



**TESTIMONY BY
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS**

**BEFORE THE
SENATE VETERANS AFFAIRS
& EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE**

ON

SB 698: COUNTYWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY AUTHORITIES

PRESENTED BY

**ANDREW J. BONI
PSATS FIRST VICE PRESIDENT**

**OCTOBER 12, 2021
CONNELLSVILLE, PA**

- Chairman Stefano and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee:
- My name is Andrew J. Boni and I am the First Vice President and Board Chairman for the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors and a supervisor for Perry Township, Fayette County. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on behalf of our member townships.
- The Association represents Pennsylvania's 1,454 townships of the second class and is committed to preserving and strengthening township government and securing greater visibility and involvement for townships in the state and federal political arenas. Townships of the second class cover 95% of Pennsylvania's land mass and represent more residents — 5.7 million Pennsylvanians — than any other type of political subdivision in the commonwealth.
- SB 698 would authorize counties to create public safety authorities for the administration of fire and EMS services. As an aside, it seems odd that, in a traditional public safety model, police services are left out at a time when recruiting and retention challenges are also affecting law enforcement. PSATS supports alternative options for the provision of local police services, such as authorizing municipalities to enter into voluntary contracts for local police services, which could be with an authority or county entity.
- There are a host of unanswered questions... Is this a financial authority only or would it also be an operating authority? Is there a minimum or maximum length for a contract or agreement between the municipality and the authority? Can a municipality withdraw from an agreement?
- We must also question why an ordinance must be enacted to adopt an agreement? Why make this more complex than the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act, which now requires only a resolution to adopt an agreement? Ordinances require expenses legal advertising and are difficult to change, where resolutions are less expensive, easier to change, and do not require legal advertising.
- What is the reasoning behind the creation of these authorities? If it is new revenue raising options, which it appears to be, then perhaps we should consider giving municipalities the ability to charge fees to pay for EMS and fire services, not just an authority. This would eliminate a new layer of bureaucracy and allow for more flexible options.
- For example, PSATS members would like to increase the amount of the ambulance tax they can currently levy under the Second Class Township Code from .5 to 1.5 mills. These revenues could only be used to support ambulance companies.
- Townships are statutorily required to ensure fire and EMS services are provided to their communities and should therefore have all the tools necessary to do so. If these tools are provided to the county instead of the townships, should we revisit whose responsibility it is to ensure these services are available for our mutual residents?

- If it is efficiencies that we are trying to accomplish, then we should consider working within the existing Intergovernmental Cooperation law or let those who want to consider public safety authorities to do so in a flexible design, with no minimum level of participation and no county permission.
- SB 698 would require municipalities representing at least 51 percent of a county's population to seek county permission before creating a multi-municipal public safety authority and this limited option is only available when the county is not creating their own. As a result, there can only be 1 authority per county.
- SB 698 should be amended to provide for local municipal choice, including an option for multi-municipal authorities *without* the need for county approval and any population restrictions or minimum number of participating municipalities. Municipalities should also be able to participate across county boundaries. Some communities would also seek cooperation across state boundaries as well.
- Multi-municipal cooperation can and should remain a viable alternative that allows local officials to maximize their creativity in flexible arrangements. As written, we do not believe the bill provides for the needed flexibility.
- There are existing multi-municipal efforts that are effective and have worked for years, yet do not meet the population thresholds set in the proposal. Fortunately, these existing multi-municipal EMS authorities are grandfathered and exempted.
- Multi-municipal cooperation is clearly a flexible and viable option that encourages communication and creative solutions. Municipalities do currently cooperate under existing law when working to fund fire and EMS services. Perhaps we should study successful solutions and see if they could be shared statewide.
- The legislation specifically exempts police, although police provide critical public safety services and an authority could be a viable means to fund police services. PSATS supports the creation of a dedicated real estate tax millage of up to 5 mills to fund police services.
- Is creating a new layer of government going to solve this problem and will it have unintended consequences? We cannot agree to only a county authority model or even a model that requires a minimum number of municipalities or population to be created. Options for emergency services need to be flexible and allow for creativity. One size fits all is NOT a viable solution.
- SB 698 as currently written extends the tool of public safety authorities to counties while placing handcuffs on municipal entities. The responsibility and tools to do the job should be available to the same entities.
- While PSATS appreciates the changes made to this legislation from its original draft, we cannot support SB 698 as currently written.

- We look forward to working with you to improve this legislation to help better serve the public safety needs of the citizens and their local governments