

# Criminologist investigates public safety consolidation

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In the first comprehensive work of its kind, a Michigan State University criminologist has completed a study on the implementation and outcomes of public safety consolidation - the merging of a city's police and fire departments.

In the study, released recently in a report by the U.S. Department of Justice, professor of criminal justice Jeremy Wilson details that while [public safety](#) consolidation can work well for some communities, it isn't the best solution for others.

"If there is one overarching lesson in our case studies, it is that consolidation of police and fire agencies is not a one-size-fits-all solution," Wilson said. "Communities must very carefully assess for themselves if it is right for them."

Across the United States, more than 130 communities provide consolidated police and fire services. The study examined public safety departments in states ranging from Texas to Michigan, and California to South Carolina. Michigan has the most consolidated departments of any state, with 61, which includes the communities of Meridian Township, East Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

Wilson hopes that this research will assist communities that are considering consolidation as an option, often as a result of budget constraints in struggling economies. He said that the knowledge gained from the study is a tool to use in exploring solutions to the contentious

and sensitive issues surrounding public safety services in communities strained for resources.

"We're not advocating for consolidation, we're objectively examining its short- and long-term advantages and disadvantages," Wilson said. "In some communities, consolidation has worked well, leading to increased efficiency and enhanced service provision, but in others it hasn't."

The study found that consolidation efforts generally encountered more difficulties in the larger and more diverse communities sampled. Some communities deconsolidated after encountering leadership issues or a lack of full community support, and others discovered that it simply didn't meet their needs.

Still other communities achieved success with consolidation, in some cases surpassing firefighting standards and earning better insurance ratings than most U.S. communities. The models and methods of implementing consolidation differed as much as the outcomes these communities experienced.

"We've found that there are as many potential ways to consolidate public safety agencies as there are communities attempting to consolidate them," Wilson said.

**More information:** [ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P328](http://ric-zai-inc.com/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P328)

Provided by Michigan State University

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