



## **Indiana Commission on Local Government Reform**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **What have you done to address high property taxes?**

Our job was to recommend ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of local government. We believe that our recommendations will do that and, as a result, lower the cost of local government—and, by extension, property taxes. Furthermore, without addressing underlying issues of efficiency and structure any property tax reduction will merely result in reduced services and/or an increased reliance on income, sales, and other taxes and user fees.

#### **If townships are eliminated, who will do the work of township officials?**

The responsibilities for the functions of township governments are being shifted to other governmental units, with most of the tasks going to the county. No services are being eliminated; responsibilities for them are being centralized to improve efficiency and reduce costs.

#### **Why did you recommending the creation of a single county executive?**

The elected county executive will create a single point of leadership, contact, and accountability. As with a city's mayor or the state's governor, the people will know whom specifically to thank or blame for the actions of their government.

Elected county executives are not uncommon around the country. According to the National Association of Counties, more than 400 counties have elected executives and Arkansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee now mandate elected county executives. More than 40 percent of all counties have shifted to a county administrator or elected county executive.

#### **What checks will be in place to balance the power of a single-person county executive?**

Our recommendation would establish a system very much like the system that exists for the governance of cities, states, and the nation. In cities, mayors serve as city executives under the legislative oversight of the city council. In states, governors serve as the state executive under the legislative oversight of the legislature. Similarly, the county executive would provide a single point of accountability within county government, a clear place for citizens to access county government, under the legislative oversight of the county council.

#### **Why are you recommending such a large shift from elected to appointed positions?**

We believe that elected positions should be reserved for leaders who set policy and levy taxes. Positions that are primarily administrative or technical in function are best filled by skilled and qualified professionals appointed by elected officials—who, in turn, are accountable to voters.

#### **Did Governor Mitch Daniels guide your recommendations?**

After issuing the initial charge to the Commission, Governor Daniels allowed us to reach our own conclusions. The Commission occasionally communicated with the governor's staff to deliver updates, but the governor did not influence our decisions.

### **What studies show that students thrive in school districts with at least 2,000 students?**

Various research studies over time suggest that economies of scale and student performance can be maximized at district enrollments of somewhere between 1,000 and 6,000 students. In light of increasing requirements for in-state admission to Indiana's universities, we also examined diplomas awarded across the state for Core 40 and Core 40 Honors by school district. We believe, based on the evidence, that school systems of at least 2,000 students are best suited to effectively deliver the resources, opportunity and education Indiana's children need to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

See:

Andrews, M., Duncombe, W., and Yinger J. (2002). Revisiting economies of size in American education: Are we any closer to a consensus? *Economics of Education Review*. 21(3): 245-262.

[Plucker, J., Spradlin, T., Magaro, M., Chien, R., and Zapf, J. \(2007\). Assessing the policy environment for school corporation collaboration, cooperation, and consolidation. \*Education Policy Brief\*. Center for Evaluation and Education Policy: Bloomington, Indiana.](#)

Zimmer, T. (2007). *Economies of scale in consolidation: Size and Indiana school corporations*. Doctoral dissertation, Purdue University: West Lafayette, Indiana.

### **Are you recommending the closing of schools?**

No. We recommended the reorganization of school districts with fewer than 2,000 students, not the consolidation of individual schools. See also ***What studies show that students thrive in school districts with at least 2,000 students?***

### **Are you recommending the closing of libraries?**

No. We recommended the consolidation of library districts into countywide entities, not the consolidation of individual libraries. In fact, rather than recommend a reduction in library services, we're suggesting a system that would expand library services to all Hoosiers in a cost-effective way. Currently, nearly 400,000 Hoosiers do not have access to library services in the communities where they live. In a time when information is a key commodity, that's putting a lot of Indiana citizens at a disadvantage.

### **Why are you recommending that the sheriff be appointed rather than elected?**

We're recommending that the countywide law enforcement official be treated like any other public safety official in the state or the nation. Indiana communities do not elect police chiefs, fire chiefs, or other public safety officials. The nation does not elect the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

**Won't some of these recommendations put new financial, operational and organizational demands on the very local governments they're designed to help?**

We recognize that local governments face their own fiscal and operational challenges, so we are recommending that the state designate an office to provide the technical assistance local governments will need to implement these changes.

