



**Westchester**  
County Association

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***For Immediate Release***

## LEADING BUSINESS ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR REDUCTIONS IN PROPOSED 2009 COUNTY BUDGET

### *Pay Hikes To Commissioners Should Be Rejected*

WHITE PLAINS, NY December 1, 2008) -- The Westchester County Association (WCA), the county's leading business advocacy group, today called for changes to the proposed 2009 County Operating Budget including the elimination of proposed salary and benefit increases for department heads and commissioners.

In response to the severity of the economic meltdown impacting the private and public sectors across New York State, the WCA said that it is incumbent that Westchester's county government further reduce expenditures in its proposed \$1,773,479,195 budget for 2009. Under the proposed budget, the county tax levy would increase 2.97 percent, although the specific tax impact will vary from community to community.

William Mooney Jr., president of the WCA, noted that in the proposed budget "the loss of projected revenue, primarily mortgage tax and state aid, is not offset by an appropriate decrease in expenditures. County businesses and residential taxpayers should not be expected to pick up the tab when their own revenues and incomes are shrinking dramatically."

He added: "Given today's economic realities, the proposed raises for the 23 commissioners and department heads (plus concurrent benefit increases) should not be implemented."

The WCA and supporters plan to present their observations at the public hearing on the budget this Wednesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Board of Legislators chambers. These will include specific questions on proposed 2009 budget expenditures based on input from leading CPAs firms.

The overall observations set forth by the WCA include the following:

1. The proposed 2009 County Budget does not adequately address today's economic realities. Most businesses and consumers are deeply worried about their financial futures and are making the tough adjustments needed. Taxpayers expect their elected officials to "feel their pain" and respond accordingly. It is difficult for people facing unemployment or a cut in compensation to approve of salary and benefits increases for county department heads and commissioners.
2. The rationale for the raises -- that the money was included in the 2008 budget but not yet expended -- is not acceptable. The proposed budget consistently makes comparisons to prior budgets as opposed to actual expenditures. Just because funding is included and justified in a prior operating budget does not mean the budgeted funds must be spent if circumstances change. If the \$1 million in proposed salary raises and accompanying benefits were eliminated from the 2008 budget, it would result in a savings in the 2009 budget. This is the right message to send to a beleaguered constituency.
3. We're all in this together. In light of the dire financial realities of today, the WCA proposes that it take a 10% reduction in the annual subsidy it receives from the county for its work in international economic development in Westchester. Where feasible, we would urge a similar approach from other contract agencies.
4. The timeframe for public comment and scrutiny of the budget is not long enough. By the time the budget is released to the public on November 15<sup>th</sup>, there is barely two weeks for review (including the Thanksgiving holiday.) This does not provide adequate time for the public to understand what is included in the budget. By law, the County budget does not need to be approved until December 27<sup>th</sup> yet this year the Budget vote will take place on December 8<sup>th</sup>. We question the reason for that.

Mr. Mooney noted that "Our members have been calling and emailing us more than ever before to register their disappointment with the perceived lack of fiscal responsibility at all levels of government. We are confident that our county

leaders will carefully reconsider the budget and make the changes that adjust spending in the current environment,” Mooney said. “Our goal is to work in a spirit of genuine cooperation with the county’s elected officials to see this accomplished.”

The Westchester County Association ([www.westchester.org](http://www.westchester.org)) is the preeminent business membership organization in Westchester County. The Association is committed to business advocacy, economic vitality and to providing a strong and clear voice for the interests of businesses on the regional, national and international levels. Its key objectives are: promoting positive economic development in the region; fostering business development; and providing its members with access and interaction with key public and private sector individuals, agencies and organizations.