

PALESKY TAX CAP! NO A Bad Idea For Maine Children And Families

On Nov. 2, Maine voters will be asked: "Do you want to limit property taxes to 1% of assessed value?" If the question were phrased to reflect the actual impact of a 1% property tax cap, it would ask you, "Do you want to save a dollar today, but spend more tomorrow in fees and the loss valuable local and state services?"

We can't afford to blindly chop away at local and statewide services. Two of the big losers will be education and our roads. They are the bedrock of economic development and quality of life and are major incentives for families and businesses to stay or move here. It is the way Maine life should be: a great place to raise your family and a great place to work. Without this bedrock, we will not be able to attract young adults and new businesses to share the tax burden, our kids will be worse off and our economy will be hobbled. It takes an educated workforce and investments in our infrastructure to create jobs and sustain commerce.

Twenty-six years ago voters in California passed the proposal on which the Palesky Tax Cap is based. It was a time when California had a huge state budget surplus. Today, the state is nearly bankrupt. The California education system went from producing the best students in the country to leaving students scrambling to reach the bottom rung on the ladder of achievement. Other vital services are withering and the state boosted fees or installed new charges to create revenue. Most states, including California, must avoid deficit spending by adopting a balanced budget. To balance California's budget, the new governor is borrowing money to pay operating costs, thinking nothing of the debt being handed to their children. And this generation of Californians is going along with the irresponsible scheme. Tomorrow has arrived and it is thorny.

It has been estimated that the Palesky Tax Cap will result in the loss of more than \$600 million a year from local revenues - a 30% reduction statewide. This is a conservative estimate and some communities will see their budgets slashed almost in half. What this means for Maine people is a potential for massive reductions in services that support our lives. It will force the state to bear the majority of the burden to fund local services. This will likely force additional deep cuts in state programs for children, families, the elderly and every Mainer that needs a license renewed, a highway plowed, or any other service that currently supports our lives and our communities to meet our minimal civil needs.

Several studies show the Palesky plan will result in massive cuts to local town and school budgets - for example, a 40.5 % reduction to the city budget in Bangor, and a 23.6% reduction in its school budget; a \$12 million reduction in Augusta's government and school budgets, resulting in the closure of three schools and layoffs of more than 137 positions in the school department; South Portland's budget would be slashed by 40%, and its schools by 25%.

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We urge you to vote NO on the Palesky Tax Cap on Nov. 2. Cost containment and tax fairness for all communities have been addressed in the legislation signed into law by Governor Baldacci in May, as well as the tax reform initiative passed by voters in June.

The Palesky Tax Cap will wreak havoc at the local level and result in the loss of local control, reduced local services and a huge loss of attainment for kids at school. In addition, there will be significant tax increases at the state level, and/or further reductions in vital services. A dollar saved today is not worth tomorrow's high cost.

California is spending its children's future to prop up today's state government. That's not the way life should be. But that's the potential life in store for Maine under the Palesky Tax Cap. **Vote NO on Nov. 2.**

For more information: <http://www.citizensunitedformaine.com/>

So you think you know all about KIDS COUNT?



We know our members are familiar with the annual production of the Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book. Each year in February, we release this annual report on the status of Maine children, which tracks over 50 state and county-level indicators of children's health and well-being. In addition, in June, the Annie E. Casey Foundation releases the National KIDS COUNT Data Book, which compares and ranks states on 10 key indicators and also provides state-level data regarding a chosen issue area. This year's national book focused on the rising numbers of vulnerable and disconnected young adults. For more information, and to peruse the data book online, visit: www.kidscount.org

For the release of the national data book, the Maine KIDS COUNT project works with Maine media outlets to direct and support the story in Maine. So if you're wondering in June why you see a KIDS COUNT report in the local paper, or on the evening news, and think you heard about KIDS COUNT sometime in the winter, you're right. There are two major data products, one national released by Casey and one local released by the state KIDS COUNT project.

In the past two years, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has focused on developing these independent state KIDS COUNT projects as a true national network of data-based advocates. For years the Casey Foundation has provided technical data assistance to the state projects, has hosted annual data meetings and a national conference. Today, the Casey Foundation provides the network with communications and "message development" training, has created a network website which houses a resource and issues library, and has created an interactive data site for state projects called CLIKS - County, City and Community Level Information on Kids. The Maine KIDS COUNT project has uploaded a good deal of our annual data book data into this interactive site. Users can create graphs, trend lines and maps for numerous indicators over time. You can find more information, and link to the Maine data by visiting that same URL, www.kidscount.org, and selecting "Online Data."

As always, if you have any questions or comments on the Maine KIDS COUNT project, please contact our KIDS COUNT director, Lynn Davey at Ldavey@mekids.org, 207-623-1868 x204

Our Website has a new look!
Check it out at www.mekids.org

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MAINE CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE AND PROGRESS FOR SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CARE IN MAINE

The Maine Assembly on School-Based Health Care, in partnership with the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA), has received a substantial five-year grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to build capacity for the Maine Assembly and school-based health services (SBHCs) in five Maine communities. The grant provides funding that will allow the community SBHCs to build capacity for engaging parents, youth and communities in promoting healthy lives for all young people. This grant will also help the community SBHCs serve as a focal point for mobilizing grassroots support and advocacy for the SBHC model of health care delivery. In this way, children can receive the health care they need, where and when they need it.

