



# Ohio Legislative Service Commission

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## Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

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**Bill:** [H.B. 509 of the 129th G.A.](#)

**Date:** April 17, 2012

**Status:** As Introduced

**Sponsor:** Rep. Blair

**Local Impact Statement Procedure Required:** No

**Contents:** Makes numerous changes to laws pertaining to the operations of local governments

### Fiscal Highlights

The bill contains various provisions that affect political subdivisions. Highlighted below are the provisions of the bill that appear to have the most significant fiscal effect on these units of government. Following the provisions highlighted below is a more detailed analysis of the fiscal effects of each of the highlighted items. Please consult the LSC Bill Analysis for a comprehensive list of the bill's contents.

- **Competitive bidding thresholds.** The bill increases competitive bid thresholds for various local government entities to \$50,000. This may reduce administrative costs associated with the competitive bidding process.
- **Office space for health districts.** The bill removes the requirement that counties provide office space to health districts and institutes a gradual phase out of the payment of these office space costs by the county. This will reduce costs to counties while requiring these costs to be paid by local boards of health.
- **Local boards of health as a body politic.** The bill specifies that a local board of health is, for the purpose of providing public health services, a "body politic and corporate." This will give boards the ability to acquire real property, which if conveyed to a board, would result in the upkeep, maintenance, and utility costs of this property becoming the responsibility of the board of health.
- **General Health District appropriation measures.** The bill provides that the revenue estimate certified by a general health district for a fiscal year must include any surplus money in the district health fund that will be carried forward to that fiscal year from the current fiscal year to fund ongoing operations. This will allow a general health district to carryover funds at the end of a fiscal year before the district's first apportionment is received in April.
- **Joint county departments of job and family services.** The bill permits the boards of county commissioners of any two or more counties (rather than only Hocking, Ross, and Vinton counties) to enter into a written agreement to form a joint county

department of job and family services (CDJFS). There is potential for a decrease in administrative costs for counties that form a joint CDJFS.

- **Testing for venereal disease.** The bill modifies a current law provision by accelerating the timeframe for which certain offenders must be tested for a venereal disease. Since this testing is already a legal requirement, any additional local costs related to expediting the timeframe should be no more than minimal.
- **Allocation of Legal Aid Fund.** The bill specifies that the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation must select the criteria for determining indigent persons in a county. This provision would not alter the total disbursements from the Ohio Legal Aid Fund (Fund 5740).
- **Weights and measures inspectors.** The bill permits counties to share or contract with individuals to provide weights and measure inspection services. There could be cost savings for county auditors that share weights and measures inspectors or contract with other counties for these inspection services.
- **County auditors as fiscal officers.** The bill allows a county auditor to serve as the fiscal officer for any department, office, or agency of the county. This could result in cost savings if counties are able to eliminate or leave vacant fiscal officer positions unfilled.
- **Cost allocation of worker's compensation payments.** The bill permits the legislative body of any county, district, district activity, or institution to allocate workers' compensation payments to the Public Insurance Fund across various funds. Although this will give these political subdivisions some accounting flexibility, it will not alter the total workers' compensation payments they are required to pay.
- **Other provisions.** The bill contains various other provisions relating to quarterly spending plans, financial distress shared service notices and group insurance coverage that appear to have minimal or unclear fiscal effects on local governments.

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## **Detailed Fiscal Analysis**

The following is a list of items contained in the bill that will have fiscal effects on the operations of political subdivisions. The list is prioritized according to the degree of fiscal impact they will have on the affected political subdivisions. The provisions contained in the bill that have only a minimal fiscal impact or no apparent fiscal effect at all are briefly listed at the end of this analysis. A more detailed description of these items may be found in the LSC Bill Analysis.

### **Competitive bidding thresholds**

The bill increases competitive bidding thresholds for local governments in several different areas and makes these thresholds uniform for the affected political subdivisions. First, the bill increases the competitive bidding thresholds that apply to projects for the construction, reconstruction, widening, resurfacing, or repair of a street or other public way for statutory villages (\$25,000) and cities (\$30,000) to \$50,000. Secondly, it increases the competitive bid threshold for a board of hospital trustees of a municipal hospital having donated property, and for a joint board having management control over a workhouse (that is, a jail) erected for the joint use of a city and a county or real estate for the purpose of erecting and maintaining a workhouse, from \$10,000 to \$50,000. Third, it increases from \$25,000 to \$50,000 the threshold for a board of park commissioners having control of parks and park facilities and changes the threshold from \$10,000 to \$50,000 for any contract for work or supplies. Finally, the bill increases the bidding thresholds for sanitary districts from \$10,000 to \$50,000. These provisions could reduce administrative burden for political subdivisions by reducing the number of projects subject to competitive bidding requirements. However, it is unclear whether or not this would result in some increased project costs because certain projects would no longer be competitively bid.

### **Office expenses for local health districts**

The bill requires a board of county commissioners to provide office space and utilities to the county's general health district board of health through FY 2013, and to provide payments in FY 2014 through FY 2017 based on specified decreasing proportions (80% in FY 2014, 60% in FY 2015, 40% in FY 2016, and 20% in FY 2017) of the estimated costs of office space and utilities. There will be no obligation for a county to provide or make payments for office space and utilities after FY 2017. (A related provision permits a board of county commissioners to provide office space and utilities to the general health district board of health, by contract or free of charge in FY 2018 and thereafter.) This reduces costs for county commissioners since they will pay a decreasing portion of costs for office space and utilities through FY 2017 and will not be required to pay any portion after that year. There will, however, be a subsequent increase in costs for local boards of health in a general health district.

