

**Saving Taxpayer Dollars**

**Through**

**Consolidated Police and Fire Services**

***Citizens Research Council of Michigan***

500 Guardian Building South  
Detroit, Michigan 48226

834 Michigan National Tower  
Lansing, Michigan 48933

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# CONSOLIDATED POLICE AND FIRE SERVICES

Today, many cities are caught in a crunch between increasing public concern about the adequacy of police and fire protection services and the rapidly escalating salary and fringe benefits costs for police officers and fire fighters.

The consolidation of municipal police and fire departments offers Michigan communities the opportunity to increase significantly police patrol strength and fire fighting response, with little or no increase in costs, or, to reduce expenditures for public service salaries and wages while maintaining existing service levels.

Police-fire consolidation can increase the number of on-duty men available for police patrol or response to fire alarms by as much as 50 percent. If present service levels are adequate, police-fire consolidation can result in a 25 percent reduction in salary and fringe benefit costs while continuing to provide the same level of service. In either case, police-fire consolidation makes available more on-duty personnel to fight fires and provides a larger group of trained public safety officers off-duty who can be recalled in the event of a major conflagration. Police-fire consolidation also makes it feasible to extend the 40-hour work week to all public safety personnel and tends to provide them a higher degree of professionalization and job satisfaction.

## How Police-Fire Consolidation Works

Police-fire consolidation involves the performance of both police and fire protection duties by a group of public safety officers who are trained in both activities. The primary thrust of police-fire consolidation is to increase the number of officers on the street performing public safety duties and to reduce the number of officers standing by in the station. Fire apparatus is manned with the minimum number of officers required to drive equipment to fires, thereby reducing the number of persons whose time is principally occupied to stand by apparatus. Except for command and special assignment personnel, all other public safety officers are assigned to patrol vehicles outfitted with fire fighting equipment and protective clothing as well as police equipment. They engage in police patrol, fire fighting and fire prevention. Police-fire consolidation has proved to be a flexible concept adaptable to the varying needs and conditions of many cities or sections of cities.

### Full Consolidation

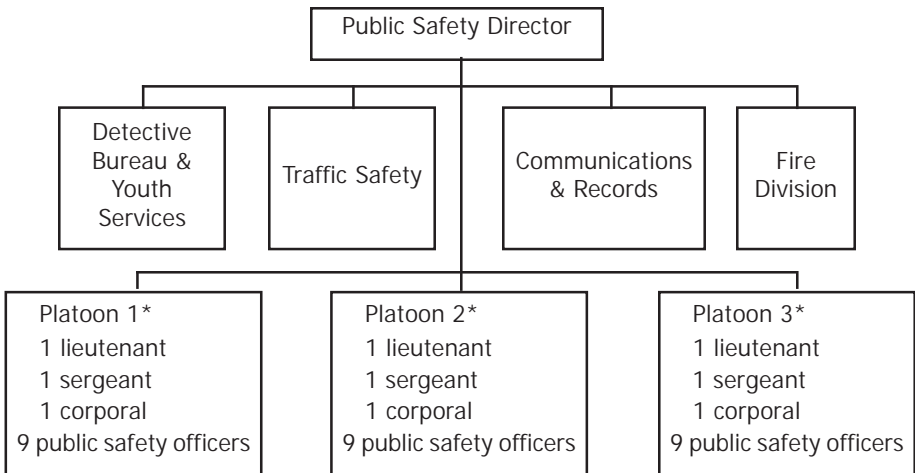
A fully consolidated police-fire department is frequently referred to as a public safety department and generally has the following characteristics: a single chief administrator responsible for supervision of all police and fire functions; a single staff for ancillary services such as personnel, training, budget, records, and communications; and, the organization of line functions into fire, patrol and detective divisions. The Michigan cities of Grosse Pointe Woods, Oak Park, Farmington,

Huntington Woods, Beverly Hills and Fraser are examples of fully consolidated public safety departments.

The economics of consolidation may be demonstrated by comparing two neighboring Michigan cities, A and B. Although the concept is applicable to cities of various sizes, the validity of the comparison is enhanced by the fact that both cities are primarily residential in nature and have populations of around 20,000 persons. Both cities also belong to mutual assistance pacts, maintain two active fire apparatus and a third in reserve, and direct all public safety operations from a single headquarters.

