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Task force legislation provides more assistance to local police

HARRISBURG, June 6 -- Legislation introduced today by state Rep. Thomas Tangretti and other lawmakers would offer financial and technical assistance to local police departments and promote regionalization and other strategies to make local policing more effective and efficient.

Tangretti, D-Westmoreland, has worked on the issue of state assistance to local police departments for several years. He said the package of bills introduced today is the result of two years of work by a special legislative task force, of which he was a member, that examined the state's role in local policing.

"Frankly, we found that the amount of state assistance given to local police is inadequate with regard to the amount of responsibility and expense they bear in providing for public safety," Tangretti said at a news conference today. "These task force proposals and the resulting legislation offer a specific role for the state to play in effectively strengthening and improving local law enforcement in Pennsylvania."

As part of the legislative package, Tangretti is sponsoring a bill that would create a low-cost loan program for municipal police departments. The 2 percent loan fund, which would be administered by the Department of Community and Economic Development, would provide money for the purchase, repair and maintenance of buildings and for vehicles and equipment. The loan program would be similar to one the state has in place for volunteer fire departments.

Tangretti has introduced this legislation in several legislative sessions, and it has passed the House several times.

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"Hopefully, its inclusion in the task force report will be the impetus it needs to pass both the House and Senate and get signed by the governor," he said. "Pennsylvania's municipal police departments need this important source of funding."

Another Tangretti bill would create a fund for municipalities that want to form their own police departments, contract with other municipalities for police coverage or join regional police departments. The money would be raised through a \$25 surcharge on misdemeanor convictions, excluding routine traffic offenses, and a \$50 surcharge on felony convictions. Tangretti said the program would raise about \$2.7 million.

Tangretti also introduced a resolution calling for a select committee to study the creation of a seamless pension system for all law enforcement officers in Pennsylvania.

"The lack of portability between the disparate police pension funds in Pennsylvania is one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of police officers transferring from one level of law enforcement to another and in the creation of regional police forces," Tangretti said. "This issue is too complicated and too important not to be looked at on its own by a committee that can make recommendations to the General Assembly."

Other bills in the legislative package would:

- designate the Governor's Center for Local Government Services within DCED to act as an advocate for municipal police departments at the state level;
- allow municipalities to levy a dedicated tax to fund police services;
- designate funding from the Shared Municipal Services Program for joint municipal police cooperation.

"This is a very important and effective bipartisan package of bills," Tangretti said. "Enacting this legislation not only would strengthen local police departments, but would give them a stronger voice at the table during the legislative and budget process."