## **Local boards of health ability to contract**

The bill clarifies that local boards of health may contract with each other for the provision of some or all public health services, rather than only for all services as has been interpreted by some under current law. The provision is permissive, so any fiscal impact to a local board would be the result of that board choosing to enter into a contract with another board. The bill also specifies that the effectiveness of a contract in which one local board of health agrees to provide some, but not all, public health services on behalf of another local board is effective immediately and is not dependent on the Director of Health's approval. The provision could result in a negligible decrease in costs for the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) since the ODH Director would no longer have to approve these contracts.

## **Local boards of health as bodies corporate and politic**

The bill specifies that a local board of health is, for the purpose of providing public health services, a "body politic and corporate." As such, it is capable of suing and being sued; contracting and being contracted with; acquiring, holding, possessing, and disposing of real and personal property; and taking and holding in trust for the use and benefit of the relevant city or general health district or authority any grant or devise of land and any domain or bequest of money or other personal property. According to the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners (AOHC), this provision will give boards the ability to enter into contracts or acquire real property. Boards can currently enter into contracts, so this will be codifying current practice. However, AOHC states that if real property is conveyed to the board, then the upkeep, maintenance, and utility costs would become the responsibility of the board of health.

## **General health district appropriation measures**

The bill requires that a general health district comply with specific current law provisions requiring the adoption of an itemized appropriation measure and revenue estimate for a fiscal year only if the district will receive an appropriation from the municipal corporations and townships that comprise the district. For general health districts that do not receive such appropriations, the bill allows them to instead comply with general law provisions governing the adoption of an appropriation measure by a subdivision.

The bill provides that the revenue estimate certified by a general health district for a fiscal year must include any surplus money in the District Health Fund that will be carried forward to that fiscal year from the current fiscal year to fund ongoing operations in the upcoming year. According to AOHC, this will allow a general health district to carryover funds at the end of a fiscal year before the district's first apportionment is received in April. AOHC states that the majority of county auditors currently allow for these funds to be carried over.

## **Joint county departments of job and family services**

The bill permits the boards of county commissioners of any two or more counties to enter into a written agreement to form a joint county department of job and family services (CDJFS). Under current law, only Hocking, Ross, and Vinton counties were permitted to form a joint CDJFS as a pilot project. There is potential for a decrease in administrative costs for counties that form a joint CDJFS.

## **Testing an accused for venereal disease**

The bill modifies an existing criminal law provision to require that a person arrested for certain sexually oriented offenses, and required to submit to a test for a venereal disease, do so within 48 hours after the date on which a complaint, information, or indictment is filed. This modification brings Ohio into compliance with federal guidelines to be eligible for money from the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) grant program. The state currently receives around \$4 million annually from this federal grant program. Absent this statutory modification, 5% of this annual amount could have been withheld. Since this testing is already a legal requirement, any additional local costs related to expediting the timeframe should be no more than minimal.

## **Allocation of assistance from the Legal Aid Fund**

The bill specifies that, for the purpose of allocating financial assistance to legal aid societies from the Ohio Legal Aid Fund (Fund 5740), the source of data for identifying the number of indigent persons residing in a county must be selected by the Ohio Legal Assistance Foundation from the best available figures maintained by the U.S. Census Bureau. This provision will have no fiscal effect on the money credited to or disbursed from the Ohio Legal Aid Fund or the Public Defender Commission, which provides administrative assistance.

## **Weights and measures inspectors**

The bill authorizes a county auditor to share the services of county weights and measures inspectors with other counties, provided the inspectors remain part-time employees of each county. The bill also specifies that if an inspector becomes a full-time employee of one county that the inspector's employment with the other county must be terminated. The bill further authorizes a county auditor to enter into a contract with a private person to perform the services of a weights and measures inspector, but requires that any contractor performing these functions meet the training and continuing education requirements established for weights and measures inspectors by the Director of Agriculture. There could be cost savings for county auditors that share weights and measures inspectors or contract with other counties for these inspection services.

## **County auditors serving as fiscal officers**

The bill allows a county auditor, if permitted by a board of county commissioners, to serve as the fiscal officer for any department, office, or agency of the county. This could result in cost savings if counties are able to eliminate or leave vacant fiscal officer positions unfilled as the county auditor would be performing these functions for that particular office or department.

## **Cost allocation of workers' compensation payments**

Current law allows counties to engage in cost allocation of Workers' Compensation premium payments. Specifically, the bill provides clarification on what specific costs may be allocated in this manner. Under the bill, in addition to workers' compensation premium payments, other costs that may be allocated include (1) direct administrative costs incurred in the management of the county's workers' compensation program, and (2) indirect costs that are necessary and reasonable for the proper and efficient administration of the county's workers' compensation plan. The indirect costs, however, must be calculated using United States Office of Management and Budget Circular A-87 guidelines. Spreading these costs across more county funds could result in higher charges against some funds and lower charges against others, but will not have any net effect on the overall payments made under a county's workers' compensation plan.

## **Other provisions**

The bill contains several other provisions that could have a minimal fiscal impact on local governments. First, the bill requires a municipal corporation, county, township, and school district under a fiscal watch or fiscal emergency to identify, in the financial plan required in these circumstances, the actions to be taken to enter into a shared service agreement with another political subdivision that agrees to carry out governmental functions or provide services for the entity under fiscal watch or emergency. Although there could be some increase in administrative costs for political subdivisions to provide this additional information in the required financial plans, any additional expense, if any, would be small. Secondly, the bill eliminates a provision that prohibits boards of county commissioners from contracting for or purchasing group insurance policies, or benefits once the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) implements health care plans that contain best practices for counties. Ultimately, the impact of this provision will depend on the terms of the health care contracts and how they compare to the best practices established by DAS. Finally, the bill limits the duration of quarterly spending plans that may be adopted by a board of county commissioners and that apply to certain county funds to two fiscal years. There is no apparent direct fiscal impact associated with this provision.