

Supporting Consolidation

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I'm anxiously watching the state Senate as it debates a bill that would streamline the process of local government consolidation. The bill, which has already passed the Assembly by a vote of 117 to 26, would allow a public vote on consolidation if 10 percent of the municipality's electorate sign a petition calling for a referendum on the issue of consolidation, sharing services or dissolution.

I strongly support consolidation, along with many other ideas that came out of the Lundine Commission report, as an essential way to reduce the overwhelming burden on state taxpayers. And I like the idea that this bill would put the issue in the hands of voters, since it is taxpayers that are now footing the bill for these government services.

But I have to caution that passing this bill is only the beginning. We still need our elected officials - the governor and the legislators - to rein in state spending, and that includes consolidating state agencies and services. And even consolidation won't be worth much if they don't address the issue of passing bills with unfunded mandates, which only shift the costs of government from the state to the local level.