perhaps significantly, when Mr. Snyder makes his budget proposal in mid-February. Summer Minnick, director of state affairs for the league, said the organization was "optimistic" that Mr. Snyder, who has said he wants urban redevelopment, will recognize that "slashing a source of funding that is critical" to the services local governments provide will not help redevelopment.

Dan Gilmartin, the MML's executive director, said Mr. Snyder has said that location is a critical element to economic development, and the organization agrees. Most entrepreneurs today choose where they want to be and then build a company when there, he said.

But the changes the MML is urging reflect the fact that the system the state now uses to provide funding for local communities is broken, he said. And Ms. Minnick said over the last decade the state has shorted local governments by some \$4 billion that revenue sharing laws would require they receive.

A major proposal the organization called for is to give local governments the ability to ask voters to approve taxes for economic development and infrastructure projects. Mr. Gilmartin said a range of possible tax options should be considered and any taxes enacted should be on a regional basis instead of a local government basis.

There are no local economies in Michigan or even a state economy, Mr. Gilmartin said, only regional economies. Allowing for this system would also restore some of the authority that local governments gave up as part of the revenue sharing process, he said.

Among the issues the group said the state should change are:

- The requirement, known as PA 312, that contract negotiation impasses with public safety unions automatically go to arbitration with the arbitrator unable to consider a community's ability to pay. At the very least, a government's ability to pay should be considered as part of the arbitrator's consideration and decision.
- Ending the Urban Cooperation Act to make it more likely that local governments can agree on cooperating on benefits. Currently, if communities combine for services, the lower-paid employees get paid at the higher rate. Citing her volunteer fire department as an example, Troy City Council member Robin Beltrami said if her city tried to combine fire services with another community "it would cost us millions." At the very least, local governments should be allowed to have new negotiations with those workers, the officials said.
- Property tax collections should be collected once a year, during July, not twice a year, July and December. Doing so would save all local governments some \$60 million a year, they said.
- Communities should be allowed to publish notices online instead of in a newspaper. With newspaper circulations declining and some publications closing, online notices would provide both cheaper access for officials it would and greater coverage to local communities.
- The Legislature should clarify what is known as "the two-inch" rule on sidewalk defects to protect governments from liability.
- And the state should allow local governments to hire work crews made up of corrections inmates. The practice of corrections work crews was ended in 2010 to save the state money. Ms. Minnick said local governments would pay more for the crews since they still save them money compared to hiring other workers.

While they did not rank the proposals in terms of what would be most important to local governments, Ms. Beltrami said the Urban Cooperation Act requirements has stopped negotiations between communities on proposals simply because of the potential cost factors.

Mr. Gilmartin also said while state leaders call for local governments to cooperate more they should recognize all local governments now do try cooperate with each other.

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