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Letter: Keep Michigan mining decisions at the local level

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It's like a bad sense of déjà vu.

After two previous — and fortunately unsuccessful — attempts, legislation is again before the state Senate that completely eliminates local voices and oversight of sand and gravel pit operations — regardless of their location or impact on the community. That's right — that means a pit could be located within 50 feet of your property line, your child's school or daycare, or where you work, and the current local approval process would be stripped.

You might think this doesn't apply to you — you don't have mining operations in your community. But you could — and your local government couldn't do anything to regulate it or ensure proper restoration is done.

Local governments, under current law, have limited authority over aspects of these mining operations. But the authority they do have must be retained so that they can help protect the safety, quality of life and character of their communities. Senate Bills 429-431 are being considered by the state Senate Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The bills, with just one exception, would strip away local authority and instead move the entire permitting and oversight process to the state level — far removed from the community and people who are most impacted.

There is no monitoring or control — at any level of government — of truck routes, so the heavy gravel trains could rumble past your house or business without any local input.

The only time constraints would be for truck-loading hours — 13 hours a day on weekdays and 11 hours on Saturdays, beginning at 6 a.m. The bills are silent on hours of operation for blasting, screening, crushing and loading rail cars — potentially allowing 24/7 operations. And the noise? The decibel level can exceed noise standards for international airports, just 400 feet from a residential dwelling.

Additionally concerning is that this is yet another attempt to preempt local governments' authority. If this legislation is successful, it will be the first of many other special interests seeking to circumvent local regulations by attempting to change state law to meet their needs.

An alternative bill has been introduced by Sen. Kevin Daley, R-Lum, to ensure local voices are protected. SB 442 is better for residents and local governments. The compromise bill clarifies the permitting process and more clearly defines the "very serious consequences" that mining operations can have on communities and the environment.

On behalf of all Michigan communities and residents, we are asking state legislators to fight for their communities. Please side with your constituents, not with special interests — vote against Senate Bills 429-431.

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