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HOUSE PANEL TOLD LOCAL GOVERNMENT COOPERATION SHOULD FOCUS ON ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION

Michigan local governments outperform their counterparts in other large-population states in providing low-cost services, and state government should encourage local governments to work together to develop regional economic revitalization plans, according to information presented to the Michigan House Committee on Intergovernmental and Regional Affairs by Michigan Townships Association (MTA) Executive Director Larry Merrill.

Michigan local governments, and in particular townships, already achieve a high level of cooperation to deliver services that are economical and efficient, Merrill told the committee at its noon meeting today.

“While some assume that government in Michigan just cannot get anything right, the vast majority of local government officials have been quietly serving the public in many exemplary ways,” Merrill asserted. “U.S. Census Bureau data shows that we are far below the national average of larger states in terms of local government expenditures per capita. If Michigan’s local governments spent at the national average, they would need an additional \$3 billion per year. That is a huge savings to Michigan taxpayers.”

Merrill suggested that additional incentives or threats by state government toward local governments to consolidate services would likely not result in significant savings in local government budgets. Certain services such as utilities are already delivered regionally, and other labor-intensive services such as law enforcement do not become less expensive as the size of the department increases. “Increased size does not reduce the cost of government, and there are no shortages of examples to illustrate this principle,” Merrill told the committee.

Nonetheless, the Michigan economy could recover much quicker if local governments had more incentives to cooperate regionally on economic revitalization strategies. Merrill described to committee members MTA’s “Pillars of Prosperity” initiative to encourage township officials to work with other local government entities to create communities that are more attractive to talented and well-educated workers and to 21st-century economy employers. He also explained that Michigan prosperity hinges on promoting agriculture, lifelong learning, wise use of natural resources, recruiting 21st-century economy businesses, and encouraging Michigan’s entrepreneurs and innovators, including immigrants who want to create new businesses.



The Michigan Townships Association promotes the interests of townships by fostering strong, vibrant communities; advocating legislation to meet 21st-century challenges; developing knowledgeable township officials and enthusiastic supporters of township government; and encouraging ethical practices of elected officials who uphold the traditions and unique characteristics of township government and the values of the people of Michigan.

