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FOR STATE REP. 108

Let's Fund Our Schools and Help Our Seniors

*By Anne Weisberg,
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The recent epic battles over school budgets and capital improvements in New Fairfield and Sherman, both of which ended with a yes vote, have taught me two things. First, both our towns care deeply about public education. Second, our current way of financing public schools through local property taxes can sometimes pit seniors on fixed incomes against parents of school-age kids.

On the campaign trail, I hear from seniors who very much want to support their town's schools but who also are very concerned about how they will afford a property tax increase on a fixed income, given all the other cost of living increases.

It doesn't have to be this way.

To begin with, the State should increase its support for local schools. In the 2024 session, our legislature recognized it should be playing a bigger role in funding local education, and passed HB 5534, which increases funding for public school students *and* provides for more individualized education. My opponent, Patrick Callahan, voted against it! Because of this and other votes, CEA, the state's largest association of teachers, has rated my opponent in the bottom 20% of House members.

I applaud the 100% bi-partisan support for HB 5491 which gives property tax relief to disabled veterans.

And I think we should also help seniors on fixed incomes afford the increases in property taxes due to increases in school budgets. If elected, I will propose that the State give these seniors a state-funded credit

or rebate on the portion of their property tax bills that goes to fund schools.

A program like this has existed for decades next door, in New York State. Called the STAR (School Tax Relief) Program, it helps seniors who are resident homeowners by reducing their property tax burden without taking any tax revenue away from the local community. Basically, the program works as follows: the homeowner pays their property tax bill and then gets a check from the State to cover a portion of it, depending on income level.

To be sure, many of today's seniors were once parents of school age kids who benefited from other seniors paying their property taxes. This is how taxes work - we all put into the system, and we all benefit from the system, albeit at different times and in different ways.

However, it is also true that school budgets have been rising rapidly, as have the costs of prescription drugs, energy, insurance, food and many other essential items that seniors need to pay from a fixed income.

A policy like New York's STAR program is a way for our State to continue to invest in education *and* support our seniors. Our kids and our elders deserve no less.

As always, please reach out to me at Anne4staterep@gmail.com and come to my Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Anne.forStateRep/>. Remember that early voting starts October 21 and make a plan to vote!



***Paid for by AnneforStateRep Committee, Samantha Addonizio-Butts Treasurer
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