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SMITH - CONSOLIDATION CAN'T COME AT THE WILL OF THE CONSOLIDATED

Asking Mayors to Give Up Jobs for Greater Good a 'Conflict of Interests'

TRENTON - Senator Bob Smith, Co-Chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Government Consolidation and Shared Services, issued the following statement regarding today's committee meeting, in which the panel took testimony from local officials on specific proposals to consolidate governments in New Jersey:

"Today's testimony regarding consolidation proposals of municipalities illustrated one basic truth - local officials are for consolidation, as long as you don't ask them to consolidate.

"I don't want to downplay the hardworking local officials who strive to do what's best for their constituents every day. But the problem with the voluntary consolidation model favored by the League of Municipalities and numerous municipal officials throughout the State, is that they would have the option to consolidate considered by the very people who would be consolidated - the mayors and municipal governments. That sets up an inherent conflict of interests, in which you ask people to voluntarily give up their own jobs for the greater good.

"Put plainly, the League's consolidation proposal doesn't hold water.

"One of the most interesting ideas on the table right now - and the one I believe holds the real promise to property tax savings - is to establish an independent panel to look at and suggest municipal mergers, with the final say going to the governed, the taxpayers, and not the government.

"We want to make sure municipal mergers are in the best interests of the people, not the politicians.

"Just as consolidation will not work without the consent of taxpayers, it cannot work if we leave it to local officials to abolish their own fiefdoms to realize property tax reform. We need an independent overseer, and approval at the ballot box, before real consolidation can take place in the Garden State."