Townships represent local self-governance in its truest and purest form. Elected by their neighbors and fellow residents to carry out the responsibilities of running the community, township supervisors reflect the values of the people they serve.

Citizen polls have indicated time and time again that people have more confidence in their local elected officials than in their state and federal representatives. Local government, the government closest to the people, can best respond to the needs and demands of its citizens.

The state legislature must grant local governments more flexibility to serve the citizens who elected them and provide townships with the authority and tools to respond to the needs of their constituents. Unfortunately, through the efforts of various special interests, the municipal codes and other statutes that govern the actions of local governments have been eroded and weakened. These changes often come at the expense of the citizens and taxpayers of townships.

Whether it be the loss of tax revenues without replacement or the weakening of township land use authority, these concessions have rendered ineffective, or eliminated altogether, many of the tools the General Assembly has granted to townships to serve their communities.

Therefore, the Association opposes any effort to erode township authority by:

- taking away a power or taxing ability without replacement;
- pre-empting the existing authority of local government;
- eliminating or transferring any local government functions to another entity;
- moving toward a larger, more centralized government; or
- imposing mandates that place a fiscal burden on townships or weaken township officials’ ability to serve their constituents.

The ability of local officials to carry forward the values of the people they have been elected to serve should not be sacrificed to the political pressures of special interests. Such concessions serve only to enhance the financial prosperity of a privileged few at the expense of those who make their homes in townships.

Government by referendum

PSATS opposes any mandated referendum for local government. Just like their counterparts in the state and federal governments, township officials have been elected to represent the citizens of their communities to the best of their ability. This includes making decisions about raising revenues, spend-
The Association supports voluntary cooperation as a means for local governments to efficiently provide the levels of service demanded by their citizens while retaining their local autonomy.

Redistricting
PSATS urges redistricting efforts to preserve the principle of one person, one vote, by placing municipalities entirely within the same legislative district as a community of interest to avoid situations where individual municipalities are divided into different legislative districts.

Intergovernmental cooperation
The commonwealth, its agencies, and political subdivisions exist to serve the same constituency: the citizens of Pennsylvania. Therefore, it is essential that all three levels of government — federal, state, and local — forge a better cooperative partnership and work together for the benefit of the citizens they represent.

For such a cooperative relationship to become reality, the commonwealth and its agencies must recognize the need for local autonomy. They should comply with local zoning, subdivision, and other ordinances and pay all related fees and costs when they conduct activities within the boundaries of any municipality, the same as any other entity.

The majority of townships participate in an intergovernmental cooperation initiative with another local government. The Association supports voluntary cooperation as a means for local governments to efficiently provide the levels of service demanded by their citizens while retaining their local autonomy. Municipalities should not, however, be forced into any multi-jurisdictional arrangement that is not supported by the local elected officials as being in the best interest of the municipality’s citizens.

Critics have suggested that local governments should be forced to regionalize municipal police departments, volunteer fire departments, sewer and water authorities, and other local services, regardless of the wishes of their citizens. PSATS opposes the mandatory regionalization of services against the will of the elected officials and their constituents. If it will benefit their residents, local officials will initiate and participate in intergovernmental cooperation.

Centralization is not necessarily better, and whether services should be provided by individual municipalities or combined through voluntary intermunicipal cooperation is a decision that must remain with each local government and its citizens.

Annexation, mergers, and consolidation
The Association believes that the justification for any boundary change, whether it is consolidation, merger, annexation, or the formation of a new municipality from all or part of an existing municipality, should be based on a demonstration of valid community interest.

Many of those who espouse mandatory regionalization and consolidation assume that the people are behind this. However, the problem they are trying to fix is one perceived by bureaucrats who are several steps removed...
PSATS opposes legislation, including an amendment to the state constitution, that would diminish the critical role of municipalities by designating the county as the primary form of local government.

Townships are key to the delivery of local services, and requiring residents to rely on a more distant layer of government would usurp local democracy.

PSATS supports the Pennsylvania Constitution provisions that require a majority of the citizens in the affected municipalities to approve any boundary change.

Regional government

The Association opposes any attempt to “right-size” municipal government by moving to a larger, more centralized form of government. Despite the contention of various special interests that there are too many local governments in Pennsylvania, no one has ever proven that bigger, centralized government is better or even more cost-effective than township government.

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The Association opposes any legislation or any state agency directive that would dissolve municipalities into unincorporated territory and give the county or state government the authority to administer this territory. County or state government should not be given additional municipal powers to administer unincorporated territory. Instead, the legislature should consider giving such powers to municipalities to help alleviate distressed financial situations.

Borough incorporation

PSATS supports the Pennsylvania Constitution provisions that require a majority of the citizens in the affected municipalities to approve any boundary change. However, PSATS opposes the creation of new boroughs from existing townships of the second class.

from those who actually live and work in our system of local government every day.

State government should not take a lead role in seeking out opportunities for and pursuing local government boundary changes, and at no time should any local government be forced without citizen approval to merge, consolidate, or form regional entities to perform local functions. Such action should be initiated only by petition of the citizens of the affected municipalities or by agreement of the governing bodies, and the question should be voted on and approved by a majority of those voting in each of the affected municipalities.

The residents of all affected municipalities should make the ultimate determination on the type of government and boundary in which they live.

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