



Westchester
County Association

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For Immediate Release

Westchester County Association Urges Legislators to Remain In Session To Pass Suozzi Commission Proposal and Alleviate Westchester's Tax Burden

Citing Widening Economic Downturn, Business Leaders Say Tax Relief Legislation Can't Wait Until Next Year: "Gone Fishin" Is Not an Option

WHITE PLAINS, NY (June 12, 2008) – Citing the widening economic downturn, The Westchester County Association's Property Tax Reform Alliance today endorsed the 4% property tax cap and other recommendations by the NY State "Suozzi" Commission on Property Tax Relief. With the current legislative session expected to end on June 23, The WCA urged Governor David A. Paterson and state legislators to remain in session and approve the tax cap now rather than waiting until next year when the new session of the Legislature begins and the State legislative elections are over.

William M. Mooney, Jr., President of The Westchester County Association (WCA), Westchester's preeminent business membership organization, said that business leaders urged immediate legislative action on the tax cap because of worsening economic conditions. "With the spiraling cost of gas that is impacting the entire economy— not just

at the gas pump— the looming credit crisis, the state deficit and decline in valuations, the business community recommends the 4% property tax cap be mandated to take effect starting with the 2009-2010 school budget year. This proposal needs to be implemented as a first step towards lessening the burden on Westchester’s taxpayers.”

He added: “Business and consumers alike have become increasingly outraged at the economic conditions they are facing. Waiting until the next session before the tax cap and other tax relief measures are considered is not an option. The Governor’s call for the legislators to continue in session will send the right message to the public that our lawmakers are dealing with this crisis. The public does not want to see a sign on their legislators’ door saying “Gone Fishin””.

Dick French, Chair of the WCA’s Property Tax Alliance, announced that the WCA was taking a leadership role because “we believe it is the obligation of business leaders of this community to rise to this challenge.” He added: “We totally agree with the Commission’s conclusion that the rate of increase in property taxes in our state— which is the highest of any large state in American and 79% above the national average— is unsustainable.”

He noted that the WCA was launching an aggressive consensus building campaign to generate broad public support for the tax cap and other Suozzi Commission recommendations. Mr. French commented, “It is the conclusion of our Alliance that the Suozzi Commission proposal represents wide reaching reforms that will go along way to alleviate the tax payers’ burden. In addition to a cap on school tax levies, the proposal includes mandate relief, a circuit breaker proposal and numerous tactical reforms. We feel it is important to adopt the Suozzi proposal in its entirety without the distraction of picking apart specific recommendations that one group or another may disagree with.”

Al DelBello, WCA Chair stated: “The coalition is modeled on the highly successful WCA Blue Ribbon Task Force on the Health Care Crisis. The task force resulted in the formation of the Suburban Healthcare Alliance comprising businesses, community

hospitals and physicians that has been successful in mandating reforms of certain practices by the health insurers. As a business organization, we have the ability to create the momentum to effect change politically. ”

The campaign will include a questionnaire that will be sent to members of the Westchester legislative delegation in Albany as well as candidates seeking election to some of those seats, asking if they will support the Suozzi report. The results of that questionnaire will be made public.

In addition, the WCA will hold a Town Hall Forum at 6:30 PM, Tuesday, June 17 at 800 Westchester Avenue auditorium to gather input from businesses, consumers and other groups.

The Property Tax Reform Alliance— consisting of key stakeholders in the business community, county and municipal governments and the public education sector— began its inquiry earlier this year with round table discussions and meetings with key public officials including Thomas R. Suozzi, the Nassau County Executive and Chairman of the of State Commission on Property Tax Relief. On June 7, Mr. Mooney was invited by Governor Paterson to participate in the Governor’s visit to a couple in Dobbs Ferry to get their views on the Commission’s report. At that meeting, Mr. Mooney endorsed the Commission’s recommendations and expressed the concerns of the business community that the cycle of property tax increases can no longer be sustained without serious consequences to the local economy.

The Westchester County Association (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.