



Pennsylvania Municipal League
President – Salvatore J. Panto, Jr., Mayor, City of Easton



Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners
President – Michael Higgins, Commissioner, Aston Township

Via e-mail

MEMO

To: Members of the House Local Government Committee

From: Amy Sturges, Director of Governmental Affairs, PML and PSATC

Re: Comments on House Bill 1444 (PN 1792)

Date: June 12, 2019

On behalf of the members of the PA Municipal League (PML) and the PA State Association of Township Commissioners (PSATC), please accept the following comments on House Bill 1444 scheduled for Committee consideration this morning.

House Bill 1444 seeks to address the issue of municipal elected officials who are not fulfilling their obligation to attend and participate in public meetings concerning municipal business. We recognize the need to address this circumstance, especially when the refusal to attend cannot be resolved locally and municipal business is being hindered.

House Bill 1444 amends the PA Constitution adding a specific attendance requirement to the reasons a local official can be removed from office. It also authorizes the other members of the governing body to initiate removal if an official misses 50% of meetings in the course of a year and does not provide a valid excuse. We find this language to be very subjective having the potential to not be applied evenly across municipalities. This process also has the potential to create a highly charged issue locally if there is not agreement on what constitutes an excused absence or if not all members are in agreement with initiating removal of the absent member. Moreover, this process would be embedded in the Constitution making it far more difficult to modify in the future.

Therefore, we support the Freeman amendment which gives the General Assembly the authority to legislate a removal process for chronic absenteeism rather than placing it in the Constitution. We believe this to be a better approach; one that provides more flexibility to create an appropriate, objective and workable process.

We request that you adopt the Freeman amendment before moving the bill to the full House.

Thank you.