MCA began working on increasing access to health care specifically with SBHCs in the autumn of 2000. MCA first received support from the Bingham Program to fund the community organizing and education portions of our health care initiative to increase the quality of children's health care, including promoting SBHCs. The SBHC model is an ideal way to offer health care for students because it is easily accessible and decreases many of the barriers to receiving health care, including:

- ❖ Cost
- ❖ Lack of insurance
- ❖ Geography
- ❖ Inconvenient appointment times
- ❖ Confidentiality

MCA convened a SBHC Council of diverse and knowledgeable community members that included health care providers and policy makers to plan and strategize methods of increasing awareness of and support for SBHCs.

In the spring of 2001, in an effort to address the sustainability of SBHCs, MCA organized an advocacy strategy in response to legislation that sought to mandate payment for services by private insurance companies. The legislation required the Superintendent of Insurance do a mandate study in order to provide more information about the potential cost of the legislation. This study ultimately established that additional costs for mandated coverage to be minimal .4% for managed care plans and less for other plans. The report did not, however, consider other valid factors such as parental work time lost to address medical problems that might reduce the overall cost to families, employers, communities and long term prevention. It also did not provide information about the quality of care provided or address the fact that teen-agers are more likely to get help at school when they need it.

Then in July, MCA brought together the SBHC Council, school-based health care providers, and private insurance companies to discuss the issues. Over the next year, MCA facilitated the meetings, and the health insurers agreed to participate in a three-year Maine School-Based Health Care Access Project that would include:

- ❖ Reimbursement for primary care services delivered to adolescents in SBHCs, and an evaluation of the cost and benefits of providing private insurance coverage for SBHC services. (A grant from the AETNA Foundation was secured to assist with grant writing to fund the evaluation portion of the Pilot

Project.

- ❖ Additional grants from the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation and the Bureau of Health supported the ongoing work of MCA in this project.)

A year later, in the summer of 2002, a Steering Committee and an Evaluation Committee were created to oversee the evaluation of the Pilot Project. For the remainder of the year and into the first half of 2003, research on potential funders and grant writing continued along with a lot of planning and organizing at the SBHCs in preparation for the project. The hard work began to pay off as the Pilot Project came together in a concrete manner. Then in July of 2003, MCA and the members of the Pilot Project committees were rewarded for their hard work when the Maine Health Access Foundation awarded them a sizable grant for the first two years of the evaluation portion of the project. In addition, the Maine Community Foundation awarded MCA a grant to support the project.

Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, SBHCs began submitting claims to the health insurers and working out the processes for reimbursement such as becoming contracted and credentialed. During the spring of 2004, the survey evaluations for the project were prepared for mailing to students, parents, and primary care physicians. The lead evaluator is Dan Meyer at Maine Dartmouth Family Practice Residency. Bill Perry at the Maine Health Information Center is working with Dan to collect and analyze the data for the evaluation.

The most recent development this past May in MCA's effort to increase access to quality health care for children, the Kellogg Foundation grant, takes the SBHC initiative to the next level by supporting MCA and the Maine Assembly's effort to promote SBHCs at the community level. By increasing awareness and knowledge of the need and benefits of SBHCs, support at the community level, along with reimbursement from the health insurers, will help increase the sustainability of SBHCs. In addition, the work done by the five participating community SBHCs will benefit Maine's other SBHCs and those communities looking to establish a SBHC.

Since we began meetings with the private insurance companies and the school-based health care providers, an extraordinary amount of work has been done by all the parties to this project to ensure that in the future there will be additional support for comprehensive health care services available to kids at school.

We want to take this opportunity to thank the Maine Legislature, the 26 SBHCs in Maine, the private insurance companies (Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, CIGNA HealthCare of Maine, Inc., Aetna, Inc., and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care), Katherine Pelletreau at the Maine Association of Health Plans, Nancy Birkhimer at the Bureau of Health, the Maine Assembly on School-Based Health Care and the Maine Health Access Foundation for their willingness to work hard to find solutions that will benefit children now and in the future. There are many lessons being learned by all the parties in this project and they come from hard work and a commitment to healthy children and communities.

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CHAMPIONS
FOR CHILDREN
GIRAFFE AWARDS

*10 year
Anniversary*

The Maine Children's Alliance created the Champions for Children / Giraffe Awards event to celebrate the everyday local heroes who "*stick their necks out*" for kids. This year marks the 10th Anniversary of this event and on Thursday, September 23rd, we will gather at the Doubletree Hotel in Portland to pay tribute to all the people that work to improve the world for kids, but especially the honorees that embody selflessness, creativity, love and an extraordinary commitment to children in Maine.

*Won't you please join us
for this wonderful tribute?*

If you did not receive an invitation in the mail you may order tickets online at www.mekids.org