

*The Commonwealth of Massachusetts*

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

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WILLIAM F. WELD  
GOVERNOR

ARGEO PAUL CELLUCCI  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

July 11, 1997

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives:

Pursuant to the provisions of Section 5 of Article 63 of the Amendments to the Constitution of the Commonwealth, I am today signing House Bill No. 4588, "An Act Abolishing Certain Counties and for the Payment by the Commonwealth of Certain Debts and Obligations of Middlesex County."

This bill is an important first step toward the abolition of the costly and unnecessary system of county government in the Commonwealth, which has long been a goal of this administration. I am particularly pleased to sign sections 1, 3, and 4, which abolish Middlesex County's government immediately and will abolish the governments of Hampden and Worcester Counties within a year. The assets and liabilities of those counties will, upon the abolition of their governments, be transferred to the Commonwealth, and creditors of those counties may be assured that their obligations will be paid. Our action today will resolve the looming fiscal crisis in Middlesex County and will eliminate the possibility of private property being seized to satisfy the county's debts.

The bill is, however, only a first step. Unfortunately, it makes little progress toward the abolition of counties other than Middlesex, Hampden, and Worcester, and a number of the procedures that the bill puts in place for transferring county functions to the state will lead to undesirable results. We will be filing legislation soon to correct these defects. We will also file legislation to accomplish the transfer of county court employees to the state, something that was not included in this bill.

I am vetoing sections 13, 14, 19, 20, 23, and 24. The reasons for these vetoes are set out in Attachment A, included with this message.

I hereby approve the remainder of this Act.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William F. Weld".

William F. Weld  
Governor

## Attachment A

County Abolition Bill (House 4588) Veto Explanations**Transfer of sheriff of abolished county**

## Section 13

This section transfers sheriffs of abolished counties to the state, but fails to provide any oversight of the functions of the sheriff's office by any state entity. We think that the absence of any state oversight is inconsistent with full state financial support of county corrections. We will file legislation that, while making clear that sheriffs will remain elected officials with significant independent authority over their facilities, will establish the necessary links to state government to ensure appropriate financial and managerial accountability.

**Sheriff as "employer" under c. 150E**

## Section 14

This section makes sheriffs "employers" for collective bargaining purposes, but does not provide for adequate accountability with respect to their collective bargaining agreements. We believe that sheriffs, like the state's higher education employers, should be required to submit their collective bargaining agreements to the Secretary of Administration and Finance for approval, and we will file legislation to that effect.

**Continuation of county retirement system**

## Section 19

We are vetoing sections 19 and 20, which place responsibility for county retirees on cities and towns rather than the state. We believe that it is appropriate for the state to assume responsibility for county retirees, and we will file legislation to that effect.

**Obligations of members of county retirement systems**

## Section 20

We are vetoing sections 19 and 20, which place responsibility for county retirees on cities and towns rather than the state. We believe that it is appropriate for the state to assume responsibility for county retirees, and we will file legislation to that effect.

County Abolition Bill (House 4588) Veto Explanations, continued**County charter commissions**

## Section 23

This section creates county charter commissions which, in the end, are unlikely to result in meaningful change to county governments other than Middlesex, Hampden and Worcester. We believe that such commissions are likely to be counterproductive, and we will file legislation that will set a date certain for the abolition of the remaining counties and will establish a mechanism by which communities that wish to put alternative regional entities in place may do so.

**Franklin county sheriff**

## Section 24

We are vetoing this section, which would remove the sheriff of Franklin county from any state oversight, for the same reason we are vetoing section 13. Some state oversight of county corrections should exist, and we will file legislation putting such oversight in place.

**DISAPPROVALS.**

I hereby disapprove the following sections: 13, 14, 19, 20, 23 and 24.