

# Memorandum

**To:** Ohio Commission on Local and Government Reform and Collaboration  
**From:** Anita Lopez, Lucas County Auditor  
**Date:** 4/30/10  
**Re:** **Government Reform**

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Ohio citizens are currently scrutinizing governmental spending more than at any other time. Governmental spending is particularly important now especially given Ohio's current economy. Unfortunately, there have been numerous national and state headlines concerning elected officials/governmental employees committing acts of fraud, bribery, or some other misconduct in office. As a result, Ohio citizens understandably have a lack of trust in government and a lack of confidence, which warrants their questioning the need for certain governmental bodies.

The testimony of citizens, elected officials, business and civic organizations received by the Commission concerning governmental reform has consistently shown that in many instances governmental reform should equate to individual reform. In other words, sometimes the problem is not the position but the individuals elected to those positions. The testimony reflects a concern with growing governmental cost and the ineffectiveness of our government leaders. Given the foregoing, this recommendation relates to the performance of the individual, and not the existence of a government entity or position.

## **County Government Structure**

Elected officials, business and civic organizations have provided consistent testimony that expresses a concern with the growth of government; however, it is my opinion that this concern reflects the dissatisfaction with our governmental leadership. It is also my belief that this dissatisfaction is rooted in the reality or perception that the current governmental leadership is interested in discourse more than the idea of solving problems. In general, Ohio's governmental growth is consistent with the demands and the commitments it has made. Ohioans' confidence in their leadership and their ability to solve problems will eliminate or greatly alleviate the general concerns.

It is recommended to establish an independent office that will be responsible for training elected officials to create and/or ensure an understanding of the responsibilities of that office. The independent office would be responsible for training on:

1. **Fiscal Governmental Responsibilities.** It is my recommendation that this training include, but not be limited to, proper financial reporting, Ohio sunshine laws, and improper transactions;

2. **Governmental collaboration, costs effectiveness, and costs savings.** This independent office would be provided with the charge of making recommendations for governmental collaboration. The independent office's focus, in part, should be to identify opportunities for governmental collaboration. By way of example, the independent office could review the feasibility and help create legislation to authorize joint law enforcement between townships and municipalities;

I support Tony Paglia's, Vice President of Government Affairs for the Youngstown/Warren recommendation to incentivize collaboration by distributing state funds to communities that are engaged in collaborative efforts.

3. **Ethics, specifically avoiding the perception of impropriety.** Elected officials should be required to annually attend training dealing with ethics, and a specific emphasis on avoiding the perception of impropriety.
4. **Improving services.** The final charge of the independent office should be an emphasis on creating ideas that improve services. The testimony provided showed that there is a perception that government operates for the government and has failed to recognize that its responsibilities are directly for the citizens. Therefore, there has to be an emphasis on improving services to the community.

Many of the issues above are consistent thoughts of elected officials; however, we have fallen short of implementing these ideas as a whole throughout the State of Ohio because of politics and personalities. This recommendation attempts to transcend personalities by installing an independent office to help establish policies and procedures that will help create and/or ensure strong fiscal responsibilities along with strong governmental leadership.