

**Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee
Public Hearing on SB 698 P.N. 782**

October 12, 2021

**Testimony of:
Michael J. Witherel, Solicitor, PMAA
Gary Watters, Executive Director, Altoona-Logan Township Mobile Medical Emergency
Department Authority**

Good afternoon, Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Muth and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. Thank you for your invitation to provide testimony on SB 698 P.N. 782.

We are testifying on behalf of the Pennsylvania Municipal Authorities Association (PMAA) which represents over 700 municipal authorities across the Commonwealth provide drinking water, wastewater treatment, waste management, and other community projects and services to over six million Pennsylvania citizens.

PMAA supports SB 698 P.N. 782 amending Title 53, Chapter 56 (Municipal Authorities). The bill adds public safety authorities to the scope of projects permitted under the Municipality Authorities Act (MAA). Specifically, “public safety projects” is defined as fire protection services, emergency medical services (EMS) and administrative support to coordinate these services. To underscore our support, PMAA, both in 2020 and 2021, adopted the following resolution as part of our advocacy platform:

Resolution 20-22

RESOLVED, That PMAA support legislation adding public safety services to permitted projects under the Municipality Authorities Act.

Multiple reports and studies have shown again and again the many issues facing fire and emergency medical services in communities across the state. One of those issues is the ability to create regional fire and EMS services. Currently, Pennsylvania only offers a limited number of options for the formation of fire and EMS services. To address this issue, the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee invited PMAA along with other stakeholder organizations to a number of roundtable discussions prior to the introduction of SB 698 P.N. 782.

An authority, by virtue of the Municipality Authorities Act, is an alternate vehicle for

accomplishing public purposes rather than through direct action of local governments. They may provide services on a regional level and finance its services by means of user fees. Authorities also commonly serve more than one municipality to provide operational efficiencies and economies of scale. Furthermore, the operation of authority projects and services does not compete with all the other traditional components and associated costs of local government. For these reasons, the authority model is perfectly suited for providing public safety services on a regional level.

To bolster this viewpoint, it is important to understand the governing structure of a municipal authority. Authorities can be created by any county, borough, city, or township, functioning singly or **jointly** with one or more other local governments. Once created, the authority manages all aspects of the operations freeing the municipality of these critical and complex responsibilities. It is also important to note that the MAA prohibits the creation of a new authority that may “duplicate or compete with existing enterprises serving substantially the same purposes.”

One item of concern we would like to point out is the authorization of public safety authorities under SB 698 P.N. 782. Although PMAA is not opposed to this provision, we continue to support the creation of public safety authorities **jointly** by two or more municipalities as established under the MAA. There are many examples of **joint authorities** achieving great success in accomplishing the goal of regionalization.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We are happy to answer any questions.