Legislative Analysis

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TOWNSHIP CONTRACTS FOR SERVICES TO DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS

House Bill 4563 (H-1) as reported from committee
Sponsor: Rep. Eric Leutheuser
Committee: Local Government
Complete to 7-15-15

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would allow township officials to enter into contracts with private nonprofit organizations that provide services to victims of domestic or sexual assault.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill is permissive; any increased spending by a township resulting from this bill would be at the discretion of a township board.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Since 1979, Domestic Harmony—a shelter for women who experience domestic or sexual violence—has served the residents of Hillsdale County. Open 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, the private non-profit organization is run by volunteers, and a staff of 10. The shelter is in the town of Hillsdale, located at the center of the county. See ***Background Information*** below.

For more than 35 years, Domestic Harmony has raised funds through individual donations, business contributions, annual fundraising events, and also grants from charitable foundations and governmental agencies. At times, fully 14 of Hillsdale County's 18 townships have contributed money toward the operation and upkeep of the Domestic Harmony shelter.

Recently, the elected trustees representing Somerset Township declined to make the township's customary annual contribution to the shelter, noting that Michigan's township enabling statutes do not explicitly provide for the funding of domestic violence shelters.

To authorize such contributions, legislation has been introduced to allow (but not to require) township trustees to fund the services provided to their residents who are survivors of domestic or sexual violence.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 4563 (H-1) would allow township officials to enter into contracts with private nonprofit organizations that provide services to victims of domestic or sexual assault.

The bill would amend Revised Statute 16 of 1846 (MCL 41.110c), which concerns the powers and duties of townships, and would take effect 90 days after enactment. A more detailed description of the bill follows.

Section 110c of the statute specifically authorizes a township board to appropriate money or spend funds for all of the following purposes:

- To advertise the agricultural, industrial, commercial, educational, or recreational advantages of the state, county, or township.
- To collect and maintain an exhibition (either domestic or foreign) of the products and industries of the township, to encourage immigration and increase trade.
- To advertise Michigan (or any portion of the state) to tourists and 'resorters'.
- To maintain and circulate a publication that disseminates information concerning township improvements, activities, and functions.

House Bill 4563 (H-1) would retain these four provisions, and amend Section 110c to authorize a fifth purpose for the expenditure of funds. Specifically, under the bill, a township could enter into a contract for services to victims of domestic or sexual violence with any private, nonprofit corporation or organization that provided domestic or sexual violence services, including, but not limited to, one or more of the following: safe emergency shelter, a 24-hour crisis hotline, supportive counseling, coordination of supportive services, and legal advocacy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To learn more about Domestic Harmony, a free shelter for the victims of domestic or sexual assault that has been operating in Hillsdale County for 36 years, please visit: http://domesticharmony.org/

ARGUMENTS:

For:

This bill is permissive. It allows, but does not require, township trustees to appropriate money to pay for the services needed by their constituents who have been the victims of domestic or sexual violence. Under the bill, township officials could use their revenue to enter into contracts for a range of services, including shelter, hotline, counseling, support, and legal services.

POSITIONS:

Domestic Harmony supports the bill. (6-3-15)

The Michigan Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence supports the bill. (6-3-15)

The Michigan Townships Association supports the bill. (6-3-15)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.