

# 1977 Detroit Lawsuit May Soon Come to an End

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The end of one of the longest running lawsuits in Michigan history may soon come to an end. That's because Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner John P. McCulloch along with other suburban leaders have reached an agreement that changes the oversight of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD).

As part of the agreement in the 1977 lawsuit, McCulloch withdrew his legal motion calling for the creation of a regional oversight panel. Instead, the DWSD will be governed by a seven-member board, as it is today, with four members from Detroit and the remaining three representing Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties. The big differences are that the suburban counties now will be permitted to select their own representatives and important decisions will require a super-majority for passage.

McCulloch explained that the super-majority provision is one of the most critical components of the change. "It means that at least one county must agree with Detroit," he said. "This also elevates the caliber of the board requiring seven years experience with the possibility of a full-time staff with expertise in finance, law and engineering if they need it. That opportunity didn't exist previously.

“The reality is that while this certainly restructures the governance, it doesn’t eliminate the challenges,” he said. “It gives the region a seat at the table to try to help address these issues.

After six months, U.S. District Judge Sean Cox, who took over the case from the ailing Judge John Feikens, will end judicial oversight of the DWSD.