

House Bill 2122 – Voluntary Municipal Disincorporation
PA House of Representatives Urban Affairs Committee Hearing
Testimony of James Roddey and Dan Onorato, Co-Chairs
Voluntary Municipal Disincorporation Task Force

It is our pleasure to appear before you to provide testimony on House Bill 2122 (HB 2122). The legislation jointly sponsored by Rep. Dom Costa and Rep. Hal English, along with members of the Allegheny County delegation, amends the Second Class County Code to authorize the voluntary dissolution of a municipality, create unincorporated districts, and authorize the county to assume responsibility for the governance and delivery of public services in that unincorporated district.

As the Institute of Politics Chair Mark Nordenberg has indicated, our final report on the issue of voluntary municipal disincorporation was issued in May of 2017. Each of you has been provided a copy. The result of our work was a clear and concise roadmap for municipal disincorporation. The proposal defined not only the criteria for determining when disincorporation is an appropriate strategy, but also the steps for implementation. It was the consensus of that committee that it was prudent to expand eligibility for disincorporation to allow more communities access to this valuable mechanism. Given the myriad challenges facing Allegheny County municipalities, an option beyond that allowed for municipalities in Act 47 is appropriate.

Municipal governments have a profound effect on the quality of our daily lives, more so than any other level of government. Through the delivery of essential public services, municipal governments give us a unique sense of place and community. Municipal governments shape the character of our neighborhoods, they provide gathering places in parks and libraries, and they deliver the public services that ensure our families' safety and health. It's why we call the municipalities in which we live "home."

A few important points to highlight for you:

- In our report and its recommendations, as well as in the bill that is before you now, this process is voluntary. That has always been a concern of municipal organizations. The process outlined begins with a majority vote by the elected officials of the municipality. It then requires the input of residents through a citizens' referendum. And appointees of the municipality are involved in every step of the process.
- For residents of the municipality considering disincorporation, this process does not affect schools or voluntary fire departments or EMS companies. A community's identity remains its own, regardless of its municipal status. And the availability of a disincorporation process in no way prevents the municipality from seeking other methods of solving their issues, such as a merger or consolidation, or entering in intergovernmental cooperation agreements or other relationships to share or out-source municipal services. The options of merger and consolidation also remain on the table even after a municipality disincorporates.
- For residents of other municipalities concerned about the impact or increased tax burden on their own community, the county does not assume the outstanding debt of the municipality.

Many Allegheny County municipalities are well-governed and flourish. As a county, we should take pride in their successes. For those municipalities that need our assistance, we as a county must be willing to

offer a hand. Municipal governments are being asked to deal with more and increasingly complex challenges at a time when local revenue sources are stagnant or declining. As a result, municipalities are finding it more challenging to deliver basic municipal services. What is needed is a new paradigm that brings greater resources, efficiencies, professional expertise, and government responsiveness to municipalities.

The region will only prosper when all citizens receive the municipal public services they need and desire. Disincorporation is a viable strategy for Allegheny County communities to reach this goal.