*City A – Consolidated Public Safety Department.* Chart 1 shows the organization of the City A public safety department. The chart shows that City A police patrol and fire fighting operations are performed by a corps of 36 public safety officers distributed among three platoons, or an average of 12 officers per platoon.<sup>1</sup> All public safety employees, including those assigned to fire apparatus, work an average 40-hour week. Leave, sick days and vacations result in the availability of eight public safety officers for each shift to perform police patrol and fire fighting functions. The manning standard in City A calls for the allocation of a

**CHART 1**  
**City "A" Public Safety Department**



\*City "A" police patrol and fire fighting operations. Leave, sick days and vacations reduce each platoon to an average strength of eight public safety officers.

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, City A maintains a split shift which consists of two public safety officers and the first platoon contains ten, rather than 12, public safety officers shown on Chart 1. For comparison purposes, however, the 36 officers are assigned to one of three, eight-hour shifts.

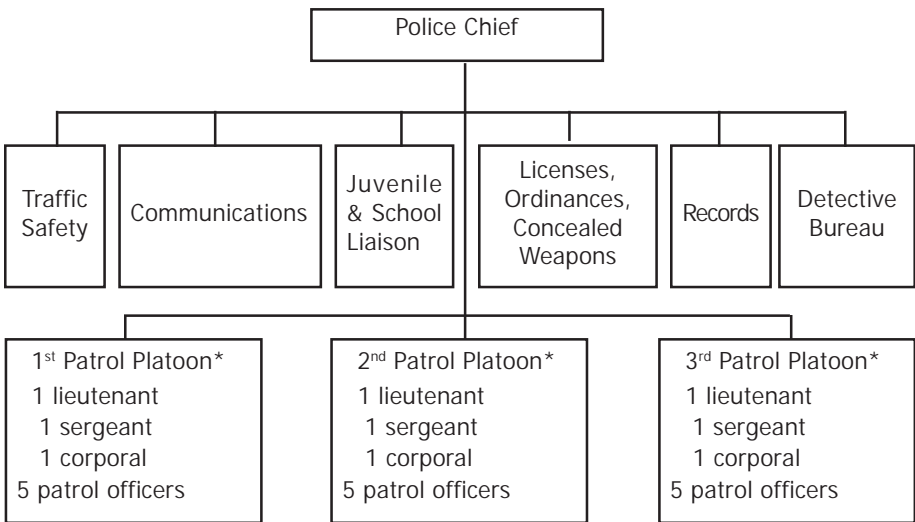
shift commander and two drivers to the fire station leaving five officers available at all times for patrol purposes.

*City B – Separate Police-Fire Departments.* Chart 2 outlines the organization of the City B police department. The chart shows that the police patrol function in City B is carried out by three, eight-man patrol platoons. Each of the 24 police officers is on duty an average of 40 hours per week. Leave, sick days and vacations reduce the average City B police platoon to five officers. Since a commanding officer normally remains in the station, an average of four officers is available for patrol duty on each shift.

Because crime occurs at irregular intervals, the number of officers on each shift varies throughout the week. In order to make a clear comparison of consolidated and separate police and fire departments, however, the following analyses assume shifts of uniform strength.

### CHART 2

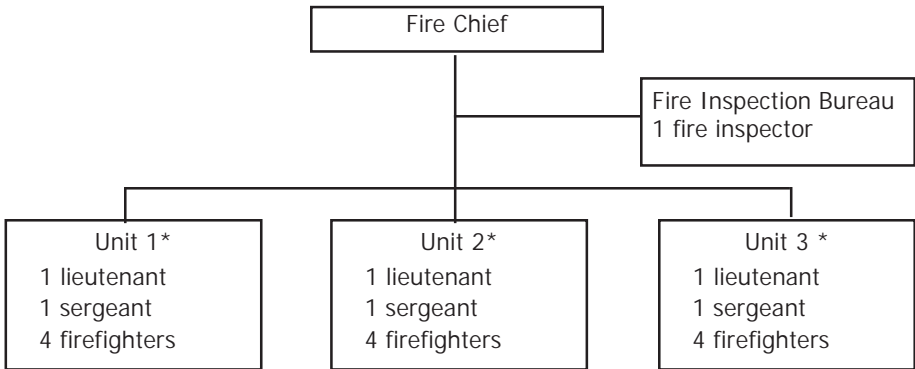
#### City "B" Police Department



\*City "B" patrol force. Leave, sick days and vacations reduce each shift to an average of five police officers, one of whom remains in the station. An average of four police officers is on patrol.

