

## False Alarm

The City of Philadelphia's Office of Emergency Management takes strong exception to statements in "Alert! Alert!" [Glimpse] in the October issue of *Governing*.

Reaching nearly 1.5 million Philadelphians any time of day or night with critical information is certainly a challenge. Research shows that text messaging is an effective way for government officials to reach the public during times of crisis. For these reasons, the five counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania invested in a regional emergency text alert service known as ReadyNotifyPA.

Since ReadyNotifyPA was launched in April, Philadelphia has sent only four emergency text alerts to the public, hardly a high number as your writer implied. Among these were an advisory, especially for pregnant women and children, to stay indoors to avoid exposure during recent aerial spraying to prevent the spread of West Nile virus. Aerial spraying is a highly unusual event for our region. Allowing people to make an informed decision about protective actions was the key factor in sending the alert.

On the surface, a text message about "gunfire on Market Street (a movie shoot)" may seem irrelevant. However, let's put this message in context. Gunfire is rarely heard in our central business district and this message was intended to provide accurate information—that the gunshots heard were simulated, not real, and there was no threat to public safety.

In September, National Preparedness Month, Philadelphia saw a 25 percent increase in subscribers to the emergency text alert system, thanks to a very successful media campaign and several preparedness workshops that highlighted the benefits of ReadyNotifyPA. This increase demonstrates to us that our citizens want to receive accurate and critical information in a timely manner during an emergency.

Overall, we agree that local governments need to use discretion when sending text messages. However, the suggestion that Philadelphia has been frivolously sending



**The suggestion that Philadelphia has been frivolously sending messages is a gross misrepresentation...**

messages is a gross misrepresentation of how we use ReadyNotifyPA.

**MaryAnn E. Marrocolo**  
Deputy Managing Director for  
Emergency Management  
Philadelphia

## Misguided Mergers

In response to "Attempted Merger" [November], local governments are more fiscally sound than states. Why would any taxpayer want to consolidate to increase the size of government and bureaucracy? The

states should learn from local governments and become smaller, not larger.

Secondly, local taxpayers have a say in what happens in their communities. This is not the case when governments get larger. It seems that economies of scale are used only to benefit the state's coffers, not the taxpayers.

**Eric R. Endresen**  
Director of Finance  
Ferguson Township, Pennsylvania

As a retired teacher and the manager of a service-center town in the poorest county in Maine, I read with interest your conclusions regarding school consolidation in Maine. What concerned people in my part of the world was not the idea of consolidating but the one-size-fits-all mentality of Augusta.

The resulting districts are geographically cumbersome, even if the illusion of local control has been maintained. People in my area also were taken aback at the presumptuousness of the governor. Surely, a more collaborative approach was needed.

**Betsy Fitzgerald**  
Town Manager  
Machias, Maine

In "Attempted Merger" you quoted Martha Freeman of the Maine State Planning Office as saying the State of Maine now pays 55 percent of the cost of K-12 education. That is incorrect. It is closer to 40 percent.

In 1987, the state legislature did pass a law saying the state must pay 55 percent. Subsequent legislatures have done the same but never once have they ever followed through. Property taxpayers financing local government have had to pick up the difference.

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