



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

MAY 15 1985
494-4100 JS.
CAMBRIDGE

THOMAS J. LARKIN, Chairman
Bedford

MICHAEL E. McLAUGHLIN, Lowell

BILL SCHMIDT, Newton

40 THORNDIKE STREET
EAST CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02141

May 6, 1985

Gentlemen:

It has become apparent that there is a strong movement among various State officials aimed at the takeover of various County functions, among them the operation of the Jail and House of Correction. As Commissioners of Middlesex County we feel it is incumbent upon us to state certain facts about this proposed takeover.

The experience we have had in the past with other takeovers, most notably Welfare and the Court system, makes it a virtual certainty that the operational costs of these facilities will double or triple in the very near future. Equally certain is the likelihood that these costs will, ultimately, be supported through a reduction in local aid. Presently, the average cost of incarceration in a County facility is \$14,439 per inmate/year; the same cost in the State is \$22,283 per inmate/year. An important fact to note, in this regard, is that **costs within the County system are controlled by Proposition 2-1/2; no such spending controls are in effect for the State!**

The reason that a State inmate costs are so high is due to the types of programs provided. State correctional inmates are by and large hardened, long term offenders; whereas, County inmates' sentences are 2-1/2 years or less. If the State takes over, there can be little doubt that the State inmates will be intergrated within the County system, and as such, long term hardened criminals will be housed in both Billerica House of Correction and the East Cambridge Jail.

In this proposed takeover, as well as others which are being considered, the Commonwealth is displaying blatant disregard for progress made by the County Advisory Boards and for the process promised by currently pending Charter Reform Legislation for Counties. This bill, presently in the Committee on Counties, would allow the voters of each County to choose which, if any, form of County Government to adopt on a permanent basis.

Presently contained in the State's FY'86 Budget is a message that, in fact, all the Counties' Jails and Houses of Correction are to be assumed by the Commonwealth as of January 1, 1986. This budget calls for one half fiscal year appropriation costing \$30,000,000. The language states clearly that:

...., in Suffolk County, correctional costs have swelled as a percentage of the overall costs of operating county government, all of which is paid by the City of Boston. The State's takeover will relieve Boston of this cost, which is more than 12.2 million dollars in direct expenses in FY'85.

This statement is an obvious indication that as a result of the need to bail out Boston from its financial burden, Suffolk County's Jails will be transferred to the Commonwealth. We are aware of Boston's need for additional revenues. One solution,

the transfer of Suffolk County Jails, is a good idea; but this need not and should not include the other counties.

The other unfortunate byproduct of this budget message is the assumption that the State can operate our correctional institutions for the \$30,000,000 which they have allocated, based on the county appropriations for FY'86. What the State failed to take into account is the following:

- The cost of maintaining state prisoners vs. county prisoners is significantly higher, as previously indicated.
- This figure does not account for the assumption of debt service presently owed on County correctional facilities.
- This figure does not allocate money for reimbursement to county taxpayers for the fair market value of property for which they have already paid. This sum in Middlesex County alone totals approximately 27 million dollars! (East Cambridge Jail and Billerica House of Correction).

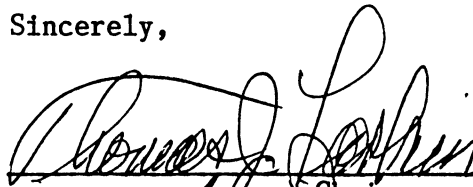
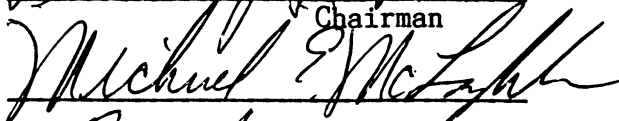
We in Middlesex County operate our Jail and House of Correction cheaply and efficiently. As Commissioners, we are constantly under the scrutiny of the County Advisory Board, without whose approval County Government cannot operate. Through this procedure there is constant and necessary oversight at the local level.

As an alternative to State takeover, the Commissioners of Middlesex County support a charter reform bill by which citizens may shape the form of County Government according to their own needs and desires. We also support a system of State aid to Counties to help offset the rising costs of operation for all correctional institutions. **We do not, however, support legislative initiatives which defeat both of these purposes by reducing local choice, and increasing local cost in poorly prepared and ill-advised actions.**

We urge you to help put a stop to these takeovers by the State, and to support our concern, and that of the Advisory Board, for efficient, low-cost government. Please contact your local Senators and Representatives, as well as Representative Michael Morrissey and Senator William Golden, of the Committee on Counties, and Representative Richard Voke and Senator Patricia McGovern of the Committee on Ways and Means to express your disapproval.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and your anticipated support.

Sincerely,


Chairman


Middlesex County Commissioners

F-195

Comm. from the Middlesex County Commissioners
Re: a movement among various State officials
to take over various County functions, including
the operation of the Jail & House of Correction.

5/20/85 - REFERRED TO THE CITY MANAGER
FOR REPORT

In City Council,

May 20, 1985

*referred to the City Manager
5/27/85 ml*