Chart 3 depicts the organization of the City B fire department. The chart shows that in addition to a fire chief and a fire marshal, the city maintains three, six-man platoons. Each fire fighter is on duty for an average of 56 hours per week, requiring two-and-one-third days in the station house. Leave, sick days and vacation reduce the on-duty strength of the average fire platoon in City B to five fire fighters.

**CHART 3**  
**City "B" Fire Department**



\*City "B" fire fighters. Leave, sick days and vacations reduce each platoon to an average of five on-duty fire personnel.

The comparison of manning standards for the two cities, as shown in Table 1, demonstrates the greater efficiency and flexibility of public safety operations in City A, the consolidated city. Table 1 shows how City A is able to provide one more additional officer for patrol purposes than City B, despite the fact that it has six fewer personnel involved in police patrol and fire fighting operations than City B. Thus, even though City A is providing a higher level of service to its residents than City B, it is spending approximately \$120,000 per year less in salaries and fringe benefits than City B. The cost savings can be attributed to having fewer personnel on stand by. As shown in Table 1, City A has three fewer personnel on stand by than City B at all times.

### Improved Service Through Consolidation

Table 2 shows how the consolidation of its police and fire departments would enable City B to provide a higher level of service without increasing personnel costs. The consolidation of City B police and fire departments in a manner similar to City A would make available a total of 42 public safety officers to perform police patrol and fire fighting operations. This would provide 14 officers assigned to each of three platoons. After leave, sick days and vacations, an average of nine public safety officers would be available for patrol and fire fighting operations for each eight-hour shift. The allocation of a shift commander plus a driver for each of the two regular responding fire apparatus would leave six public safety officers available for patrol,

which is a 50 percent increase in the number of police officers available for patrol in the present City B police department. In addition to greater patrol strength, consolidation of the City B police and fire departments would make available eight public safety officers for fire fighting duties, an increase of 60 percent in the number of fire fighters available to the present City B fire department. Since few of the fire calls received by the City B fire department would require eight fire fighters, it would be possible to send five officers to a scene of a fire, equal to the present number of City B firemen who respond to a call, and still have three officers on patrol.

**TABLE 1**  
**Comparison of Manpower in City A and City B**

	<u>City A (Consolidated Department)</u>	<u>City B (Separate Departments)</u>	<u>Difference A – B</u>
Number of Operations Personnel*	36	45	-6
Police	(36)	24	-6
Fire		18	
Average Number of Officers on Patrol	5	4	+1
Average Number of Officers on Stand by			
Police	1	1	—
Fire	2	5	-3
Average Number of Officers Available to Respond to Fires	8	5	+3

\*Excludes specialized officers.

**Table 2**  
**Consolidation of City B Police and Fire Departments to  
Increase Service Levels Without Increasing Costs**

	<u>Increase + or Decrease – in Consolidated Department</u>	<u>Separate Departments</u>	<u>Service Level if Consolidated</u>
Number of Operations Personnel			
Police	(42)	24	
Fire		18	—
Total	42	42	—
Number of Officers on Patrol	6	4	+2
Number of Officers on Stand by			
Police	1	1	—
Fire	2	5	-3
Number of Officers Available to Respond to Fires	8	5	+3

## The Use of Consolidation to Reduce Personnel Without Reducing Service

If present service levels in City B are adequate, consolidation of the police and fire departments would enable City B to maintain existing service levels with 20 percent fewer operations personnel (see Table 3). The City B police department presently maintains an average patrol strength of five police officers, one of whom normally remains in the station. The fire department maintains an average on-duty platoon of five fire fighters. City B employs 42 persons to provide these service levels. If City B consolidated its police and fire departments, however, only 32 public safety officers would be required to provide a level of service comparable to that now provided by the existing City B police and fire departments. Based on a total force of 32 public safety officers, leave, sick days and vacations in a consolidated department would result in an average shift of seven officers available for patrol and fire fighting operations. The allocation of a shift commander and two fire apparatus drivers to the station would leave four public safety officers for police patrol (equal to the existing City B police department) and for responding to fire calls. In the event of a fire, three officers on patrol could respond to an alarm with the two drivers of apparatus which is the response strength of the present fire department. This would leave the remaining officer and the shift commander for patrol purposes. Based on an average salary and fringe benefits cost of \$20,000 per police officer or fire fighter, the reduction in operations personnel would mean annual savings of around \$200,000 to City B taxpayers.

