



## Grand Valley Metropolitan Council

Algoma Township•Allendale Township•Alpine Township•Byron Township•Caledonia Township•Cannon Township•Cascade Township  
Cedar Springs•Coopersville•Courtland Township•East Grand Rapids•Gaines Township•Georgetown Township•Grand Rapids  
Grand Rapids Township•Grandville•Greenville•Hastings•Hudsonville•Ionia•Jamestown Township•Kent County•Kentwood•Middleville  
Ottawa County•Plainfield Township•Rockford•Sparta•Sparta Township•Tallmadge Township•Walker•Wayland•Wyoming

June 7, 2007

West Michigan State Representatives  
Michigan House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909

**RE: Grand Valley Metro Council Opposition to HBs 4780-4788 – the Township Services Consolidation Act**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council (GVMC), we want to clearly articulate GVMC's opposition to House Bills 4780-4788, known as the Township Services Consolidation Act.

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Metro Council on June 7, 2007, Council members – representing Kent and Ottawa Counties and 31 cities, villages and townships throughout the Grand Rapids metropolitan area – voted unanimously to endorse the recommendation of the GVMC Legislative Committee to oppose this package of bills. As you know, the legislation in question would require so-called “rural” townships to transfer to their respective county responsibility for delivering certain services, including assessing, taxation and elections. Under the bills, “rural townships” are defined as those under a population of 10,000 and those under 20,000 that do not provide police and fire service on a 24-hour basis and do not provide public water and sewer services to more than 50 percent of their residents.

While at first-glance, this may appear as an effort to streamline, reform and ultimately lower the cost of delivering local government services, it could instead have just the opposite effect. It forces townships that already provide these services in an efficient, cost-effective manner to surrender these functions to their county government. The affected townships have, in most instances, decades of experience in providing critical services like property assessing, the collection of taxes for the township as well as other local taxing authorities, and the administration of elections. They are staffed efficiently, and those staff people – under the supervision of locally-elected officials – possess the levels of experience and expertise to properly administer these functions.

We fail to see how simply transferring such complex administrative functions to county governments – based solely on population and current service provision thresholds – would benefit township residents and taxpayers and result in cost savings. Under the bills, townships

are required to reimburse counties for the added costs that county governments would incur in providing these services so we feel it is quite unlikely that this package would yield cost savings and result in the expected “reform” of government.

## **MORE EFFECTIVE APPROACHES**

The Grand Valley Metro Council was founded in 1990 by county and local officials seeking a regional mechanism to discuss, analyze and develop more efficient methods for delivering local public services. Since that time, Metro Council members have collaborated on dozens of initiatives to more efficiently deliver police patrols and fire protection, water and sewer services, improvements to the region’s transportation network, and state-of-the-art geographic information services to communities throughout the Grand Rapids metropolitan area.

Such regional, collaborative efforts must continue. GVMC members believe, sincerely, that the best way to promote that is by removing current statutory barriers to collaboration and service sharing. These common sense, statutory solutions were referenced in GVMC’s **Policy Statement on State Budget and Taxation Issues**, approved by the Metro Council on April 9, 2007:

“The GVMC strongly supports amendments to current state laws that will remove statutory obstacles faced by Michigan counties, cities, villages and townships desiring to form service sharing partnerships. For decades, state statutes enabling county and local governments to form multi-jurisdictional compacts to share the cost of service provision have contained language that requires payment of the highest level of wages and benefits to public employees assigned to such work arrangements. These statutory provisions have stalled service sharing partnerships across the state.

In order to remove these obstacles, GVMC is working with Representatives and Senators to champion amendments to several existing state statutes that will make it easier for counties and communities to share resources and more efficiently deliver critical local services:

1. 1967 Public Act 7 – Urban Cooperation Act
2. 1967 Public Act 8 – Intergovernmental Transfer of Functions and Responsibilities Act
3. 1989 Public Act 292 – The Metropolitan Councils Act

## **RESTORING COMMON SENSE TO COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

In 1969 state lawmakers passed Public Act 312, a law that triggers compulsory binding arbitration when public safety employees – police and firefighters -- and a local government employer reach an

impasse during the process of collective bargaining for wages and benefits. In exchange, police officers and firefighters relinquished the right to strike.

Over the years, Act 312 has cost local communities and their taxpayers millions of dollars in increased costs. Under the law, the arbitration panel assigned to any particular dispute must choose either the employer's offer or the union's offer -- not something in-between. What's more, the arbitration panel is prohibited from considering the fiscal health of the community and, therefore, its ability to pay the wage and benefit levels selected by the arbitration panel.

The GVMC strongly supports amendments to Act 312 of 1969 to restore balance to the arbitration process and require arbitration panels to consider the community's fiscal health and ability to pay an arbitration award.

In addition, GVMC supports amendments to Act 312 to improve the process used to select arbitration panel members.”


These statutory reforms, coupled with a willingness of state government to facilitate local dialogue on cooperation, consolidation, and service sharing, will – in our opinion – achieve far more tangible results than legislative mandates such as those proposed under HBs 4780-4788.

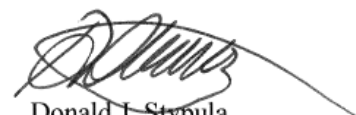
Representative, county and local governments did not cause Michigan state government's structural deficit. But, county and local officials have demonstrated through their actions that they can work together to devise new, more efficient methods for delivering critical public services at the local and regional level. We offer you our pledge to continue these efforts. In turn, we sincerely hope that you offer us your pledge to oppose enactment of the Township Services Consolidation Act.

If you have any comments or questions, or if GVMC can be of further assistance, please contact GVMC Executive Director Donald Stypula anytime via cell phone at 616-450-5217, in the office at 776-7604, at home at 257-3372 or via email at [stypulad@gvmc.org](mailto:stypulad@gvmc.org).

Respectfully submitted,

**THE GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL**

  
James R. Buck  
Chair

  
Donald J. Stypula  
Executive Director