



**TESTIMONY BY
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS**

**BEFORE THE
SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE
AND THE
SENATE URBAN AFFAIRS AND HOUSING COMMITTEE**

ON

**SHARED MUNICIPAL SERVICES
AND MULTIMUNICIPAL PLANNING**

PRESENTED BY

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Chairman Regola, Chairman Pippy and members of the Senate Local Government Committee and Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee:

Good morning. My name is Richard Hadley, and I am the president of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors and a township supervisor in Cranberry Township, Butler County. I also serve as the manager of Reserve Township, Allegheny County. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of the 1,455 townships in Pennsylvania represented by the Association.

Townships comprise 95 percent of the commonwealth's land area and are home to more than 5.4 million Pennsylvanians — nearly 42 percent of the state's population. These townships are very diverse, ranging from rural communities with fewer than 200 residents to more populated communities with populations approaching 70,000 residents.

Since the passage of the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act of 1972, municipalities have been able to enter into agreements with one or more municipalities to provide services, purchase goods, and perform many other governmental functions on a voluntary basis. Essentially, this act states that anything a municipality is authorized to do individually may also be done cooperatively. This act has been used for services from investments to building and housing code enforcement to fire protection to recreation programs as well as countless other areas.

Local government officials across the commonwealth have discovered that one of the best ways to save money and achieve greater efficiency is by pooling resources through shared municipal services. The Intergovernmental Cooperation Act enables municipalities to work together through the creation of councils of governments and other formal entities as well as through formal and informal agreements.

For example, the Northern York County Regional Police Group was founded in 1973 to provide police services to municipalities in northern York County. In Centre County, townships have engaged in numerous types of shared municipal services over the years through the Centre Region Council of Governments, including fire protection, trash collection, swimming pools and recreation programs, and land use planning. Joint purchasing contracts have become very common across the state, whether through a formal arrangement, such as the Westmoreland Council of Governments, or through informal arrangements.

Local governments participate in shared services everyday. However, there is a need to advertise and promote this everyday use of shared services and the benefit to the taxpayer. In our area, many local governments share equipment informally, such as sweepers and trucks, and share commodities such as salt. We also enter into more formal cooperative arrangements to share specialized equipment such as a crime scene investigation van that was purchased by the North Hills Council of Governments and shared by the participating municipalities. We are currently sharing GIS technology, which will result in significant municipal savings and enhanced services for the general public.

In Pine Township, Mercer County, a recent tragedy occurred where a firefighter was killed in line of duty. This was devastating to the volunteer fire company. To help out, volunteers

from fire companies all around the region gathered and manned that department for 2 weeks so that the fire company could get back on their feet after the accident. Unpaid volunteers helped out in this situation, not paid professionals.

Informal agreements and trading of road maintenance responsibilities often help to create a culture of increased cooperation. As municipalities continue to communicate and find that the informal agreements are beneficial, additional areas may be explored for opportunities to share services. Many examples of formalized planning and shared services have been going on for years unnoticed. One example is a joint stormwater management effort with 19 municipalities in the North Hills Council of Governments. In this case, we are working with municipalities in 4 different watersheds in upstream and downstream communities to implement a program of Best Management Practices and projects that will reduce downstream flooding and to develop a joint ordinance that will be compliant with Act 167 at the same time.

Intergovernmental cooperation does not have to be highly visible to be successful. It does not require individuals sitting in a thinktank to brainstorm ways that local government can make the best use of its resources. Instead, it is the individual practitioners of local government working together everyday to make the best use of local resources. Other examples of cooperation in our area include garbage contracts, cable franchise agreements, and shared police services, such as accident investigations. Our citizens often don't know about these efforts as they are not often publicized or seen. Just last week I attended a conference with the Allegheny League of Municipalities where local governments came together to learn and to share ideas. Many local governments across the state are actively looking for ideas of ways to share expenses, resources, and even technology.

