

Mark W. Smith, Chairman
John Sullivan, Vice Chairman
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Bradford County Commissioners Office

Bradford County Passes Resolution Urging State Lawmakers To Pass A Responsible Budget That Does Not Shift Costs To The Local Property Taxpayers

(**Towanda PA May 28, 2009**) – Bradford County Commissioners today passed a resolution advising state lawmakers to act responsibly in passing a balanced state budget that spares devastating cuts to core government services and avoids pushing costs down to local taxpayers, or be willing to be held accountable to all Pennsylvanians for the increases in local property taxes that could result.

Mark Smith said, “Just like the state, our county must adopt a balanced budget. Unlike any other unit of government, counties are solely reliant on the real property tax. When the state passes costs to counties, local taxpayers suffer consequences in the form of increased property taxes. Our residents could face significant property tax increases or service cuts this year if our state leaders do not pass a responsible state budget that provides level funding for mandates, entitlements, and necessary services.

Mark Smith said the county adopted the resolution on behalf of all county residents and would send it on to state leaders with a strong message that “Our House and Senate members cannot be proud of a ‘no tax increase budget’ that drastically cuts local services and is balanced on the backs of local property owners.”

The county commissioners said that last year, nearly one-third of Pennsylvania’s counties were forced to pass a millage increase to meet the funding needs of state-mandated services. Many more spent down their reserve funds leaving county governments in a precarious financial position.

Counties have been telling state lawmakers the state must fund those services required under law and cannot act as if those services, or the state’s obligation to fund them, do not exist. Counties have been critical of state leaders in the last several state budget cycles, as they have failed to uphold their statutory

obligation to fund mandates such as the 65 percent share of the district attorney salary. Counties have also had to make ends meet with inadequate appropriations to offset the increased cost of providing services.

“We are very concerned about the likelihood of the General Assembly passing a budget that slashes funding for core government services, and passes costs to the local level. We are requesting the assistance of local taxpayers and ask them to contact their state representatives and senators and let them know this is not acceptable,” Chairman Smith said.

Bradford County wants state leaders to consider the impacts of increased service demands resulting from the economic downturn. “We strongly advocate for a state budget that does not pass state responsibility and costs to the local property owner. State lawmakers need to listen to our concerns, because we also represent the taxpayer. Lawmakers need to unite with county government in finding real solutions to these difficult budget issues.”

Bradford County is sending the resolution it adopted to the county’s legislative delegation in the hopes it will prompt a commitment to meet with county leaders to find answers and solutions to the budget issues, not politically expedient ones that cause significant emotional and economic pain for local taxpayers. “We understand the state faces a dire fiscal situation with its projected year-end deficit of three billion dollars. But state leaders must remember that not only will the budget decisions they make in the coming weeks affect the county budget mid-fiscal year, these decisions will also impact their constituents’ local tax bills.”