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South Shore lawmakers protest Gov. Patrick's proposed local-a

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BOSTON — A bipartisan coalition of eight South Shore lawmakers has sent a letter to Gov. Deval Patrick's top budg that proposed local-aid cuts would unfairly punish the communities they represent.

Patrick's budget, released last week, includes a \$65 million reduction in state funding for local government services, governor said could be offset by proposed municipal health-care reforms.

But the coalition of local lawmakers, headed by state Sen. John Keenan, D-Quincy, argues that if the governor's plan savings, communities in their districts that have already made his proposed changes have not seen huge benefits fro

The eight lawmakers who signed the letter are Keenan and state Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, and the follow members: Rep. Bruce Ayers, D-Quincy; Rep. Tackey Chan, D-Quincy; Rep. Ronald Mariano, D-Quincy; Rep. James Weymouth; Rep. Mark Cusack, D-Braintree; and Rep. Geoff Diehl, R-Abington.

"We support steps that make it easier for our cities and towns to regain their fiscal footing, it should only be done in they wrote in a letter to Administration and Finance Secretary Jay Gonzalez.

"We will not support the governor's plan so long as it does not hold harmless those communities who have been pro to address their health-care costs."

Patrick wants the Legislature to allow cities and towns to join the state's insurance program, the Group Insurance C save money. He also wants to change a rule that says municipalities must get union approval of at least 70 percent t

But the letter from lawmakers points out that Quincy, Weymouth and Holbrook have already reached agreements w to join the Group Insurance Commission. And although Braintree has not, it has worked with its unions to create a l say is more cost-effective than the state's insurance program.

At the same time, the local communities are in the same position as others around the state, facing a proposed fundi averages 7 percent less than what they got for the current fiscal year.

Gonzalez's office did not respond to the letter; instead, it stated support for Patrick's health-care plan.

"The governor's plan for municipal health-care reform will provide cities and towns the tools they need to rein in m insurance costs," Gonzalez said in the statement. "We understand that municipalities need relief... This legislation w municipalities achieve real health-care cost savings and preserve local services this year."

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