

**Statement to the Joint Budget Hearing on Local Government Officials / General  
Government**

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In Syracuse and across Onondaga County, we have been part of a grassroots community conversation about the future of local government services and structures for more than two years. As part of this process, we've engaged leaders from each municipality, consulted experts from across New York and the nation, and held more than 100 meetings directly engaging more than 6,000 residents, business and civic leaders and generating more than 11,000 comments and suggestions. Across our community of 470,000 residents, we are home to 36 municipalities which house 14 local law enforcement agencies, 36 departments of public works, 54 fire departments, and hundreds upon hundreds of special districts. We are not optimally organized. We can do better.

We will soon release a thorough analysis and comprehensive set of more than 50 recommendations for our community to take action. It is clear that there are opportunities to enhance services and provide tangible savings to local taxpayers. These opportunities range from modest to ambitious - from shared equipment, services and purchasing, to opportunities for merged services and to reimagine our municipal structures.

It is clear that members of our community are ready to seize these opportunities. In 2016, Consensus, the commission on local government modernization in Onondaga County, commissioned a county-wide survey conducted by the Siena Research Institute. The survey results showed that a plurality of residents support local government modernization and a majority of residents favor modernization in each individual aspect of local government, including: economic development (61% favor modernization), governance (55%), infrastructure (67%), municipal operations (61%) and public safety (54%).

The benefits of modernization discussed most often surround the potential for property tax savings. This potential is real and necessary. Further, there are additional opportunities to provide better service delivery when local governments work in a more coordinated and streamlined manner. Just as importantly, communities that choose to modernize their operations send a powerful signal that they are preparing for a more economically sustainable and prosperous future, something that is attractive to businesses, small and large, as they plan for their own future growth.

Our community's approach is rooted in three key values: better government, economic growth and inclusive, responsive governance. As a business organization, we encourage communities across New York to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of their local governments. For these efforts to be successful, residents must be actively involved in these decisions, and their voice must be heard. Through an informed and transparent process, the most effective way for the taxpayer to be heard is through their vote on election day. We endorse initiatives to modernize government and give the people their voice.