



**The Pennsylvania Municipal League**  
*President – William Peduto, Mayor, City of Pittsburgh*



**The Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners**  
*President – Anthony Taliani, Commissioner, East Deer Township*

**PA Municipal League  
and  
PA State Association of Township Commissioners**

**Written Testimony Regarding the Per Capita Fee for State Police Coverage**

**House Transportation Committee  
May 11, 2017**

The PA Municipal League and the PA State Association of Township Commissioners support the concept of requiring municipalities to reimburse the State Police for coverage. It is a matter of equity and fairness on several levels – to the taxpayers in communities with their own departments; to the communities themselves; and to the Commonwealth.

As you all know, this issue has been debated for many years. Governor Wolf's inclusion of reimbursement revenue in the state budget, however, has raised the issue to a new level. One only need to look at recent newspaper headlines to realize the inequities have finally hit a nerve. Perhaps, the Commonwealth's budget deficit; the State Police agency's need for stable funding; and the ever growing need to address our aging road and bridge infrastructure will be the perfect storm that finally provides a remedy.

Public safety is the number one job of a municipality and its governing body. That said, statutorily there is no requirement to provide police service. Rather cities, boroughs and townships are authorized to expend funds to implement police protection. As such, the level of service is determined locally; and across the Commonwealth, we find full-time, part-time and

regional departments, as well as contracts for service with neighboring municipalities. And where the local governing body has chosen not to provide public safety or has dissolved its department, Pennsylvania allows reliance on the State Police for protection. No questions asked and at no additional charge.

The municipalities that belong to the PA Municipal League and PA State Association of Township Commissioners are full-service communities. They have chosen to provide police service and have been doing so for many years. In fact, it is questionable if they could, at this point, dismantle their police departments without great difficulty and expense because of numerous personnel issues that would need to be resolved first. At the very least, such action would certainly stir negative public reaction and safety concerns among residents.

There is no debate about the fact that administering a police department is expensive. Most assuredly, it is the main reason half of the municipalities in Pennsylvania have chosen to rely on the State Police. Salaries, training, healthcare, pensions, equipment, liability insurance, collective bargaining and other personnel mandates all play into the total cost. In full-service communities, public safety costs are the largest expense, oftentimes half of a municipal budget. Consequently, balancing the costs of public safety with other budgetary priorities is an annual exercise in most full-service communities. This is especially true in the older, built out communities that no longer have a growing tax base.

Two local taxes – property and earned income – generate the bulk of revenue used to pay for municipal services. Increasing taxes to cover service costs is a double-edged sword. Higher taxes discourage home ownership, saddle current residents with more burden and make a community less attractive to new residents and investment, which in the end, amplifies the burden on residents even more. This is a cycle that is familiar to many older communities. The other option, cutting services, especially public safety, is a last resort for local elected officials.

Communities utilizing the State Police however, need not worry about having enough revenue for services. Police coverage is free, there are minimal property taxes, and far less of a burden on residents. Overall, this puts such communities and their residents at an overall greater economic advantage.

As an example, take two nearly identical townships in Montgomery Township. In 2014, Franconia Township made the difficult decision to lay-off six police officers citing years of increased expenses and flat revenue. In addition to the lay-offs, there were other budget cuts and an increase in fees and taxes. Franconia Township has 13,000 residents and a median household income of \$81,000. On the other hand, Skippack Township, with roughly the same population and a median household income of \$108,000 utilizes the State Police, insulating it from budgetary concerns related to public safety costs. A final comparison of the two townships – Skippack’s 2017 property tax millage is .35 mills; Franconia’s is 1.9 mills. While both rates are relatively low, one can reasonably infer the 543% difference demonstrates the higher tax levy needed to pay for a full-time department.

In addition to inequities created among communities, there is an inequity among the Commonwealth’s citizens. We whole-heartedly agree with the argument that taxpayers in full-service communities are paying twice. Once, for their own coverage through local taxes and again for the coverage of those communities choosing State Police protection through state taxes. This is especially difficult to accept when a community clearly has the ability to afford its own force, a regional department or a contract for services, but continues to rely on the State Police.

The cost of service cannot continue to be an excuse when 74% of Pennsylvanians pay for their own police protection and their local officials manage the expenses accordingly. For example, take two first class townships in the Lehigh Valley. Bethlehem Township, has a median household income of \$76,000 and a population of 24,000. Bethlehem Township’s 2017 police costs are \$5.4 million. This equates to \$228 per resident. Bethlehem Township’s budget narrative also reports

that \$200 of each property owner's average \$643 property tax bill is dedicated to police costs. By comparison, Lower Macungie Township has a median household income of \$82,000 and the population is 30,000 residents. Its residents enjoy free police service, but clearly have the ability to pay for local service.

The third inequity relates the Commonwealth's budget and the transfer of funds out of the Motor License Fund to cover State Police expenses. It is reported that one-half of the State Police's \$1.3 billion budget is spent on municipal coverage. As we have heard, diverting road and bridge funds to pay for this coverage comes at a significant price as road projects are delayed and the safety of the public is put at risk. Representative Sturla's fee proposal will reduce and eventually eliminate the need to dip into the Motor License Fund. It will also provide additional funding for State Police training, regional policing initiatives, and consistent funding for the State Police.

For the reasons set out above communities receiving free police coverage must start paying something toward the cost. PML and PSATC are not advocating for one proposal over another, only the need to remedy this inequity. Needless to say, we believe both the Governor's \$25 per capita fee and Representative Sturla's \$30 million a year phase-in are exceptional deals as the actual cost to the State Police is over \$200 per person. The argument that \$25 per person is too much and will create a hardship for municipalities and their taxpayers in the form of a tax increase is simply not valid when you consider the number of communities funding their own forces with taxpayer dollars at eight and twelve times that cost.

The argument that reimbursement should be based on the number of responses or patrols is also not valid. The State Police must be prepared to respond to calls whether they be once a month or once a day. That level of preparedness requires a consistent level of funding regardless of the number of times they are called into action.

There is one final, yet important, point that needs to be made as this discussion is ultimately about the cost of public safety. Should the fee proposal become reality, it does not change the

fact that there are significant costs associated with operating a local police department. The General Assembly is the only entity that can make public safety costs more affordable and sustainable in the long run by instituting reforms. PML and PSATC are strong advocates for making prospective changes to the personnel mandates in Act 111 and the municipal pension statutes. Until we look at the issue of public safety costs from all sides, full-service communities will continue to see costs rise and those utilizing the state police will continue to have no incentive to operate their own force.

Thank you again for the invitation to provide testimony. We appreciate the attention this issue has received in recent weeks and we look forward to a resolution that brings fairness and cost savings to the Commonwealth's taxpayers. Any questions or comments can be directed to Amy Sturges, Director of Governmental Affairs, at [asturges@pml.org](mailto:asturges@pml.org).