



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

David J. Valesky

Senators Valesky, DeFrancisco Provide \$250,000 for Effort to Improve Government Services and Efficiency

DAVID J. VALESKY January 24, 2014

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SYRACUSE, NY – The Commission on Local Government Modernization, has launched a comprehensive study of government structure in Onondaga County in an effort to provide better services more efficiently to the community.

“Our local governments face a serious set of challenges,” said Robert Simpson, president, CenterState CEO. “Onondaga County has nearly double the national

average of local government entities, per capita, and it's not sustainable.

Establishing a commission on government modernization will allow us to explore a wide range of solutions to make government easier to use, more responsive, more cost effective, provide better services, and ultimately achieve better outcomes.”

The effort, called Consensus, will be led by Neil Murphy, who most recently served as president of SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry; Catherine Richardson a retired attorney with the firm Bond, Schoeneck & King, PLLC.; and former Congressman James Walsh.

“We need to gather solid data, analyze information, and consider every avenue for effective, sustainable service delivery that meets our community needs,” said Neil Murphy, co-chairman of Consensus. “This commission is about developing the best possible recommendations for the public to consider.”

“I am excited to be a part of this commission and its work, and believe that we have an opportunity to engage the community in a process that will accommodate new and exciting growth,” said Catherine Richardson, co-chairman of Consensus. “At every opportunity, we will be emphatic that real actions leading to real change be taken.”

“The process we are launching is an inclusive one,” said James Walsh, co-chairman of Consensus. “Our goal is to find common ground and build consensus for action. We invite significant public participation beyond the actual Commission membership in order to build support for the conclusions that we arrive at. I look forward to working with our community leaders to forge a solid set of recommendations to address our future. In the end, the public will make the final

decision on how to move forward.”

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Sixteen community and business leaders will join the three co-chairs and together will review:

- The number and types of local government in Onondaga County and the costs associated with those governments.
- The nature and extent of services delivered by various types of local governments.
- Opportunities and barriers to restructuring local government functions and services and the extent to which more efficient practices can improve the performance of local government and the delivery of public services.

The Commission will also make recommendations relative to:

- Strengthening and streamlining the structure and operations of local governments.
- Improving the effectiveness and reducing the costs of local government operations and services.
- Facilitating the merger, consolidation and partnering in the delivery of services by and between local governments.

Bi-partisan support for the creation of the commission and the work it will do on behalf of Onondaga County residents includes a \$250,000 state grant secured by State Senator John A. DeFrancisco, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and supported by State Senator David J. Valesky.

“I support this measure because in order to reduce the property tax burden, we need to significantly reduce the size and cost of local governments, while increasing efficiency of services,” said Senator DeFrancisco. “I believe community and public leaders at every level of government should work together toward real solutions that will help save tax dollars.”

“We are at a unique time in our history where we can point to our closest level of collaboration ever between leaders at all levels of government in Onondaga County, the business community, our academic institutions, the not-for-profit sector, and our community organizations,” said Senator Valesky. “Given this collaboration and the reality of our long-term structural challenges, this is a pivotal moment for all of us.”

The establishment of the commission has received broad support from the community. Together, SYRACUSE 20/20, CenterState CEO, FOCUS Greater Syracuse, the League of Women Voters of Syracuse Metropolitan Area, Onondaga Citizens League and the Homebuilders & Remodelers Association of CNY called for the creation of a local government modernization commission. It was also one of four key initiatives outlined in the region’s business plan – The CenterState Agenda for Economic Opportunity.

“Establishing this commission sends an important message to Albany that, as a community, we are serious about addressing our toughest issues and solutions

should be data driven with voices from towns and villages, business and labor, urban and rural,” said Kathleen Murphy, co-chairperson, Syracuse 20/20. “We all have a stake in the outcome.”

Onondaga County is the first county in New York State to create such a commission. The analysis and recommendations made in Onondaga County will serve as a blueprint for other communities across the state.

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“Onondaga County is proud to have been at the forefront of systemic change,” said Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney. “We look forward to partnering on this initiative to study and identify real opportunities to lower the cost of government and lessen the burden of property taxes on our community.”

Last year, the Onondaga County Legislature and the Syracuse Common Council passed joint resolutions seeking state funding to hire an outside consultant who will support the efforts of Syracuse 20/20 as it studies how municipal services are provided and what opportunities exist to modernize.

“All levels of government face enormous pressures, both fiscal and technological, to change,” said Syracuse Mayor Stephanie A. Miner. “The County Executive and I decided that we would lead this effort. We are both presiding over governments that are in transition, and the only way that we will succeed through that transition is if we have an effective and efficient plan. So this is about making a plan for our future.”

The commission is expected to complete its analysis in ten to twelve months, and make its recommendations by the end of 2015.

To learn more about Consensus, visit: www.consensuscny.com.