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HOUSE PANEL APPROVES CORRECTIONS ARBITRATION BILL

Despite concerns from municipal groups over the increased costs associated with the legislation, the House Labor Committee on Tuesday approved a bill that would give jail corrections officers the same bargaining power as road patrol officers.

[HB 6112](#), which would provide for compulsory binding arbitration for county corrections officers involved in contract disputes, brought plenty of opposition from local governments last week when they said that the bill would increase their costs by forcing them to pay for more frequent arbitration and possibly higher salaries resulting from bargaining.

The Michigan Municipal League this week reiterated its stance that with revenue sharing down nearly \$600 million, cities can't afford any new costs.

But Wayne Beerbower, business agent for the Police Officers Association, said that allowing officers the chance to go to negotiation simply speeds the process up by making both sides more realistic about their demands, rather than increasing the number of people who actually go to arbitration.

He added that if a group chose to go to arbitration, an administrative hearing would take the place of the current fact finding procedure, the costs of which are equal.

Samantha Jones from the MML said costs are just part of the problem with the legislation; there's also the fact that the bill is based on Act 312, which needs reform.

One needed change, she said, is a better definition of comparable counties. If this bill adds counties to those that have approved contracts, future arbitrators might compare cities to counties, which have very different resources and responsibilities, to come up with an appropriate contract for officers.

Don Gilmer, a former legislator and Kalamazoo County administrator, agreed that legislators must reform Act 312 before using it as a basis for new laws.

He pointed out that the law doesn't have a specific requirement for arbitrators to consider the locality's ability to pay the awarded salary and benefits or a formula to decide the ability to pay.

"There has been a history of awards that have caused great hardship to governments and to the people," Mr. Gilmer said. "To further expand this: ultimately citizens would be the losers."

Committee Chair and bill sponsor [Rep. Fred Miller](#) (D-Mount Clemens) said he would consider incorporating some of the reforms outlined in testimony in the version of the bill that will be voted on by the full House.

Reps. Lorence Wenke (R-Galesburg) and Glenn Steil (R-Cascade Township) voted against the bill. [Rep. Phil LaJoy](#) (R-Canton) abstained from voting, saying he plans to introduce amendments for the floor that address some of the reforms and passed on a committee vote "in the spirit of trying to make improvements to the bill."