

New York State Division of Budget Town Hall Meeting Hauppauge N.Y. November 30, 2007

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Andrea Vecchio speaking on behalf of the Long Island grassroots effort to Cap Our School Taxes

We need a school tax cap. The state education budget must not be balanced on the backs of taxpaying property owners.

Homeowner property taxes cannot keep rising without any limit. School districts cannot keep spending to levels that are forcing families off the Island and out of the state. On every block and in every neighborhood on Long Island the exodus continues. Until recently, our friends and neighbors could still sell for a good price as they left for the Carolinas or Tennessee. They could still sell to buyers willing to pay a premium for the desirable suburban lifestyle despite the high taxes.

But that was then and this is now. Houses are not selling like hotcakes any more and suddenly school taxes matter - affordable houses will still sell, others won't. Affordable houses will be those with affordable taxes.

With homeowner property taxes out of control and no end in sight, actively involved taxpayers like myself realize at this point we have to limit school districts ability to add to Long Island's already unaffordable property tax burden. And it must be done at the state level. Taxpayers ability to control spending at the district level come school budget time is over. In my district where over 6000 voters typically turn out to vote and have repeatedly turned down budgets with big increases property tax bills have shot up by 47% in 5 years. Last year after voting "no" twice, with the district on austerity and with an expired teachers contract, taxes still went up by 13%. Years of so-called "reforms" have finally rendered voting on school budgets virtually meaningless. That is, unless it's a "yes".

To regain control over runaway school taxes and truly protect property values the first thing to do is to "stop the bleeding" with a statewide tax cap with increases limited to inflation or 4% which ever is lower. This would be a cap on the school property tax levy that should result in controlling the growth in school spending.

This past year there were a number of tax cap bills proposed, Assembly bill #8775 sponsored by Mike Fitzpatrick is the one we support and will work to get passed when the state legislature reconvenes in January. It is time to fix what Albany has allowed to happen. Both Massachusetts and New Jersey have adopted similar caps. Once a high tax state like New York, Massachusetts has significantly lowered their residents tax burden.

Of course there are many other reforms that must follow - but we need tax relief and we need it now. Every Long Islander has a stake in the system's continuing success in turning out another generation of educated Long Islanders. We would like them all to be able to stay here - and so would we.

Thank you.

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