

and for your reference, members of the body, I am going to still talk about the committee amendment. I'm not speaking about Senator Beutler's proposed amendment. Again, briefly, the provisions of 1085 that deal with merger and consolidation I think are primarily what I'd like to discuss with you. Senator Warner noted other provisions of the committee amendments that have to do with a computation of a preliminary levy. That is primarily an informational and educational tool, I think. Perhaps that is a fair characterization of it. The other provisions in the bill, as I've noted, largely build on existing statutory provisions, but those existing statutory provisions were deficient in a number of aspects. No mechanisms for setting budgets, for consolidated operations, no real provisions for who and how officers are to be elected for the new consolidated offices. That is taken care of. Time frames are put in place. There are requirements for citizen votes on consolidations, whether that's an office or a full county, for example. The provisions that deal with joint operations are more permissive. They do not require a vote of the citizens, although that could occur. There are provisions for citizens themselves to initiate the merger or consolidation discussions and there are provisions for removal of the county officials if they do not proceed in good faith to act, as directed in the citizen petition. It doesn't mean that anything actually has to happen because there may be a full evaluation and it might be determined that it isn't the thing to do, but at least the citizens can initiate the process through a petition. Excuse me. There are a number of provisions in the amendments that deal with those mergers that are very technical in nature: the name of the county that results, for example, if you have the merger of a county; what happens to the debt of a county if there's going to be any...if there was debt prior to the merger. In fact, there's a constitutional provision that deals with that issue and it says it really has to remain a liability of the old county. Some of those things are taken care of on a purely technical basis. There were concerns about the terms of the officers that could be reduced in the consolidation. We've made a review of the constitutional provisions, the case law. We believe that those elected officials do not have a protected, constitutionally protected term. In other words, we believe that if you did a merger or consolidation in mid cycle that you could, in fact, validly elect a new officer or provide for an officer to hold office and wait for the next election cycle. The only protection in the constitution seems to be against a