**Table 3**  
**Consolidation of City B Police and Fire Departments to Reduce Costs Without Reducing Service Levels**

	<u>Consolidated Department</u>	<u>Separate Departments</u>	<u>Decrease in Personnel</u>
Number of Operations Personnel			
Police	(32)	24	
Fire	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
Total	32	42	-10
Number of Officers on Patrol	4	4	--
Number of Officers on Stand by			
Police	1	1	—
Fire	2	5	-3
Number of Officers Available to Respond to Fires	5	5	--

## Partial Police-Fire Consolidation

Partial police-fire consolidation seems to be favored by large cities, perhaps because it is more flexible than full consolidation and easier to implement. Partial consolidation retains separate police and fire services. Its unique characteristic, however, is the development of a unit of officers who perform regular patrol duties in addition to responding to fire alarms in patrol vehicles outfitted with protective clothing, a portable fire extinguisher and a hand axe. While on patrol the officers are under the direction of the police department. When fighting fires, however, they are generally supervised by the senior fire officer at the scene. The officers who constitute the public safety corps receive training in both fields.

Cities with partially consolidated police-fire services have tended to establish the public safety officer corps with new recruits and with volunteers from the existing police and fire departments. There is also a tendency to require that all personnel hired after implementation of the public safety corps undergo training in both fields and eventually hold the position of public safety officer. Thus, through attrition the number of public safety officers is increased. Because of the gradual, volunteer approach to the establishment of a public safety officer corps, partial consolidation is often viewed as an intermediate step leading to full consolidation.

Durham, North Carolina, has partially consolidated its city police and fire departments. Durham undertook partial consolidation initially in order to reduce the average work week of firemen from 72 to 56 hours and to increase police patrol strength without significantly increasing costs. In addition to new recruits, Durham sought volunteers from the city police and fire departments to undergo training as public safety officers. After three years, four of the seven city fire stations had been converted to public safety stations housing dually trained public safety officers. A fifth fire station housed both a public safety company and a fire company, while the remaining two stations housed fire companies. The original intent in the Durham plan was for each five-man public safety team to deploy four officers to patrol and the remaining officer to the fire apparatus, but a desire to give public safety officers additional training in the operation of fire apparatus resulted in the allocation of two officers to the station, leaving three officers available for patrol duty.

The director of the Durham public safety department credits partial consolidation of the city police and fire departments with a 25 to 48 percent reduction in fire response time for first arriving officers. The director further points out that since most fire calls involve either very small fires or no fire at all, quick response by public safety officers results in fire trucks being ordered back to the station before they arrive at the scene of the fire. That partial consolidation of police-fire departments offer significant economies in personnel costs is illustrated by the fact that 108 Durham public safety officers working 40 hours per week are able to provide about the same level of service as would 133 operations personnel (64 police officers and 69 fire fighters) assigned to separate departments. The Durham partially consolidated police-fire department requires about 20 percent fewer operating personnel than traditional police-fire departments to provide an equivalent level of service.

# Other Benefits of Consolidation

## Employee Development, Job Satisfactions

The reclassification of positions and the additional training which accompany police-fire consolidation present the public safety officer with greater prestige and a more diverse challenge. Some cities recognize the added responsibilities of public safety officers by providing higher compensation to public safety officers than that of either police officers or fire fighters. Furthermore, the exposure to such a system also prepares potential commanders and leaders for a more attractive career ladder than exists with separate police and fire departments.

## More Efficient Use of Personnel to Perform Related Tasks

The availability of police and fire personnel each trained in the basic function of the other also makes a greater number of employees available for temporary transfer to other functions. Where police and fire personnel are employed in the same building, stand by personnel can be utilized in some records and dispatch functions, inter-disciplinary training, taking accident reports, issuing bicycle licenses, taking stolen property reports, fingerprinting persons, and many other tasks that can be left temporarily to respond to an emergency.

