

My name is Vito J. Abruzzino and I am the Columbiana County Prosecuting Attorney. I am here today to speak in favor of House Bill 613 which proposes consolidating the East Liverpool Municipal Court into the already unified Columbiana County Municipal Court District.

Judges, like all elected officials, need to be assigned where they are the most needed. As populations shift, sometimes difficult decisions need to be made. In East Liverpool, we must make one of those difficult, but necessary decisions.

Consolidation would achieve many desirable objectives, among them the efficient use of judicial manpower, efficient distribution of workload, savings to litigants and taxpayers, and greater convenience to attorneys and the public. Perhaps most importantly, it would eliminate unnecessary duplication of facilities, court personnel and support services—all of which costs taxpayer money.

Court consolidation has been utilized in Columbiana County before with success. I will remind the legislators here today that there was opposition to the original court consolidation that took the county from a multi-court municipal system with part-time judges, to a single municipal court with two full-time judges. The consolidated municipal district in Columbiana County has been operational since 2005 and has operated with great success. It is well-respected by lawyers and litigants. The single, modern courthouse building with two full-time judges has saved the taxpayers of Columbiana County thousands, if not millions of dollars over time.

East Liverpool’s population at the time of the last consolidation was around 14,000 people. Today, that population has shrunk in excess of 23% to just over 9,000. What was at one time justified (nearly 27,000 people in 1970), is no longer so. With due respect to the proud staff of East Liverpool, it is time to create a truly unified municipal district at a countywide level given the County’s total population of approximately 100,000.

To be sure, this legislative body does not have to take the word of proponents or opponents of HB 613 - **in the unbiased analysis conducted by the Ohio Supreme Court** at the request of the Columbiana County Commissioners, it was found that even with the proposed consolidation, the two remaining, full-time judges in Lisbon would be operating at **under 40% capacity** when compared to other courts in the State. This analysis should not be ignored.

Further, I would be remiss if I did not mention that East Liverpool tragically lost its Judge well before his time. Judge Dominic Frank who passed away earlier this year was a good man and a good judge. His family and the staff of East Liverpool municipal court would like his memory to live on through the court, and this is an admirable pursuit. That said, court consolidation is most appropriate when its effect would not take food from a sitting judge's table. Judge Franks's memory will live on through his legacy of practicing law throughout the Mahoning Valley for over thirty years, well beyond the walls of what was once his courtroom.

You may ask yourselves why I, as the prosecuting attorney, came here today? The reason is because the East Liverpool Municipal Court is currently demanding more time and attention than my office can reasonably justify given its insignificant caseload. Currently, I send one of my assistant prosecuting attorneys to the East Liverpool court three days per week. Prior to Judge Frank consolidating the schedule, it was up to five days a week, or full-time. Despite having to staff this court three days currently, and before, full-time, my East Liverpool assistant prosecutor has tried only one criminal case since January 2021. That is to say, I am clearly forced to allocate resources to a court that simply cannot justify tying up a member of my staff. Consolidation will allow me to take this individual and focus his efforts on other critical matters, like Columbiana County's 30+ cold case homicides or one of our many, felony drug matters. I feel that this is my obligation to the taxpayers of Columbiana County.

In conclusion, and for all of the foregoing reasons, it is my professional opinion that the East Liverpool Municipal Court be consolidated within the Columbiana County Consolidated District to save our County countless dollars and vastly improve efficiency.

Thank you.