



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Local Government Consolidation Measure Takes First Major Step; Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins Introduces and Advances Attorney General's Program Bill in Senate with Bipartisan Support

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS January 2, 2009

| ISSUE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

| COMMITTEE: **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D - 35th District), Chair, Senate Local Government Committee announced today that she and Senator Elizabeth O'C Little have introduced landmark legislation 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. The Senator also announced that the measure was approved today by the Senate Local Government Committee.

"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. "The introduction and passage of this measure will finally change that."

"Given the severity of this fiscal crisis, now is the time to act," said Senator Betty Little, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Local Government Committee. "For several years I have pushed initiatives to encourage and reward local governments that think outside of the box by sharing services where it makes sense to improve efficiency and save tax dollars. We've seen this work, but this bill takes it a step further.

“I see this as part of a comprehensive approach to truly address New York’s high property taxes. This includes mandate relief. It also should include immediate help for those in danger of losing their homes because their incomes have not kept pace with rising taxes. And we need a better partnership between state and local government. As a former local elected official, I have not forgotten the frustration of dealing with a large state bureaucracy that often failed to understand local problems but had no problem imposing costly demands.”

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Reorganization and Citizen Empowerment Act" empowers citizens, local officials and local governments to reorganize outdated or less efficient districts by setting forth procedures for consolidation.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 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.”

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.

“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 pass and become law,” Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins concluded.