Crime prevention and fire prevention activities can also be carried out by the same men. Many cities are now receiving LEAA funds for crime prevention programs, most of which include the task of inspecting business establishments and advising the owners of methods of target hardening. Fire departments traditionally inspect the same occupancies to advise on fire prevention and protection. In Oak Park, Michigan, patrol officers have been assigned such tasks daily for over ten years, but the single patrol officer does the fire and crime inspection at the same time, uses the same form, and does it as a matter of routine within his regularly assigned patrol district. This program also requires officers to get out of their vehicles and talk to the people of the community, which is a practice long advocated by police-community relations advisors, who decry the disappearance of the police foot beat. Oak Park also carries out a home inspection program, using similar methods, yet it allocates no special funds for the purpose, nor does it receiving any federal grants for its "innovative" operations.

## Communications and Records Systems

Consolidation of the police-fire telephone and radio communications systems is facilitated. The increasing use of the "911" emergency telephone number as the central dispatch system for all city emergency operated from a single switchboard and single radio dispatch position, promises to reduce equipment costs for maintaining separate systems for police and fire departments. The manpower savings which can be realized from the combination of dispatch positions and

duties are considerable. Records systems can also be integrated, reducing the number of personnel and amount of equipment allocated to separate systems.

## **Command Resources**

The combination of the command resources for the individual services provides a unity of command that reduces the fragmentation of efforts so often experienced at emergencies demanding the presence of both services.

# **Problems Associated with Consolidation – Real and Perceived**

## **Opposition from City Employees and Special Interests**

Most cities which attempt to consolidate police and fire departments encounter organized resistance from city police officers and fire fighters. Opposition among the fire fighters is usually greater than that of police officers perhaps because the change is more dramatic in relation to their duties, responsibilities and work schedules. This opposition is manifested in a resolution adopted by the International Association of Fire Fighters opposing the concept of police-fire consolidation.

## **Changes in Work Schedules**

Historically, those opposed to consolidation took refuge in the Michigan fire fighters work week law, Act 125, P.A. 1925, as amended, to prevent changes of scheduling which are inherent in some forms of consolidation. Act 125 provided that persons engaged in fire fighting could not be required to work with less than 24 consecutive hours off between duty periods. The law reinforced the traditional work schedule which required fire fighters to be on duty for 24 hours, off duty for 24 hours—a schedule that mitigates against an eight-hour work day. The problem was compounded when the 56-hour week became a reality in Michigan and provided fire fighters with 48 hours off between each 24-hour duty period. Under this schedule a fire fighter is required to be on duty for only ten days out of each thirty. Consequently, many fire fighters are gainfully employed in other positions for a greater portion of the normal monthly working period than they are at the fire station. Today, however, consolidation is aided by Act 78, P.A. 1973, which provides that the requirement of 24 hours off duty for firemen shall not apply to any municipality which by agreement with the fire fighters does not require them to be on duty for more than 40 hours in any consecutive seven-day period.

## Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining for police officers and fire fighters is also a potential negative factor. Contracts are usually written in such a manner that the city cannot make reorganization moves within the contract period. In order to make the appropriate changes at the time contracts are being negotiated, cities are required to adopt some hard-line positions which call for the utmost skill by the management negotiating teams and great dedication by the elected officials.

## Fire Insurance Ratings

One of the arguments most frequently advanced against consolidated police-fire departments is that consolidation results in a less advantageous fire insurance classification and thus, higher fire insurance premiums for homeowners and busi-

**Table 4**  
**A Comparison of Fire Insurance Classifications**  
**in Cities with Consolidated Public Safety Departments**  
**and Cities With Separate Police & Fire Departments**

(Detroit Metropolitan Area)

**Cities, Pop. 5,000-10,000**

Consolidated:	
Huntington Woods	7
Separate:	
Grosse Pointe City	5
Northville	7
Rochester	7
Woodhaven	8-9

**Cities, Pop. 15,000-25,000**

Consolidated:	
Grosse Pointe Woods	5
Separate:	
Berkley	6
Birmingham	5
Clawson	7
Ecorse	6
Harper Woods	5
Hazel Park	6
Mt. Clemens	5
River Rouge	6
Wayne	6

**Cities, Pop. 10,000-15,000**

Consolidated:	
Beverly Hills	7
Farmington	7
Fraser	6
Separate:	
Centerline	6
Grosse Pointe Farms	5
Grosse Pointe Park	5
Melvindale	6
Plymouth	7
Riverview	6

