

Tax reform bill gaining support

Cash would be collected sooner, limiting extent of hikes

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Four more suburban lawmakers agreed Monday to support legislation designed to protect taxpayers from higher-than-expected bills after voters approve tax-rate increases.

State Reps. James Meyer of Naperville, JoAnn Osmond of Antioch, Mark Beaubien Jr. of Wauconda and Sandra Pihos of Glen Ellyn signed on as co-sponsors of the bill, which seeks to prevent taxing bodies from collecting more money than they tell voters during their referendum campaigns. All told, 14 legislators are backing the change.

The flurry of activity followed the Sunday publication of a Daily Herald analysis of 25 school districts in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake and McHenry counties, which showed that, during the past five years, the districts collected \$204 million more than most school officials projected.

"I think we're going to get it solved," said State Rep. Mike Tryon, a Crystal Lake Republican who introduced the bill. "I can't tell you it's going to get done in the next couple of weeks, but this is going to get fixed. There's no question in my mind."

The bill now has support from lawmakers in Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will counties — the first six counties to fall under the state tax cap law.

Osmond, an Antioch Republican, said the tax collection process is "somewhat of a loophole that we have to close up. ... Taxpayers seem to get more than they're agreeing upon" when they approve a tax-increase request.

Her district includes Grass Lake Elementary District 36, where voters recently approved a 60-cent tax-rate increase, which Osmond said the school badly needs.

"They have worked so, so hard. But they deserve what they asked for — nothing beyond that," she said.

And that's what the bill's supporters hope to accomplish — limit taxing bodies to the amount voters believe they've agreed upon.

The bill is complicated, but in effect, would prevent taxing bodies from taking several years to enact voter-approved tax-rate increases, taking advantage of the higher yields brought on by increases in the assessed value of property.

Officials would have two years to collect money from such tax-rate increases — not five, as they do now.

"The problem's complex," Tryon said. "The fix is easy."

The bill was unanimously approved by the House revenue committee and could come up for a vote by the full House by Friday.