

## **A Message from the President of the AMANJ**

At a time when public employees in New Jersey are being blamed for everything from underfunded pensions to unfilled potholes – and in the case of assessors for high property taxes – it is increasingly important for us to tell our story.

Assessors have been a key element of the fabric of government since the first leader came up with the concept of all citizens bearing their share of the cost of government. Today taxes are the primary source of revenue for municipalities around the world. The system works because property values are generally the most stable and best reflect the value of property in a community. Basing taxation on property valuations helps assure the equitable distribution of the cost of services in proportion to real estate values.

As a result, assessors are the economic engines that power municipal and county governments, as well as school systems. We are not the only revenue center in local government but we are surely the greatest source of funding for the services municipalities provide their taxpayers.

That is why it is so surprising and disappointing to see a pilot program such as the one underway in Gloucester County that eliminates municipal tax assessors in favor of county-based assessor's offices. Or to see pending legislation that that would eliminate both the tax assessment and tax collection functions in municipalities and consolidate them in county offices.

We are opposed to this legislation on several counts:

- The premise of the legislation is that it would somehow reduce property taxes, implying that high property taxes are the responsibility of assessors and collectors. There is no data to support this belief. In fact, in all likelihood county-based assessment and collection would increase the cost of municipal government and place a greater burden on counties to make ends meet.
- There is no doubt that consolidating the assessment function at county offices would result in a loss of vital services to the residents of affected municipalities. No longer would taxpayers be able to conduct the business of government with assessors or collectors in their communities.
- The idea of implementing such a plan statewide is based on the notion that one size fits all, which is far from the case when it comes to New Jersey. Part of our state's great charm is the demographic and economic diversity of its people and municipalities. Take it from me that Bergen County, where I live and work, is a much different place from the vacation communities on the shore or the farms of Sussex and Warren counties. Or from the business and industrial centers of Jersey City and Newark and the counties surrounding Philadelphia.
- In short, this legislation has the potential to inflict more harm than to do good for the people they purport to help – the taxpayers.

You can read more about both of these issues by exploring the County Pilot/S458 page. I urge you to read, educate yourself to the real issues and address any questions you may have to your local assessor or to me at this website.

In closing, we need to make a greater effort to reach out to the people of New Jersey – the taxpayers and business community, elected officials and the news media – to tell our story and talk about the valuable services we provide.

Sincerely,

***Carol C. Byrne***