

League of Women Voters
Kane County Government
Monitoring Committee Report

MEETING: Legislative Committee _____

DATE: Wednesday, April 25, 2007 _____ REPORTING: BJ ZAHA _____

ATTENDING: Wyatt (Chair), Jones, Kenyan, Kissane, Leonberger, Neuberger, and VanCleave

ABSENT: None _____

WAS PRESS IN ATTENDING: YES X NO _____

DID PRESS COVER SIGNIFICANT ISSUES: YES _____ NO _____

SUMMARY OF MEETING: Committee received updates on a number of bills which will go before the state legislature.

MOST CRITICAL ISSUES(S): Mass Transit (HB1841 and HB 1134), which is centered around reform and re-structuring of RTA and its subsidiaries, i.e. CTA, to provide greater self-governance and oversight. These bills would also enhance the regional planning of services to initiate a more coordinated effort. David Rickert, Kane County Treasurer, defined the county's stance as one of "wait and see," mirroring the sentiments of Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), which has remained neutral on both these bills. Kane County Board Chairwoman and Wyatt will be meeting with CMAP in Springfield to discuss the pending legislation further. The only concern expressed by Kane County officials was to have greater local representation on the RTA Board, however, they feared if additional Kane County representatives are added to the Board, even more Cook County representatives would also be added, resulting in a disproportionate perspective as is currently the case. These bills would also impact the fee structure. Currently, Kane County pays \$20,000 per year to NIPSY for RTA and transit related fees. This is an extremely complex piece of legislation, the amendments alone having evolved from three to more than forty pages.

HB 1517 would raise the legal juvenile age to 17, redistributing incarcerated persons, with greater stress upon juvenile detention facilities than the current system is prepared to handle. The options would be to transfer all offenders and defendants under age 17 from county jails to juvenile detention facilities or to transfer these individuals systemically in phases, starting with those accused or charged with a misdemeanor offense and working through to class X felonies. Consensus among all collar county judges is to support the legislation based on extensive studies, however, little is known of the overall fiscal and social impact of changing the legal status of defendants and offenders age 17 or under. The Committee hopes the final draft of the legislation will provide Department of Justice funds and/or judicial resources to defray the hundreds of thousands of dollars it will necessitate to enact locally.

The Commission whole-heartedly supports a statewide ban on smoking in all public places, HB246, SB500, and SB125, and will draft a letter to local legislators to pass the legislation without amending it to exempt bars, casinos, and/or private clubs.

Jones moved to extend the mailing list of state legislators Kane County corresponds with to include not only those who represent Kane County but also State Reps and Senators who represent districts from all neighboring counties, including Kendall, Will, DeKalb, Lee, McHenry, DuPage, and Lake. The motion was approved by consensus vote.

VanKerkhoff explained the ramifications of the proposed legislation to open competition to alternate cable providers, HB1500. Kane County supports the Bill provided local entities retain control of all easements and can mandate particulars to ensure public safety; county is indemnified with state funds for all related costs it incurs; franchises are made available to local governmental entities; and, eminent domain issues continue to be controlled at the local level. Notably, Kane is the only County in Illinois to provide a strong voice in support of this issue by approving a resolution supporting competitive cable providers.

Kane County Supervisor of Assessments Mark Armstrong reported having met with lobbyists of the Illinois Association of County Officials regarding the various proposed bills which would modify the current senior property tax assessment. According to Armstrong, Speaker of the House Emil Jones has pigeon-holed all bills related to tax assessment processes pending the final outcome of the controversial tax-swap legislation, which would replace property tax funding of education with funding of school districts through increased state income tax. Armstrong also requested a Committee or the full Board consider investigating the legalities of establishing a Review Board to specifically address the resolution of erroneous assessments, which were solely the result of staff error. (Currently, there are no statutes to allow for the creation of such a panel.)

Kane County agreed to support a new tax that would be assessed for farmland preservation easements contingent upon the county being included in the program and not just having it apply to more rural counties – some of which support and others of which oppose the legislation. Armstrong contended the new tax would have zero impact on Kane County's tax base.

HB1251 would specify requirements of county property converted to private municipalities, such as has recently occurred in Campton Township. The County supports the legislation but would ask for greater details of the Bill and its impact than provided in the synopsis.

COMMENTS/NOTES: Other legislation reviewed by the Committee was related to Child Advocacy Center Funding through an increase in fees charged for all convictions; establishment of county health access networks; pay raise for jurists; recycling of electronics and electronic scraps; \$.50 tax on retail sale of new and used tires to provide funding to recycle discarded rubber tires; stronger safeguards in county offices to minimize the risk of identity theft; and statewide building codes.

RECOMMENDED ACTION(S): Closely watch the establishment of a Review Panel to ensure it serves only the stipulated intent of remedying erroneous tax bills resulting from county staff error.

Monitor Kane County's participation in RTA Board.

Calculate the total amount of fees charged per conviction as Kane County has applied the maximum fee allowed by state statute for every possible additional item. A \$75 traffic ticket could end up costing twice that much after court and county fees have been applied.

NEXT MEETING: May 23, 2007 9:00 a.m