Cranberry Township is currently participating in highway corridor planning effort that affects 3 different counties. Our township sits on the border of Allegheny and Beaver Counties and is part of the Route 19 corridor. Marshall Township, Allegheny County is just south of our township on the same corridor. There is an intersection on the border of our townships and Marshall Township has agreed to tie signalization into our township's program so that traffic signals will be synchronized along the corridor. One of the developers adjacent to the shared intersection will pay impact fees to both Cranberry and to Marshall due to our agreement, which is working to make development seamless in the community as a whole. This type of cooperation just makes sense.

Several years ago, Act 67 of 2000 authorized municipalities to engage in cooperative land use efforts through multimunicipal plans and implementation agreements. This flexible alternative allows municipalities to plan together, yet retain their own planning commission, zoning hearing board, and zoning ordinance. Act 67 provides incentives to cooperate by allowing those municipalities participating in a multimunicipal plan to provide for all uses within the area of the plan and not in each individual municipality, as is required when a municipality adopts its own comprehensive plan.

Due to Act 67 of 2000, nearly 700 local governments across the state are now involved in multimunicipal planning. In rural Susquehanna County in the northern part of the state townships are working together to plan for future growth from New York and New Jersey. In more urban

Bucks County, multimunicipal planning is helping to make development more compatible with neighboring communities while allowing each township to preserve its own identity. In these areas, the municipalities have adopted multimunicipal plans to take advantages of many of the act's benefits and to plan for their community's future.

While we agree that increased use of shared municipal services is a good thing, this does not mean that the epitome of shared municipal services is when every service is shared or merged. In contrast, the benefits of voluntary intergovernmental cooperation are that municipalities have the flexibility to work together to pool resources and see how they can serve their residents best by sharing services and when services are best performed alone. Municipalities should never be forced to "share" services, and instead should retain the ability to decide how to best serve their taxpayers.

There are situations where shared services do not work and we need to retain the freedom to decide what is best for our communities. Efforts to form regional police services have at times been met with great difficulty. In some situations, forming a regional police service actually adds another unit of government and can lead to a loss of local control over this service. In some cases, residents may be better served by contracting for police services with existing police departments. Other times, these efforts fail due to outside influences. Several years ago, an effort to create a large regional police force in Lancaster County failed, not because of the participating municipalities, which were strongly in favor of the regional force, but because the police did not like the idea and convinced the public that their level of service would decrease under a regional service.

The essential ingredients for intergovernmental cooperation are communication, education, and trust. Every opportunity to freely communicate promotes opportunities for cooperation. PSATS actively promotes communication and education through our state conference, various training opportunities, and our publications, such as the attached article from the November 2005 issue of the *Pennsylvania Township News*, which highlights multimunicipal planning efforts across the state.

There are no legal obstacles that I am aware of today that keep local government from undertaking any activity together. The Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, Act 67 of 2000, as well as the various municipal codes, provide the necessary authority and procedures for voluntary intergovernmental cooperation. At this time we do not believe that any statutory changes are needed to enable municipalities to cooperate and work together.

The state has consistently encouraged cooperative efforts through the Governor's Center for Local Government Services' Shared Services Program, which provides grants to cover up to 50 percent of the total cost for two or more municipalities to work together to perform any local government function. The circuit rider program, which has been eliminated, provided funding for municipalities to share personnel, such as a municipal manager or bookkeeper. We believe it is worth reviving.

The state should continue to promote shared services by providing additional funding to programs like the Shared Services program and the Land Use Planning and Technical Assistance

Program, which provides financial and technical assistance to those municipalities interested in planning and zoning.

In closing, the Association encourages voluntary cooperation among municipalities to provide the levels of service demanded by their citizens while retaining their local autonomy. Municipalities and their citizens should not, however, be forced into any multi-jurisdictional arrangement that is not practical for their particular state of affairs.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's discussion on shared municipal services. I'll be happy to clarify anything I've said and to answer any questions you may have.