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SMITH CONSOLIDATION COMMISSION MEASURE SIGNED INTO LAW

TRENTON - A bill sponsored by Senator Bob Smith which would establish a municipal consolidation commission to recommend mergers and shared services in order to cut the cost of government in New Jersey was signed into law today by Governor Corzine.

"New Jersey's highest in the nation property taxes are a direct result of inefficient bureaucracy and wasteful duplication of services," said Senator Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, the co-chair of a panel to review regionalization and shared services during the Legislature's Special Session. "We need the municipal consolidation commission to point out opportunities to merge and share services, because we cannot afford the many layers of government we have in the Garden State. With the commission pointing the way, there will be a greater emphasis on regionalization and shared services, and that will translate into greater savings for the taxpayers of this State."

The bill, S-12, would establish the "Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission," to identify municipalities in the State which are ripe for mergers or shared service agreements, based on a set of predetermined efficiency benchmarks. Under the bill, the Commission - which would include representation from each region of the State: North, Central and South - would recommend municipalities to regionalize, either in whole or in part, with service sharing to increase government efficiency for the taxpayers. The Legislature would have 30 days to object to any recommendations from the Commission, at which point the regionalization proposal would be put to the voters in each municipality as a ballot question. Consolidation would require voter approval in each affected municipality.

"The consolidation commission is a proposal that makes common sense, and has received support from both sides of the aisle," said Senator Smith, who noted that the concept was originally proposed by Senator Joe Kyrillos, R-Monmouth and Middlesex. "It's one of the best proposals to come out from the Joint Committee on Government Consolidation, and is a testament to what both parties can achieve for the taxpayers when they work together, instead of giving in to divisive partisan rhetoric."

"By creating a panel of planning experts to oversee local regionalization, the Governor and the Legislature has really moved the ball forward in terms of reforming costly government," Senator Smith added. "We may not see immediate benefits from their work, but this is a proposal with long-term benefits, which will hopefully cut through New Jersey's unique 'municipal madness' and usher in a new era of efficiency for government in the Garden State."

The bill was approved by both houses in the Legislature in January.