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. 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.

**PSATS Opposes:**
Any effort to erode township authority by:
- Preempting the existing authority of local government, including land use;
- Eliminating or transferring any local government functions to another entity;
- Taking away a power or taxing ability without replacement;
- Moving towards a larger, more centralized government; or
- Imposing mandates that place a fiscal burden on townships or weaken township officials’ ability to serve their constituents.

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**PSATS Lays Out 2022 Legislative Priorities**

**Preserving Local Democracy**

Township Grassroots Advocacy Can Help Advance Legislation
Provide Common-sense Relief for Unfunded Mandates

PSATS supports common-sense mandate reform, including local government impact statements for all proposed legislation; requirements for state cost-sharing of new mandates that would financially impact local governments; and a local government mandates task force to review mandates and provide recommendations for relief. PSATS supports mandate relief, including the following:

- A common-sense approach to stormwater management — Municipalities are mandated to oversee the quality and quantity of public and private stormwater discharges by federal law and regulated by the state Department of Environmental Protection. PSATS supports:
  - A flexible menu of cost-effective options to maximize the reduction in pollutants and sediment in the state’s waterways that doesn’t bankrupt communities or shut down economic growth. This menu should allow municipalities to work together creatively to share the burden of compliance.
  - An equitable and proportional allocation of the responsibility for reducing discharges between point and nonpoint sources and funding to implement these reductions.
  - Amendment of DEP stormwater regulations to streamline permitting for local governments and reduce requirements for low-impact projects.

- Modernization of outdated mandates that waste taxpayer funds — Lawmakers should support legislation to do the following:
  - Expand advertising options to include legal ads on websites and in mass-circulation community newspapers.
  - Reform the Prevailing Wage Act, which requires local government and contractors to pay state-established wage rates for public works projects. This law applies to road projects that cost at least $100,000 (depending on the funding source) and all other public works projects that are $25,000 or more.

Invest in Pennsylvania’s Transportation Infrastructure

Act 89 of 2013 enacted transportation funding reform for state and local roads by changing the way the gas tax was levied in Pennsylvania, allowing the tax to rise with extended higher fuel prices and creating a “floor” to ensure a minimum funding level if gas tax prices dropped. The gas tax is levied on fuel sold in Pennsylvania and is the source of revenue for Liquid Fuels funds that townships use to maintain local roads and bridges. Act 89’s phased implementation led to an increase in Liquid Fuels funding from $320.8 million in 2013 to a high of $500.7 million in 2019 but has since dropped due to the increase in more fuel-efficient vehicles.

An increase in oil prices directly increases road maintenance expenses. Townships need to put fuel into vehicles to maintain roads, including winter maintenance, and petroleum products are a primary component in asphalt and sealcoat. Oil is used on dirt roadways to control dust. As such, PSATS opposes a gas tax holiday unless a full replacement of Liquid Fuels funds is provided. Road maintenance and repairs cannot simply be put on hold without further damage.

Municipalities should receive a fair share of state liquid fuels funds to adequately maintain the local road portion of the entire commonwealth system. PSATS supports the use of a blend of revenue sources, including the oil franchise tax, registration fees, and public-private partnerships, to fund the state and local highway and bridge systems.

The recent Transportation Revenue Options Commission Report in Pennsylvania identified a $3.9 billion funding gap (in 2021 dollars) for local roads and bridges and calls for local governments to share in new or replacement gas tax revenue options. PSATS supports at least 14% of any mileage-based fee that would be paired with a congestion fee for short, but time-consuming, trips in urbanized areas, as well as 100% of a package delivery fee. Other revenue options include doubling registration fees and increasing the gas tax before it begins to be phased out.
Provide Legal Advertising Options

Local governments are required to keep the public informed of meetings, bid opportunities, proposed ordinances, and more through the placement of expensive legal advertisements in newspapers of general circulation. However, papers are charging more, publishing less often, and requiring more advance notice. Meanwhile, readership continues to decline as residents increasingly look to online sources for real-time news and information. Most papers are going online yet refuse to support online access!

PSATS supports additional advertising options to provide competition for townships’ limited funds while reaching a wider audience with a shorter turnaround time for meeting notices, contract opportunities, and proposed ordinances and budgets.

Enact Right-To-Know Law Reform

PSATS supports the public’s right to view and obtain copies of municipal public documents, but the current law places a financial burden on municipalities and taxpayers. Commercial interests, particularly out-of-state businesses, are using public records about law-abiding citizens and taxpayers for private gain, often free-of-charge under existing fee schedules. In fact, a 2016 study found that 26 percent of all the requests for public documents received that year were from outside of Pennsylvania, with almost 71 percent of these being made for a commercial purpose. The study also found that local governments overwhelmingly complied with the law.

