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#### **BINDING ARBITRATION A TOP ISSUE FOR LOCALS BUCKING UNFUNDED MANDATES**

Many of the costliest mandates for municipalities and townships are the same, said representatives of their associations to a panel looking at mandates on Tuesday, and representatives of both groups pegged binding arbitration for police and fire fighters in their lists of top grievances. For counties, the big problem surrounds court funding.

The Legislative Commission on Statutory Mandates requested various associations - Michigan Association of Counties, Michigan Municipal League, and Michigan Townships Association - to survey their members and provide lists of their top ten problem mandates.

The results between the municipalities and the townships were strikingly similar, but the association representatives said there were no plans to have comparable lists.

The top issue for the municipalities, binding arbitration for police and firefighter unions, was among the most pressing issues for the township association as well but was not their top priority only because fewer townships have unionized emergency personnel, said David Bertram, legislative liaison for the MTA.

Arbitration was also a major concern for the county association, which hit on many of the same issues but dealt primarily with county-level problems such as court funding, funding and maintenance of county jails, and staffing of constitutional offices.

The county association listed court funding as the costliest mandate, costing a representative sample of 27 counties some \$88 million a year.

Crossovers between the municipalities and townships included the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), optical voting machine maintenance, additional elections despite (or because of, as suggested) consolidation, new auditing requirements, and publication of notices in newspapers.

While the pollution requirement comes from the federal government and would not be subject to the Headlee Amendment, related regulations by the Department of

Environmental Quality filter down to the local units. NPDES regulates storm drains and requires "extensive, expensive reporting," according to the municipal league.

Optical voting machines were given to local governments in compliance with federal law, but the cost for maintaining the equipment is far greater than the cost was for the previous machines, said Summer Minnick, state affairs director for the Municipal League.

"County clerks have found more elections have taken place," Mr. Bertram said. His colleague, Tom Frazier, added that school elections have decreased but township clerks have had to run more elections.

While material and other real costs are paid by the state, incidental costs of school board elections, which were added to traditional elections during a recent consolidation, fall on local governments and are among the mandated burdens townships face, he said.

Auditing requirements related to Proposal A, tracking exemptions, and reassessing property rates every five years added up to large accounting mandates, Mr. Bertram said.

"Extra reporting is yet one more instance of how we continue to nickel and dime our way into mandates," Ms. Minnick said, about auditing reports.

Required newspaper advertisements for local meetings and proposals can add up for local units of government, which may be forced to advertise in expensive state-wide publications to meet Open Meetings Act and other regulations, said Mr. Bertram.

Ms. Minnick suggested the commission look at options for reporting meetings, such as bulletin boards, Web sites and local cable access channels, instead of mailings or newspaper ads.

"I think it's very important for the public to have a right to know," said committee member J. Dallas Winegarden Jr., who urged the committee to keep mandates requiring public dissemination of information.

The committee moved the next meeting to June 25, two weeks after it had been scheduled, in order to allow more time for the next batch of reports. Tuesday's meeting had been moved back and committee Chair Amanda Van Dusen said the next six months worth of meetings would likely be examined at the next meeting.

She said she anticipates the June 25 meeting will allow preparation for school districts, the County Road Association of Michigan, Citizens Research Council (on mandates in other states), and Michigan State University researchers (quantifying the mandates).