

# REPLACE DON'T ERASE

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Legislative Chair, Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police:*

My name is George Basar. I am the Police Chief for the City of Howell and I am also the Legislative Chairman for Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police as well a Past-President of the Association. I am here today representing our member Chiefs from Police Departments across the State of Michigan.

Our association is here today to raise our concern with the package of bills that propose the elimination of at least a portion of the personal property taxes that are collected and paid directly to local governments. We certainly support the legislatures desire to create a strong business environment in the State of Michigan but we can no longer afford to continue to create that vision on the backs of local governments.

Over the past decade, billions of dollars in revenue sharing funds have already been taken from local communities. And as a result, has already severely hampered our ability to continue to deliver quality public safety services to our communities. I don't believe that there is a single community that has not suffered the ill effects of the loss of revenue sharing dollars. Police Departments across the state have already faced, and continue to face additional layoffs and serious reductions in personnel.

Let me cite a few examples: The City of Kentwood on the west side of the state has already lost 16% of its department. The City of Wyoming, also on the west side-25%. Kalamazoo Township-20%. Thomas Township-28%, and Mt. Morris Township, has already lost 45% of its police department to budget cuts. In Southeast Michigan the City of Wayne-28%. Trenton 27%. City of Livonia has already lost 40 personnel, with the potential to lose another 55, if personal property tax is eliminated. Elsewhere in the state the City of Sandusky is already at 33%, and the City of Jackson has lost 34% of its police department. In my own department I have lost 17% of my road patrol with a further reduction proposed for this coming fiscal year.

We have already witnessed the first hand the effects of slowly choking off the revenue

to local communities. That's how we create declining school systems and communities with crime running rampant. That's how we end up with 4 Michigan communities on the top 10 list of the most violent communities in our nation.

We can continue to create a vision of Michigan that is good for business, but we cannot continue to create that vision on the backs of local governments. What business wants to locate in a community with sub-standard schools, no library services, no amenities, inadequate fire protection, a high crime rate and fears for personal safety?

If we are going to eliminate personal property taxes then the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police is in full support of the constitutional amendment to replace those funds. Why a constitutional amendment?

Governor's office and the Legislature are quick to point out that the amount of money currently collected in the form of personal property tax is not constitutionally guaranteed. However, what they fail to point out is that the revenue from personal property taxes is assessed locally, collected locally and goes directly to the local communities to provide services. They do not pass through the hands of the legislature and as such these funds are not subjected to the annual appropriations process and the whims of the legislature or administration.

The Governor's office has repeatedly said that it seeks a sustainable long-term solution to providing adequate replacement funding. So I have to ask ..... given the history in the legislature, how is it that any funding that has to move through the annual appropriations process will meet the test of being sustainable, and sustainable, particularly over the long term? I ask this question certainly in light of the recent history but also, especially in light of repeated comments from the legislature that it cannot and will not be bound by the promises of prior legislatures. Without a constitutional amendment, what assurance do local communities have that replacement revenue will be made available.

What this proposed amendment calls for is a constitutionally protected formula by which to determine the amount of funding that can be provided to local communities, and makes it incumbent upon the legislature to comply with that formula and that process, and not the political whim of this or any future administration or legislature.

Our first responders, our police officers on the street, have repeatedly been identified as the first line of defense in Homeland Security. However, in spite of that proclamation, Police protection across Michigan has already been drastically impacted and seriously weakened by the repeated revenue sharing cuts of the past decade.

Eliminating the Personal Property Tax without a guaranteed method of replacement to fund local services, one that this proposed constitutional amendment provides for, would be devastating to the future ability of Police Departments across the State to adequately provide for the safety of Michigan's citizens and its local communities.

As we "repeatedly" remind our elected representatives ..... providing for the safety of its citizens, and should remain, the number one function of government."

Guaranteed, and I stress the word guaranteed, replacement of this essential piece of local revenue is a must. It should not, and cannot, be left as a matter of choice or a

matter of convenience for this current legislature or that of future legislatures. It's simply too important.

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