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New Report Finds Illinois Municipalities Pushing for ‘Home Rule.’

A movement is underway to have the Illinois legislature expand what’s called “home rule authority,” according to a [new report](#) from the Better Government Association. What exactly is home rule and what could it mean for towns and villages throughout the state?

Bob Reed, director of programming at the Better Government Association, says home rule gives communities “more control.”

“It’s basically a legal standing that allows towns of over 25,000 [people] to tax, issue bonds, do other financial engineering and economic development and make a number of other decisions for their communities, such as privatizing certain services, like garbage collection or water, and changing zoning,” Reed said. “Basically, it gives communities more control in both how they finance and how they will run their communities.”

According to Reed, out of 1,297 municipalities in Illinois, 211 currently operate under home rule, which was first introduced in Illinois in 1970 as an amendment to the state constitution.

The Illinois Municipal League is working on legislation that would expand home rule to communities with over 5,000 people with an amendment to the Illinois constitution. But that legislation would have to make it through the General Assembly before it gets to the ballot in November.

Reed said the chances that home rule will be on the ballot are “slim to none.”

“I wouldn’t rule it out 100 percent, but it’s highly unlikely,” Reed said. “What this really is, is a warm-up act. What the Illinois Municipal League is signaling here is the state’s 1,297 municipalities are hurting. These towns and villages are concerned that even if a state budget is passed, the state could hold back money. So they’re looking at the taxpayer as a way to relieve some of this pressure and uncertainty so they can move forward with plans and fully funding their day-to-day operations.”

Reed said that even with the state budget stalemate, home rule is still a tough sell to voters.

“Most people, when they hear home rule, think more taxes. But on the other side, you have the people who run the government and unions who want home rule to pay for better schools and better services,” Reed said.

“[What is] important to remember here though is that home rule by itself won’t solve the financial problems for communities,” Reed said. “Municipalities need to also deal with reforming pensions, consolidating government, and where possible, consider privatizing services. Home rule is just one tool in the package for municipalities.”

Reed joins “Chicago Tonight” to further discuss home rule and what that could mean for Illinois communities.

Chicago Tonight

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