



New York State Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness **Early Recommendations**

The Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness will report in April 2008 with comprehensive recommendations, but chose to start the process with early consensus resolutions in the Executive Budget. While some of these recommendations are simply good government measures, like support for Wicks Reform and improved financial data that will allow benchmarking and cost comparisons, many of the recommendations below will remove impediments or increase the ability of local governments to act cooperatively. Recommendations include:

Enhanced and Refocused Shared Services Grant Program – The Budget includes an enhanced grant program with increased funding focused on consolidation and major service sharing arrangements that save taxpayer dollars. **Local Government Efficiency Grants** would be a redesign of the existing shared services program that includes new consolidation incentives, technical assistance, and state agency services (\$30 million appropriation). **21st Century Demonstration Grants** are an exciting new component of the program. These grants would provide support for local leaders willing to implement transformative changes in areas like schools consolidation or countywide or regional service models in areas like highway maintenance, policing, and smart growth planning.

Highway Service Consolidation Incentives – Funding is provided for a highway consolidation incentive is that would grant a bonus equal to 30% of the CHIPS aid (phased down over five years), to local governments that functionally consolidate highway operations countywide (including either 90% of non-state maintained roads or all of the towns within a county). The CHIPS formula would be adjusted to provide a hold harmless provision so that municipalities receiving lower reimbursement rates per lane mile may accept responsibility for road maintenance from municipalities receiving a higher rate of reimbursement without a loss in reimbursements.

Coordination of State and Local Highway Services – Changes in State law would permit greater cooperation between the state and localities for routine highway maintenance, snow & ice conditions, and under emergency conditions.

Health Insurance – Intermunicipal employee health insurance approaches are facilitated through eased provisions for forming municipal cooperatives, requiring insurers to provide claims experience, and reevaluation of requirements for local governments with fewer than 50 employees.

Procurement Reform – Increased thresholds are provided for competitive bid requirements, and the State's Office of General Services will expand services to offer local governments a broad selection of equipment and services that they can purchase off state contract.

Early Recommendations, Continued

Assessing & Tax Receiving – Funding for studies of consolidated or coordinated assessing and tax receiving is available. Aid will be increased for equitable assessing that meets modern professional standards, including appropriate scale. Elective offices for assessors and tax receivers are phased out, as are duplicative village assessing units.

Multi-County Positions – The law often contains residency requirements for certain public officers, which may be particularly difficult to meet in rural areas. The budget contains proposals to allow counties to share the positions of Director of Weights and Measures, as well as Public Health Director, and board of health.

Petition Process Improvements –A clarified and simpler petition process for citizens wishing to consolidate or dissolve municipalities and fire districts is provided to ensure that citizen initiatives that can reduce local taxes are not stymied by unclear and complex requirements.

Reforms for Commissioner-Run Special Districts – Like school board members and fire commissioners, special district commissioners would not receive compensation or other perks. Virtually all of these commissioner-run special districts are located on Long Island where many abuses have been disclosed. Independent sanitation districts would be subject to town management, which will increase accountability and transparency and can help reduce costs, according to studies by Nassau County Comptroller Howard Weitzman.

Improved Local Financial Data – Improvements in state requirements for local government financial reporting will facilitate local studies, benchmarking and comparison of costs for services such as police, fire and highway operations.