

*"A Great City Is Not To Be
Confounded With A Populous One."
Aristotle*



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
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House Local Government Committee: House Bill 2018
March 7, 2008
Testimony – Mayor Robert J. Lucas

The City of Sharon is similar to many historic 3rd class cities in Pennsylvania. It has a rich history of providing jobs, homes, schools, healthcare facilities, libraries, places of worship, and many needed non-profit agencies. However, over the last thirty plus years Sharon has experienced a decline of population of over forty percent, the exodus of thousands of jobs, and the erosion of core neighborhoods. In addition, the last countywide property assessment occurred in 1970, and the Commonwealth's successful Keystone Opportunity Zone initiative, placed an additional burden on our city services without corresponding revenue.

House Bill 2018 addresses the fact that cities like Sharon are caught in the middle. Currently, twenty-five percent of our assessed value is tax-exempt, and yet we must continually provide the needed city services for these necessary entities while our tax base erodes yearly. Our neighboring communities with large tracks of undeveloped land enjoy residential and commercial growth. Their taxes are lower because of a broader tax base. Meanwhile, the challenge of maintaining adequate police forces in the face of

increased drug and criminal activity is a daily struggle. The COPS program helped but it ended. Blighted neighborhoods and substandard housing draws absentee landlords that prey on desperate people. This corresponds to an increase of structure fires, which in turn strains our fire department.

Fiscally the City of Sharon, working with the Governor's Action Team, has utilized the Early Intervention Study to avoid Act 47. We have made tough expenditure decisions by reducing our workforce by twenty percent. We also have the highest property taxes in Mercer County.

In summation, the model of yesteryear, where people wanted to live in town, close to their places of work, school, and worship has changed and the Commonwealth needs to assist our core communities through this transition. We are committed to moving Sharon forward and the Tax-exempt Property Municipal Assistance Act would be an essential tool in our efforts.