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## Legislators again talk merging townships

House bill advances out of committee

TOM DAVIES

INDIANA CAPITAL CHRONICLE

Hundreds of Indiana township governments could be forced into consolidation under a renewed attempt in the Legislature for streamlining the 1,000-plus such bodies across the state.

A House committee on Tuesday advanced a proposal that would require many townships to merge with other townships, with others being taken over by city or county governments.

Rep. Alaina Shonkwiler, the author of House Bill 1315, said Indiana's township government structure was developed for a "different era" when the state was more rural in the 1800s.

The proposal would require consolidations by township units that don't operate fire departments, have fewer than 6,700 residents and don't meet a minimum level of emergency financial assistance distribution.

A township with at least 80% of its territory and half of its population living within city limits would have its functions assumed by the city unless the township operates a fire department.

"If you're fully engulfed, or 80% engulfed, within another local unit of government as a township, there's a redundancy in services," said

See MERGE on A2



Tom Davies | Indiana Capital Chronicle

**Rep. Alaina Shonkwiler**, R-Noblesville, speaks during an Indiana House committee meeting on Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2026.



Photo provided

A crane from Grand Industrial lowers the final container into place on the fourth floor of the structure while personnel from Logansport and Cass County Fire District 1 fire departments guide direction and stand by to weld the container into place.

## A needed asset

New Cass County live fire training tower begins to take shape

STAFF REPORT

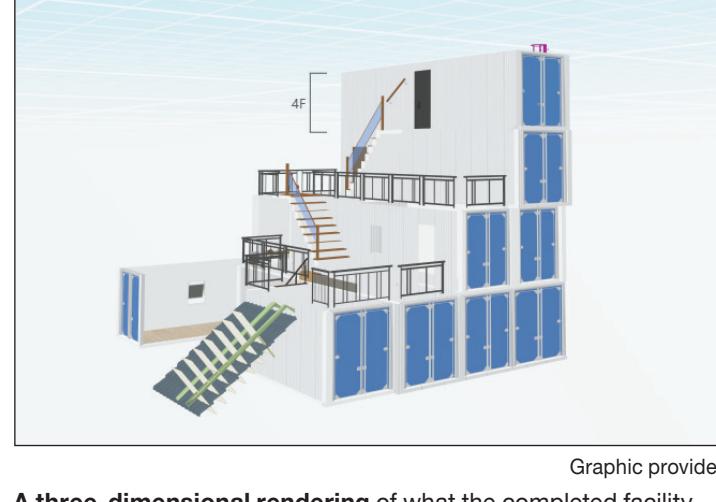
Despite having 11 fire departments in its area, Cass County does not have a live fire training facility.

That is about to change. Travelers heading north on State Road 17 over the past few weeks may have noticed a growing structure being erected at the Cass County Emergency Management Agency.

The four-story structure is the new fire training tower, being built for the benefit of all of the county's fire departments, made possible by a grant from the Cass County Community Foundation.

The \$30,000.00 grant to the Cass County Fire Association funded the purchase of shipping containers and other items that are starting to now take shape over the north Cass County skyline, according to a press release from the EMA.

Due to Indiana Department



A three-dimensional rendering of what the completed facility will look like.

of Environmental Management regulations for live fire training facilities, most existing fire department properties in the county are not conducive to hosting one. The EMA facility grounds are far enough away from other structures, roadways, utility lines and fuel storage to meet all of the permitting requirements.

The idea was pitched to the Board of Commissioners, and it was supportive of using the grounds to host the facility. The Indiana Department of Environmental Management has already signed off on the permit for the new live fire facility.

The new facility will allow firefighters to get in-county training

on a variety of topics including live fire training, ladder work, hose advancement, search and rescue and many other items. Currently, fire departments mark out of service to go to another community for this type of training or go without.

The facility will also be used by programs such as the Cass County Fire Academy, put on locally by a cooperative effort of area departments, or programs like the one at Century Career Center. In years past they too have had to travel out of county to complete live fire and other training requirements for certification. With many agencies, both paid and volunteer, being short on manpower and equipment, it is a strain to send personnel and trucks out of county to meet requirements.

The facility may also have an impact on insurance rates for county homes and businesses. Fire departments are graded by the Insurance Services Organization on topics including training they participate in each year. The presence of a training tower in the

See TOWER on A2

## 'Let-kids-be-kids' bill clears vote with bipartisan support

Bill would prevent 'unjust' investigations

CASEY SMITH  
INDIANA CAPITAL CHRONICLE

INDIANAPOLIS — A bill to shield Hoosier parents from child welfare investigations solely for allowing their children age-appropriate independence cleared the House Judiciary Committee on Monday with bipartisan support.

House Bill 1035 advanced to the full House on a 12-1 vote after more than an hour of testimony and discussion.

Only Rep. Ryan Dvorak, D-South Bend, voted against the bill, citing concerns that its new "recklessness" standard could raise the threshold too high for state intervention in child welfare cases.

Another Democrat on the committee, Rep. Victoria Garcia Wilburn of Fishers, is a co-author and voted in favor.

The bill follows other proposals



Jake Teshka

in recent years to broaden parents' rights and prevent "unjust" Department of Child Services inquiries and investigations. Senate Enrolled Act 143, for example, was passed during the 2025 session and requires courts to give deference to parental rights in disputes with government regulators.

Authored by Rep. Jake Tes-

hka, R-North Liberty, the latest measure pending before state lawmakers seeks to clarify that parents should not face DCS inquiries, court involvement or criminal consequences simply for allowing children to walk, bike, play outside or spend short periods alone — unless that decision is reckless and endangers the child's health or safety.

"What this bill is, is a clarification bill," Teshka told lawmakers. "It draws a clear legal boundary between ordinary childhood independence and actual neglect."

### CURRENT LAW IS 'TOO VAGUE'

Under current Indiana law, a child can be alleged to be a child in need of services, or CHINS, based on a lack of supervision, even when the activity is common and age-appropriate.

Teshka said his bill seeks to change that standard.

The measure defines "independent activity" to include walking or traveling on foot or by bicycle, playing

See BILL on A2

### INSIDE

OBITUARIES.....	A2	COMICS.....	A6
OPINION.....	A4	SPORTS.....	B1-2
ADVICE.....	A5	CLASSIFIEDS.....	B3-4

### FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

### WEATHER

Rain/Snow to Snow. Falling temps. High 36, Low 26. Complete forecast on Page A8.



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