

## MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS MATTER

### *General Information about Michigan Townships*

Michigan governments efficiently, economically, and effectively protect the public safety of families and enhance the quality of life for more than half of Michigan's residents. Townships consistently provide more services with fewer resources to residents-and do it in an accountable manner.

Townships are governed by everyday residents serving each other.

Because neighbors are serving neighbors, townships match the needs of the communities they serve.

1. The premise that combining smaller units of government into large entities will produce cost savings in providing government services is overly simplistic. There is little evidence that larger units of government have lower costs-in fact, the opposite is generally true. Typically, greater local democracy-with smaller local jurisdictions-does not result in higher government costs per capita.
  - According to the U.S. Census Bureau, cities in Michigan spent nearly \$12 billion on municipal operations in fiscal year 2001-02. During the same period, townships spent \$1.7 billion-one eighth the amount of cities.
2. Michigan ranks relatively low in terms of the number of local governments per capita.
  - There are 1,242 townships in Michigan.
  - Michigan is one of 20 states that have the township form of government.
  - Michigan is 12<sup>th</sup> nationally in total number of local governments. \*
  - Michigan is 32<sup>nd</sup> nationally in total number of governments per person. \*
  - More than half of Michigan's population (50.1 %) lives in townships.
3. Townships are characteristically low cost entities, and sharing services is far more prevalent than local governments are generally given credit for. In relation to the magnitude of the state's structural deficit the amount of state money transferred to townships is extraordinarily small.

- Of the 1,166 township that provide fire services, 57% have a joint fire operation with another government unit.
- Of the 351 townships that provide police services, 74% have police patrols through contract or some other agreement with another local government unit.
- Of the 622 townships that operate ambulance service, 80% have services through joint operations or by contract.

#### 4. Services commonly provided by Townships:

- Fire, Police, and EMS
- Planning and Zoning
- Tax Collection
- Election Administration
- Property Assessing
- Public Water and Sewer
- Library Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Senior Programs
- Waste Hauling and Recycling
- Cemetery Operation
- Road Funding

With an understanding of the efficiencies, effectiveness, and economic accountability under which townships operate, it becomes important to carefully analyze the impact that the elimination of townships might have on everyday life in our state.

- The State of Michigan should only facilitate local dialogs on the wisdom of community consolidation or reorganization, including offering financial incentives to underwrite the costs of professional, objective studies that will help local residents decide if consolidation, mergers, or abolishment is appropriate.
- There does not appear to be a strong case that the urban consolidations of recent decades have induced unusually significant revitalization of core areas.
- Townships were created pursuant to the Michigan Constitution. The abolishment of townships as a form of government would require numerous constitutional

amendments adopted by the voters in a statewide general election. Consolidating or eliminating specific townships will require the consent of the electors in the townships.

Township residents have the right to at least the same expectations of governmental self-determination as their counterparts in cities and villages.

- The elimination of townships would likely result in a proliferation of special districts to govern services previously governed by townships. Special districts are generally unelected, unaccountable and do not provide the fiscal oversight currently performed by townships.

5. More than other local units of government, townships consistently do more with less. In 1946, revenue sharing was established to replace and relieve local taxation. Revenue sharing was designed to be flexible, non-restricted funding that communities could use to best fit their needs. Now, money that local communities rely on to pay for services that directly impact the lives of residents is continually being threatened.

- Townships receive both statutory revenue sharing and constitutional revenue sharing. However, statutory revenue sharing has consistently been reduced over the years.
- Statutory revenue sharing for townships has gone from \$90 million to \$20 million since 2001-02.
- Townships, despite having more than 50% of the state's population, receive considerably less funding **per capita** than cities and villages.
- In the current fiscal year (2006-07), cities received a total revenue sharing amount of \$748,438,714.
- In the current fiscal year (2006-07), villages received a total revenue sharing amount of \$7,648,821.
- In the current fiscal year (2006-07), townships received a total revenue sharing amount of \$337,296,134.

*\* Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau that includes schools and charter schools in the definition of local government. The number of local governments in Michigan is actually inflated because Michigan ranks 4<sup>th</sup> nationally in the number of charter schools.*

## MYTHS V. FACTS ABOUT MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS

MYTH: Michigan has more local units of government than any other state.

*FACT: Michigan ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> nationally in total number of governments per person.*

MYTH: There are too many townships in Michigan

*FACT: According to a Wayne State University study, local government tax burden per capita in Michigan is below the national average, ranking 41<sup>st</sup> among the states. Michigan is 12<sup>th</sup> nationally in total number of governments.*

MYTH: Michigan is not competitive in the global economy because there are too many governmental units.

*FACT: Local governments work more closely with small business, both recruiting and expansion, which provide more jobs locally for families.*

MYTH: When it comes to government, bigger is better.

*FACT: Township governments can better meet the needs of the communities it serves because township governments understand the needs of the local community. Township officials live and work in the communities they represent.*

MYTH: It costs too much to run townships.

*FACT: More than 50% of the state's residents live in townships. Despite having the smaller portion of population, cities spend eight times as much as townships on operations and services, according to U. S. Census Bureau.*

MYTH: Townships are not using the revenue sharing for emergency services.

*FACT: Numerous townships are using revenue sharing to support emergency services. Revenue sharing was never intended to be a restricted revenue expenditure.*

MYTH: Townships don't cooperate on services.

*FACT: Of the 1,166 townships that provide fire services, 57% have a joint fire operation with another government unit. Of the 351 townships that provide police services, 74% have police patrols through contract or some other agreement with another local government unit. Of the 622 townships that operate ambulance services, 80% have services through joint operations or by contract.*

MYTH: Townships duplicate services provided by county government.

*FACT: Township services in no way duplicate services provided by the county.*

MYTH: Michigan is one of the few states that still have township governments.

*FACT: Michigan is one of the 20 states that have the township form of government. Townships are created pursuant to the Michigan Constitution.*