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New Statewide Coalition Unveils

Let New York Work: A Common Agenda for the Common Good

Business, local government and education leaders introduce six-point plan to achieve mandate relief.

ALBANY, NY – An historic coalition of eleven prominent business, local government and educational organizations launched a new, comprehensive initiative to advance significant mandate relief. The effort, *Let New York Work: A Common Agenda for the Common Good*, consists of six key measures that will provide relief from mandates faced by all New Yorkers.

The agenda's main points include:

- **Make the pension system predictable and affordable** – The state should offer two retirement options to new employees – a reduced defined benefit plan or a new defined contribution plan that is controlled by the employees and does not weigh down taxpayers.
- **Redefine compulsory arbitration** – A number of amendments are needed to the state's compulsory arbitration statute that will benefit local municipalities and taxpayers such as: defining the ability to pay; prohibiting consideration of non-compensation issues; limiting access to binding arbitration; and, adding transparency to the arbitration process.
- **Reduce the costs of construction on public/private projects** – The state should enact a number of measures that will spur building and development such as: supporting alternative project delivery methods like design build; increasing the Wicks Law threshold across the state; enacting the *Public Construction Savings Act* (S.4121/A.7855); and making common sense changes to the antiquated Scaffold Law.
- **Freeze step increases when contracts expire** – Due to the state's Triborough Amendment, public employees' pay continue to increase under an expired contract, placing additional burdens on school districts and municipalities.
- **Establish minimum health insurance contribution level for employees and retirees** – Employers should cover no more than 85 percent of a single healthcare premium or 75 percent of a healthcare premium for families or retirees.
- **Prohibit new mandates** – The state should not impose any future mandates on municipalities, school districts and taxpayers. Enacting the *Unfunded Mandate Reform Act* (S.5379/A.8150) and requiring a super-majority to add new unfunded mandates would be beneficial.

Following the passage of the 2-percent property tax cap earlier this year, members of the newly-formed coalition recognized the need for a unified pro-mandate relief voice leading up to the 2012 legislative session.

“Just as we faced the property tax cap head on, we must focus on enacting meaningful mandate relief,” said Brian Sampson, executive director of Unshackle Upstate. “Making our communities more affordable and preventing the insolvency of local governments and school districts needs to be our top priority. Doing so will help to stabilize the state’s economy and provide a sense of security for taxpayers.”

Representing prominent business, local government and education organizations across the state, the coalition’s leaders strongly believe that mandate relief is essential to the future of New York’s economy.

“In order to rebuild our economy and our state, we must reduce costs on job creators, taxpayers, local governments and school districts alike. The comprehensive reform agenda that a historic and unprecedented coalition of organizations representing all of these entities is advancing today is a critical and common sense step in that direction,” said Mike Elmendorf, President and CEO of the Associated General Contractors of New York State.

“Real mandate relief is part of a broader goal of controlling total state and local spending, and lowering the combined tax burden on individuals and businesses,” said Heather Briccetti, acting-president and CEO of The Business Council of New York State, Inc. “A more competitive cost climate is essential for promoting new investment and new job growth in New York. The enactment of a 2 percent cap on the growth of property taxes was the first step. By working together, members of this newly-formed coalition hope to rein in the high cost of state mandates and provide much-needed fiscal relief to municipalities.”

“Outdated, only-in-New-York laws, like labor law 240/241, are actually unfunded mandates on our municipalities,” said Tom Stebbins, executive director, Lawsuit Reform Alliance of New York. “Our local communities pay for these unnecessary laws in the form of inflated legal settlements, skyrocketing insurance rates and prohibitively high construction costs. We need to free our municipalities from these antiquated laws in order to make New York a better place to live and do business.”

“This is not the first tough year for schools. We have had three years of state aid cuts and freezes,” said Robert Reidy, executive director, New York State Council of School Superintendents. “With the prospect of operating under a tax cap it is imperative schools get help to preserve services for children. Immediate and significant mandate relief is necessary to maintain quality services for all children.”

“New York is at a crossroads and action is needed now to stem the high costs of mandates on local governments and school districts. These mandates translate into ever increasing costs for agricultural businesses and create a very unfavorable environment for farm retention and growth. While the enactment of the property tax cap helped solve the first half of the problem, New York must address the cost drivers for local governments and school districts to truly let New York work,” said Jeff Williams, Manager of Governmental Relations for New York Farm Bureau.

“Enacting the property tax cap was the first step in drastically changing the future for New York’s small business owners and taxpayers. This coalition of business, school and municipal leaders stands here today advancing the critical second step of mandate relief. This agenda will drastically reform our business climate, by addressing many of the key cost drivers that have driven businesses and people from New York’s borders, and provide significant relief to communities and school districts across the state from public pension and health benefit costs that are rising at an unsustainable rate. We urge the Governor and legislative leaders to heed this call of business owners and taxpayers, setting New York on a course for a new dawn of prosperity,” said Mike Durant, New York State Director of the National Federation of Independent Business

“New York’s local government cost structure, in its current mandate-driven form, cannot support real and sustainable property tax relief. A property tax cap, alone, will not change this fact,” said Peter A. Baynes, executive director of the New York Conference of Mayors. “Yet, with the significant mandate relief our broadly-based coalition is advancing today, there is an opportunity to finally change this destructive equation and provide the property tax relief New Yorkers desperately need.”

“Now is the time to finish the job of building meaningful and lasting property tax relief,” said Duncan MacKenzie, CEO of the New York State Association of REALTORS. “The cap approved earlier this year provided the framework for ending the cycle of property taxpayer abuse. To fulfill the promise of sustainable tax relief, this diverse coalition calls on state lawmakers to rethink every existing mandate and refrain from any further unfunded requirements on our schools and local governments. While the tax cap issue created divides between business and local taxing entities, mandate relief does not.”

“As school districts continue to grapple with the worst fiscal crisis in a generation, they need a new set of rules. The Let New York Work proposals, if enacted, would result in dramatic improvements to the fiscal health of our schools,” said Timothy Kremer, executive director, New York State School Boards Association. “They would also result in a more viable system of operating in this heightened era of fiscal responsibility and taxpayer fatigue. If we are to simultaneously address the fiscal crisis and advance academic achievement we must focus resources on those things that improve results for kids.”

“The Westchester County Association is very pleased to be a part of the Let New York Work coalition. We have long believed that once the tax cap was passed, there would be a collective outcry for mandate reform,” said Bill Mooney, president of the Westchester County Association. “Having the business community joined by local government and school groups with one common agenda, sends a powerful message to our elected officials in Albany that meaningful and significant mandate relief must be achieved in 2012.”

Following today’s release of the *Let New York Work* agenda, the group will continue to advocate for the passage of the agenda during the 2012 legislative session.

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