**Cities, Pop. 25,000-45,000**

Consolidated:	
Oak Park	5
Separate:	
Allen Park	6
East Detroit	6
Ferndale	4
Garden City	6
Hamtramck	5
Highland Park	3
Inkster	6
Madison Heights	6
Southgate	5
Trenton	4
Wyandotte	4

nesses in the city. However, a fire insurance classification is the result of an extensive survey of all elements affecting the quality of the fire service, including water supply, fire department, fire service communications, and fire safety control. Manning standards, a type of equipment, and other aspects of the fire department account for only 39 percent of the potential maximum deficiency points which may be assigned to a city in determining a fire insurance classification. Furthermore, consolidated cities are given partial credit for the officers assigned to patrol vehicles who regularly respond to fires.

Table 4 compares the fire insurance classification of cities with consolidated public safety departments and cities in the same population group with separate police and fire departments. The data indicate that the fire insurance classification in cities with consolidated departments is generally comparable to those in cities with separate departments. In the 5,000-10,000 population size group, Huntington Woods (7) is average. In the 10,000-15,000 population group, Fraser (6) is average, while Beverly Hills (7) and Farmington (7) have poorer classifications than four of the cities and the same as two of the cities. In the 15,000-25,000 group, Grosse Pointe Woods (5) is average. In the 25,000-40,000 group, Oak Park (5) is better than average. The data do not support the allegation that cities with consolidated public safety departments have less advantageous fire insurance classifications than cities with separate departments.

## **Steps to Implement Police-Fire Consolidation**

### **The City Charter, Civil Service System**

The city charter may have to be amended if it has no provision for the combination or elimination of departments, or if it has strongly stated provisions for separate police and fire departments. If the community is one of the approximately two dozen in Michigan which has established a civil service system under provisions of Act 78, P.A. 1935, as amended, full or partial consolidation of the police-fire departments may necessitate abolition of the existing civil service systems by referendum, and substitution of a different system for the new consolidated department. Furthermore, if the charter is sufficiently flexible to permit consolidation, city ordinances which delineate the new powers and duties of the department and its personnel must be drafted or the ones amended. The city administrative code and departmental rules, policies and procedures should also be changed to reflect full or partial police-fire consolidation.

### **Renegotiation of Contracts**

Another obstacle to be overcome prior to consolidating police and fire departments is the renegotiation of existing police and fire contracts to achieve a single, unitary contract. Implementation of a partially consolidated police-fire department composed of volunteers from the existing police and fire departments would not

result in a unitary contract, but would instead require appropriate amendments to the existing police and fire contracts to accommodate dually-trained public safety officers.

## **Training**

A comprehensive training program must be established to provide a vigorous substitute for experience. To avoid the tendency of having police officers trained to fight fires, or fire fighters trained to do police work, Durham, North Carolina, established a public safety training academy in which police and fire training are alternated each week for a 16-week period. All public safety recruits, whether experienced fire fighters, police officers, or new recruits are required to undergo the training program. It would appear that such combined training helps to unify the public safety officers and leads to better teamwork after graduation. A strong training program is of particular importance to full or partially consolidated police-fire departments because they are often subject to closer scrutiny than traditional police and fire departments. As a result, a single bad performance by a consolidated department can cause greater official agony than the same performance by traditional police and fire departments.

## **Conclusion**

The contention that police-fire consolidation is a practical, alternative means of organizing public safety services in many Michigan communities is based on two facts: first, public safety officers can be successfully trained to perform police patrol, fire fighting, and fire prevention tasks; and second, it is necessary to man a fire station with only as many officers as are needed to drive the apparatus to the scene of a fire. That full or partial police-fire consolidation is a proven concept is demonstrated by the Michigan cities which maintain such departments: Beverly Hills, Farmington, Fraser, Grosse Pointe Woods, Huntington Woods, and Oak Park. Grosse Pointe Woods and Huntington Woods have operated consolidated police-fire departments for over 30 years.

Faced with demands for higher levels of police and fire services, shorter work weeks, and rapidly increasing salaries for all public safety personnel, full or partial police-fire consolidation is a proven alternative means of organizing public safety services from which many Michigan cities can benefit. The examples in this report have demonstrated that consolidation will work to the degree that men and equipment are available and will provide better protection man for man. It is certainly true that too few public safety officers are incapable of replacing enough fire fighters and police officers. But through consolidation it is possible to provide equal service with fewer personnel, or better service with the same personnel.