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Counties Call for Property Tax Relief

Budget testimony suggests reforming \$1 billion Pre-School Special Ed Program

Declaring 2008 the year of the property taxpayer, NYSAC Executive Director Stephen J. Acquario testified today before the New York State Division of the Budget.

“We applaud state leaders for their apparent focus on property taxes. But we want to make one thing clear; the road to any substantial property tax relief runs through our county governments. Counties are the administrative arm of state government. That is the where the majority of state programs and services are delivered locally and this is where reform is needed,” said Acquario.

The testimony outlined a number of items that could relieve the county property tax burden. Among them was a call for the state to phase out county liability from New York’s Pre-School Special Education Program.

The Pre-School Special Education Program creates a significant impact on state and local taxpayers—currently over \$1 billion annually, yet state policy limits a county’s administrative ability and restricts their fiscal oversight. To address the local fiscal burden and foster needed reform, similar to the way Medicaid reforms were achieved, county leaders are advocating for the removal of counties from the fiscal and programmatic responsibilities of this program.

“The Pre-School Special Education program is an essential public service for our most needy. Yet it is inefficient and not the best value to the children, taxpayers or the providers of the services,” said NYSAC President Lucille M. McKnight, an Albany County legislator. “We look forward to working closely with the State Legislature and Governor to implement the findings of the Task Force, specifically eliminating the role of counties in the Pre-School Special Education program, during the 2008 Legislative session.”

In response to calls from NYSAC, last year Governor Spitzer commissioned a task force to look at all aspects of the Preschool special education program with an eye toward making it more effective and efficient. In November, following long and productive deliberations, the Governor’s Task Force issued recommendations that support the counties’ position.

“Arguably, this is one of the most important and essential public services for our little ones, but who is accountable to their families? Who is accountable to the taxpayers who fund the program? We believe that the answers to these questions will help provide a framework for reform that will benefit everyone involved—the children, providers and taxpayers,” said Acquario. “Counties are not in the business of education, and county taxpayers should not be funding a program over which county governments have no oversight. This is one unfunded state mandate that can be reformed this coming year that will have clear and unambiguous benefits for the local real property taxpayer, the children and participating providers.”

NYSAC county delegates recently made relief from this unfunded mandate a top priority. For a copy of the resolution, visit the NYSAC website at www.nysac.org or click here [NYSAC Resolution Supporting The Removal Of Counties From The 4410 Preschool Special Education Program](#)

The New York State Association of Counties is a municipal association serving all 62 counties of New York State including the City of New York. Organized in 1925, NYSAC’s mission is to represent, educate and advocate for member counties and the thousands of elected and appointed county officials who serve the public.

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