



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION BILL PASSES SENATE; Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins Advances Attorney General's Program Bill in Senate with Bipartisan Support

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS January 4, 2009

| ISSUE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D - 35th District), Chair of the Senate Local Government Committee announced today that the Senate has approved landmark legislation she sponsors that will empower citizens and local officials across the State of New York to significantly reduce the size and cost of government while increasing its efficiency and reducing the property tax burden.

"For many years, in spite of a myriad of proposals introduced, the State Legislature has failed to enact measures that would provide New Yorkers with the ability to choose the size, scope and cost of their own Government," stated Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, lead sponsor of the bill. "The passage of this measure will finally change that."

Senate bill 5661, entitled the "New NY Government Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act" empowers citizens, local officials and local governments to reorganize outdated or less efficient districts by setting forth procedures for consolidation.

New York State has more than 10,521 local governmental entities which provide layers of overlapping structure, and each entity has its own rules and procedures which hinder the ability of localities to reorganize. This legislation provides for a single law applicable to all towns, villages, and special districts and allows citizens and local officials to decide for

themselves if they would like to reorganize.

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins stated, "After 75 years of discussion about making government more effective and making spending more efficient, the Senate has approved legislation that truly empowers our communities and will help address the overwhelming burden of property taxes on families across the State of New York. The outstanding component of this bill, in my opinion, is that it is the taxpayers who will decide how to best enhance the delivery of services and achieve savings locally. Attorney General Cuomo is to be commended for his diligence in advancing this measure, and for partnering with me and my Senate colleagues to address the bipartisan issues of governmental reorganization and citizen empowerment that are important to all of us."

The Act provides that a local government reorganization can be initiated in one of two ways: by the governing bodies; or by a citizen-initiated petition process. The citizen-initiated process is triggered by the filing of a petition containing the signatures of at least 10% or 5,000 whichever is less; of the number of voters in each entity to be reorganized. For small entities with 500 or fewer voters the petition needs signatures of at least 20% of the voters.

The governing body initiated process is triggered by the development of a joint reorganization plan by the localities, the plan is then approved by each locality and then by a majority of voters who reside in each locality.

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins continued, "This is a long overdue major step forward in bringing about fiscal responsibility, government efficiency, and significant property tax relief for all New Yorkers, which in turn, will attract businesses and create jobs."

"As Chair of the Senate Local Government Committee, I am pleased to sponsor and move this bipartisan bill initiated by Attorney General Andrew Cuomo. With the support of the Majority Leader and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, this legislation will become law," Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins concluded.