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Legislator pushes shared services bill

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TRENTON While a state commission is studying the best ways for towns to share services, a state legislator thinks local officials should have access to what is working now.

Assemblyman Peter Biondo wants the state Department of Community Affairs to post shared service agreements from municipalities and studies on the financial benefits of those agreements on their Web site to serve as a guide to local officials. He recently introduced a bill to require it.

"This is common-sense legislation that will serve as a valuable resource for towns that may be searching for ways to operate more efficiently," said Assemblyman Peter Biondi, R-Somerset and Morris.

The legislation would direct the DCA to review and update the Web site monthly.

Currently, the state's recently developed Local Unit Alignment, Reorganization and Consolidation Commission is working to develop efficiency benchmarks for service sharing between municipalities. It is expected to release its findings by March, also detailing which level of government should provide certain services.

Based on those parameters, the nine-member commission would recommend consolidating municipalities or suggest service sharing between specific municipalities.

In the meantime, Gov. Jon S. Corzine has encouraged service sharing in his proposed \$33 billion budget, through proposed cuts in municipal aid to small towns with those with fewer than 5,000 residents the hardest hit. Instead, he has made funding available for municipalities to study service sharing and consolidation and to implement those agreements.

Biondo believes the DCA Web site could serve as a resource to municipalities, providing examples of "best practices" for local governments to follow.

"Our goal is to realize cost efficiencies at the local level that will benefit the taxpayer," Biondi said.

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