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Bills to cut townships stall in state legislature

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The Illinois General Assembly adjourned without taking any action on three bills that would impact townships, including potential consolidations.

Senate Bill 2504 made it through to the Senate Executive Committee where its third reading deadline was June 1, marking the third delay. The deadline passed with no vote.

SB 2504 states that in counties with a population under 50,000, the offices of township assessor and multitownship assessor will be abolished once the current term expires.

Under the proposed bill, the county assessor would assume all duties and responsibilities of these positions, including managing assets, liabilities and public records related to property assessments.

SB 2504 also includes a provision, upon petition of "at least 5% of the voters in the township election immediately preceding the petition in each adjacent township subject to proposed consolidation, each township board shall certify and cause to be submitted to the voters of the township, at the next election or consolidated election, a proposition to consolidate the existing townships."

SB 2504 was initially filed by state Sen. Suzy Glowiak Hilton, D-Western Springs, on Feb. 7. Chief sponsorship was changed to state Sen. President Don Harmon, D-Oak Park, on April 4. There were no co-

sponsors.

Two other bills called for the consolidation of township based on populations. Those proposed laws did not move past the initial committee referrals.

SB 2217, sponsored by Hilton, would mandate that all townships with a population less than 5,000 are dissolved and must either consolidate with an adjacent township or the county containing the geographic boundaries of the dissolving township.

Hilton filed the legislation Feb. 7 and was referred to the Assignments Committee. The bill was assigned to the Executive Committee Feb. 25 and referred again to the Assignments Committee where it has sat since March 21. No other sponsors signed on to the bill.

A third township-related proposal, House Bill 2515,

sponsored by state Rep. Joe Sosnowski, R-Rockford, would mandate that all townships with a population of less than 500 be dissolved two years after the effected date of the bill and transfer their re-

sponsibilities to the to the county the then-former township is located.

The county would assume all rights and duties previously held by the township, acting solely on behalf of the residents within the dissolved township's boundaries.

Under HB 2515, counties would have the authority to levy property taxes within the boundaries of dissolved townships to fund the services they assume.

Road districts entirely within dissolving townships would also be dissolved, with their powers and responsibilities transferred to the county. However, municipalities within these areas may choose to take on the duties of the road districts.

Elected and appointed township officers and road commissioners would cease to hold office upon dissolution, with no com-

pensation or legal recourse for the loss of their positions.

HB 2515 was field by Sosnowski on Feb. 3 and sat in the Rules Committee since Feb. 4. No other House lawmakers signed

on as sponsors.

Jerry Crabtree, Township Officials of Illinois executive director, and the TOI team met with legislators in the final week leading up to the close of the legislative session.

"There are organizations in Illinois that want to address the units of local government that we have in this state. That could be everything from mosquito abatement to townships to municipalities, to villages, and they want to explore options in the future of where consolidation would be beneficial," Crabtree said.

"I think they have listened to our concerns and those concerns are everything from taking road districts off the table, to the negative impact of what's going to happen if you make rural townships merge. Services that would be declined or eliminated, that could be devastating.

"They let us discuss it

and then we asked that we have a seat at the table if further decisions are considered because we don't want to be labeled as an organization that opposes everything if we see the benefits of it and it makes financial sense.

"Our ultimate message was that the voters support what we're doing. Consolidation of services just needs to be something that's beneficial to everybody involved. I think they also took our message that we just do not like the fact that one unit of local government has the authority



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to wipe out another unit without discussion or consideration, and they heard that. I think they were very receptive.”

Regarding the two bills that mandating township consolidations based on populations, Crabtree said, “From what I understand in my experience, those two are just kind of dead, and the vehicle that if anything were to happen was SB 2504.”

“I think the governor wants to look at efficient,

effective consolidation, and I think these new budgeters, I say with respect, we have to make sure that they understand the difference between rural and urban townships, and that they understand the difference between north and south townships, and the vitality of the townships among the local government landscape in Illinois because we are the fifth largest state in the union. We’re very rural and agricultural,” he said.

“Our president, Greg Paulek (Stonington Township clerk in Christian County) said something to me a couple days ago in the car that ‘they can talk about rural township roads, but for farmers in this state, a condition of those roads are what helped them get their product to market. If you play around with or shift the responsibility of maintenance and upkeep to an entity of government that is so overloaded that it

becomes less of a priority in some of these areas, it trickles down and it impacts the farming community pretty extensive.’

“I don’t know of a county government system that could take over what they think they can without considerable revamping, if that’s the right word, and, if anything, it looks towards a tax increase because I don’t think they’re comparing apples to apples.”



Crabtree