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TREND NY Poll Says New Yorkers Prefer Circuit Breaker over Cap

A poll conducted by tax policy group TREND NY over the weekend shows that New Yorkers overwhelmingly support legislation that would limit a taxpayer's total property taxes over a cap on local contributions toward school funding.

The random automated phone survey polled over 500 registered voters across the state asking them if they supported a measure known as a circuit breaker; which would limit an individual's total property taxes to a small percentage of their income. By greater than a two to one margin (272/126), respondents preferred an income based cap on their taxes over a cap on local school levies.

When given the specific choice of a 4% school tax cap or a limit of 5% of their income for their total property tax bill, as exists in Vermont, voters favored the circuit breaker by a 5 to 1 margin, 66% to 13% with 21% undecided. Respondents indicated their primary motivation was to limit taxes, and not to curb school funding, by an 82% to 18% margin.

"In the past, poorly worded polls that didn't explain the different types of caps have led the public into thinking that the only way overburdened New Yorkers can be helped would be to limit school levies," said TREND Director Robert McKeon. "The truth is that a traditional tax cap will at best curb future increases, while a circuit breaker would provide immediate relief to many taxpayers and insure New Yorkers against unreasonable levels in the future. Taxpayers want a more equitable system of taxation, not just controlled spending. A circuit breaker could accomplish that."

McKeon added that the survey results confirm the testimony given to the Governor's Commission during the course of the many hearings: "There was almost unanimous support for circuit breaker and very few calling on them to propose a cap. That's why it was disappointing to see that they would prioritize something that would not protect individuals, many of whom are overburdened."

In addition to preferences on tax relief measures, the poll asked voters if they were willing to raise income taxes on those making more than a million dollars a year from the current rate of 6.85% to 7.7% to help fund additional property tax relief. By greater than a 7 to 1 margin, respondents supported the millionaire's surtax. Frank Mauro of the Fiscal Policy Institute said that New Yorkers have consistently favored the wealthy picking up a fairer share of state and local taxes. "Our state essentially has a flat income tax, but the property tax is disproportionately burdening those who can least afford it -middle and low income families. On average, the property tax accounts for around 3.5% of family income. We have a crisis because the current system burdens many families with property tax bills that account for a much greater percentage of their incomes."

Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, said that the recent Siena poll showing New Yorkers supporting a cap did not accurately reflect the wishes of taxpayers: "Without explaining the difference between a cap on your taxes and a cap on school levies, of course New Yorkers will all say they want a cap. But when they realize that a cap won't apply to the amount they have to pay, their view changes quickly to support the circuit breaker instead." McKeon echoed Deutsch's sentiments: "When New Yorkers say they want taxes capped, they mean *their* taxes."

A complete copy of the poll results is attached.

The Tax Reform Effort of Northern Dutchess (TREND) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit advocacy group that educates and organizes on property tax relief at the local, county, state and federal levels. Founded in 2006, TREND's work is intended to further the education of citizens and implementation of public policies that create a fair tax system in which education funding and property ownership are partnered forces cooperating for a strong New York State. TREND is an independent organization wholly supported by its taxpayer members.

TREND NY Poll - Conducted June 21-22 across New York State by automated phone call. Total Respondents - 516 random voters of all party affiliations.

1. Which of the following is more important to you?

limiting the amount of money you have to pay

OR

controlling the amount of money that schools can raise

Limit my tax bill 421 82%

Control school funding 95 18%

2. The Governor's commission had two major recommendations.

One idea limits (*caps*) how much a resident has to pay and the other caps how much schools can increase taxes. Which would you most prefer?

A circuit breaker which would *cap your total taxes* at a small percentage of your income

OR

A 4% annual tax levy cap on the school district

Cap my property taxes 272 57%

Cap the school's increase 126 26%

Not sure 80 17%

3. Some states, including Vermont, have passed “circuit breaker” legislation that prevents property taxes from exceeding 5% of income.

Would you support a similar measure here in New York?

Yes 302 66%

No 59 13%

Not sure 100 22%

4. Right now, New Yorkers making 45 thousand dollars a year and those making 45 million dollars a year both pay the same state income tax rate of 6.85%.

Would you support changing the rate on those making more than a million dollars a year to 7.7% to help fund additional property tax relief?

Yes 400 84%

No 55 11%

Not sure 23 5%