**PSATS Supports:**

SB 312 would allow townships to charge a reasonable fee for commercial requests, including selling or reselling any portion of the records, using names and addresses from the records for commercial solicitation, or any other purposes intended to generate revenue. Would exempt media requests.

SB 552 would allow townships to petition the Office of Open Records for relief from a vexatious requester. A “vexatious requester” is someone who uses the Right-to-Know Law with malicious intent to intimidate, harass, or punish an agency, resulting in wasting taxpayer dollars and resources.

SB 745 would exempt birthdates from the RTKL.

HB 978 would further clarify that personal financial information, such as account passwords, tax forms, benefit election forms, account information, and dependent information, is confidential. The bill would also protect township account numbers, routing numbers, credit card numbers, and PINs from disclosure.

Broadband Deployment

The digital divide was never clearer than what was brought into focus during the pandemic of 2020-21. PSATS supports the safe and orderly deployment of both wired and wireless broadband services throughout all areas of the commonwealth to provide reliable, high-speed internet access. All levels of government — local, state, and federal — must work together with the business community, higher education, and broadband providers to close the growing digital divide.

PSATS believes that township government is a critical partner to these efforts as local officials are intimately aware of the internet access that is available, and sorely lacking, in areas of their communities.

**PSATS Supports:**

Efforts by the Pennsylvania Broadband Development Authority to create a statewide broadband development plan to access and distribute new federal and state aid for unserved and underserved communities. The charge of the authority is to seek to close Pennsylvania's ever-present digital divide and allow Pennsylvanians to get connected at home, at work, or on the road.

Coordination of state and federal funding, including use of a portion of the Commonwealth’s American Rescue Plan Funding, to leverage broadband development for unserved and underserved communities.
Public Safety

The Association believes that state, federal, and local government are partners in the provision of public safety services for Pennsylvania’s residents, including emergency management, fire protection, police protection, and ambulance and rescue response.

Townships need creative, flexible tools to ensure that they can uphold the critical role of first responder. Pennsylvania is diverse, so rigid, one-size-fits-all solutions are bound to fail. Instead, providing options that allow local governments to work together to maximize the effective delivery of services for their communities should be the goal.

Police Services

PSATS has long supported the use of radar and LIDAR for municipal police departments, which would provide a critical tool for enforcement of speed limits. As other currently authorized speed enforcement tools are increasingly unavailable, the need for this tool has never been more important. PSATS supports HB 606 and SB 419, which would provide these valuable public safety tools to municipal police under the same rules as the State Police.

Due to state mandates, local police service is extremely expensive. PSATS opposes any plan to mandate that certain townships pay for the services of the Pennsylvania State Police. This includes required per capita or similar fees for townships that do not provide police services, as well as mandated charges for crime lab services, use of the State Police helicopter, and other PSP services for any municipality. However, we do support legislation that would allow townships to voluntarily contract with the PSP for patrol and ordinance enforcement services.

The General Assembly should provide relief to municipalities with local police service by enacting municipal pension reforms that enable townships to enroll new officers in defined contribution plans with a generous employer contribution, instead of the current mandated defined benefit plan. To ensure financial sustainability, pension benefits should not be expanded.

PSATS also strongly supports arbitration reform. When collective bargaining negotiations go to arbitration, both parties should equally share the cost of the third-neutral arbitrator. PSATS believes that the board of arbitration should be required to consider a municipality’s ability to pay before making any award and that communities should be given a way out of awards that create a financial hardship on a municipality and its residents.

Finally, legislators should refrain from requiring new costly benefits, such as SB 775, unless full funding is provided by the commonwealth. SB 775 would amend the Workers’ Compensation Law to provide post-traumatic stress injury coverage for first responders, including professional and volunteer firefighters, members of a volunteer ambulance corps, and police officers.

Fire and EMS Response

The SR 6 Commission released a report in 2018 detailing ways to address the challenges affecting the commonwealth’s emergency responders, including but not limited to the recruitment and retention of volunteers and the availability of cost-effective, necessary, and appropriate training. While some of these recommendations have been implemented, many are outstanding and should be given much-needed attention.

The need to enhance the recruitment and retention of emergency responder volunteers is paramount. Attention must be focused on removing barriers, such as current training requirements. Reduce the hours needed for less than command-level positions and implement risk-based training requirements. The State Fire Commissioner should create a tiered system for training and certifying firefighters that takes into consideration rank or position and provides training that is commensurate with these positions, community risk assessment, and variable standards of coverage.

In addition, PSATS urges the State Fire Commissioner to work with public high schools and vocational-technical schools to provide firefighter and EMS training and certifications to the next generation of emergency service providers. As such, PSATS supports SB 83 and SB 1027, which would make this a reality.