**How will we know if these recommendations are implemented effectively?**

We recommend that the state establish a system to review and report on the progress made as a result of our recommendations.

**Can my local government pursue these reforms before new legislation is enacted?**

A number of statutes already exist that allow restructuring and collaborative efforts among local governments, including:

- IC 36-1.5 Government Modernization provides significant flexibility to consolidate local governments and/or individual services. The reorganization process can be initiated by one legislative body or by citizen petition. To be completed, all participating legislative bodies must approve the change, as well as a majority of voters from each of the affected jurisdictions.
- IC 36-1-7 Interlocal Cooperation allows local governments to enter into collaborative agreements to exercise any local government power that two or more local governments are allowed to exercise. It also provides that contracts may be used to buy, sell, or exchange services, supplies, or equipment among local governments. These agreements can be effected by the appropriate elected officials of the included jurisdictions.
- IC 20-23-4 Community School Corporations allows for the reorganization of school districts. Merging two or more school districts requires the formation of a county committee to develop a plan and approval by the affected voters either by petition or special election. The state budget that began in July 2007 includes \$200,000 in grant funding to support school corporation consolidation feasibility studies. This funding is available through the Indiana Department of Education.
- IC 36-6-1.5 Merger of Township Governments allows two or more contiguous townships within a single county to consolidate voluntarily. This change must be adopted by a majority of both township legislative bodies and the county legislative body.
- IC 36-2-3.5 Division of Powers of Certain Counties allows counties to redistribute the responsibilities of the board of commissioners and the county council. If implemented, the board of commissioners serves only as the county executive body and the county council services as the legislative body and the fiscal body. This change requires adoption by both the existing board of commissioners and county council.

- IC 36-12-4 Merger of Class 1 Public Libraries allows two or more public library systems within Indiana to merge voluntarily. This change requires a majority vote of each participating library board.

### **When will the recommendations take effect?**

Full implementation of our recommendations will require enabling legislation from the Indiana General Assembly. The transition from one structural system to another will require the consideration of a number of details that have not be addressed specifically by our general recommendations. A number of pieces of legislation regarding local government reform were introduced during the 2008 session of the Indiana General Assembly. A brief summary of the 2008 activity is available at [indianalocalgovreform.iu.edu](http://indianalocalgovreform.iu.edu) under the News/Update tab.

Some structural recommendations can be implemented on a voluntary basis, see ***Can my local government pursue these reforms before new legislation is enacted?*** Local improvement efforts using best management and business practices also can be implemented currently.

### **How were rural needs taken into consideration?**

During our work, we received input from rural residents, communities, and organizations. A consistent theme of the input we received was that “one-size does not fit all.” We have addressed these concerns in a number of ways. First, we have distinguished between the consolidation of the governance and administrative functions of townships, schools, and libraries and the consolidation of service delivery locations for those services. We have recommended the former. Second, the details of public safety coordination by county were left to each set of local governments. Third, in addressing county executive and legislative functions, counties were given the option to establish a legislative body with 7, 9, or 11 members to accommodate variations among county populations.

### **How did the commission collect input regarding its recommendations?**

Public input was an important component of our work. Early on, the commission established a web site to facilitate sharing information and collecting input from stakeholders. Throughout the six months of our work, citizens were able to submit comments by web form, e-mail, and phone. The website received more than 12,000 visits and we received approximately 1,500 recommendations and comments. In addition, the staff conducted 25 interviews various experts and stakeholder groups. The commission also held public forums in Gary, South Bend, Fort Wayne, Franklin, New Albany, and Evansville. More than 700 citizens participated in these six events.

### **What cost savings are expected as a result of the recommendations?**

There simply was not time to produce cost estimates given the short time frame allowed to develop the commission’s recommendations. Even so, we have been understandably cautious about estimating cost savings as many of the recommended changes will be managed by local officials—the exact details left to their judgment to allow them to address the varied local needs and circumstances reflected in communities across the state.

**How can I as a citizen have influence the adoption and implementation of these reforms?**

The Indiana General Assembly was able to take action on a few of the recommendations in the 2008 legislative session. The complete adoption of our recommendations will require significant effort to adopt the constitutional and statutory changes necessary and to implement at the local level over many years to come. To be successful, citizens must share their support and ideas with legislators and local officials, as well as their fellow citizens.