



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kenneth P. LaValle

Senator LaValle Recaps Efforts to Provide Property Tax Relief

KENNETH P. LAVALLE April 1, 2010

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It comes as no surprise that Long Islanders pay among the highest property taxes in the nation. Middle class families and seniors, in particular, have stretched their budgets to the limit and are finding it extremely difficult to keep pace with continuous increases in school taxes.

In addition, ongoing reports of waste, fraud, and mismanagement of funds have shattered the public's confidence in how school district's are spending their tax dollars. Taxpayers feel they are being deceived and that their children's education is being compromised. In these tough economic times, anything we can do to ease the financial burden of living and working on Long Island will be a help to our residents and communities.

For years, I have worked to provide real property tax relief for all New Yorkers and to eliminate abuse in spending of taxpayer dollars. As architect of the STAR property tax relief program, I was outraged when the Governor and Senate Democrats took away the STAR rebate check. The elimination of that check meant a loss of more than \$368 million in property tax relief for Long Island homeowners.

I have taken the lead in advancing the "Homeowner Protection and Property Tax Rebate Act," which offers immediate relief for millions of people across the state. This multi-level plan builds on many of the

tax relief initiatives I sponsored over the years and gives people choices. The choices included in this desperately needed property tax relief plan are to restore STAR rebate checks; a tax relief program based on a household's income and ability to pay (Circuit Breaker); or my plan to provide a much-needed and deserved freeze on the property tax rate for senior citizens age 70 and older, which would be returned, dollar for dollar, to school districts that opt to participate in the program. In addition, the program provides a school property tax cap to ensure that schools hold the line on spending and offers school mandate relief. We could think of this plan as an economic stimulus plan because if people paid less property taxes discretionary spending would increase, which would help create jobs and restore our economic vitality. Unfortunately, the Democrat Majority did not see the benefits of this initiative and voted it down. Their inaction, however, will not stop me from fighting to bring about real property tax relief.

Taxpayers have also suffered from fraud and mismanagement of school district funds. That is why I have been advocating for a School Inspector General (SIG) who would have the authority to review and assess the fiscal performance of a school district and evaluate its financial practices. The SIG would be responsive to the people and ensure that no one loses sight of who's picking up the tab.

My Truth in Voting legislation would also protect the taxpayer by empowering voters in the school budget process. People have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. This measure requires a clearly defined budget proposal, including a detailed contingency budget, be delivered to the voters prior to the school budget vote. This would help shed more light on the process and hold districts accountable for spending taxpayer dollars appropriately.

Real property tax relief must be a priority during budget negotiations – not tomorrow, not next year, not two years from now, but today. The proposals I have been advocating would put money back where it rightfully belongs – into the pockets of the hardworking men and women of New York State.