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Poll: Voters Don't Like Higher Taxes to Fund the Kirwan Commission's Education Plan

The True Cost of the Plan Will Be at Least \$4 Billion Annually

ROCKVILLE, MD (June 22, 2023) — A 63% majority of Maryland voters oppose the tax increases needed to fund education spending hikes, according to a new Maryland Public Policy Institute poll conducted by Gonzales Research & Media Services. The overwhelming opposition to income and property tax hikes comes as Maryland taxpayers are learning of the truly enormous cost of the so-called “Blueprint for Maryland’s Future” devised by the Kirwan Commission in 2019.

A total of 841 likely voters were read the following: “Lawmakers in Annapolis passed legislation that increases funding for Maryland public schools by nearly \$4 billion each year. Do you support or oppose efforts to raise income and property taxes to pay for these new increases in education spending?” A mere 36% voiced support, including only 51% of Democrats, 25% of Independents, and 15% of Republicans.

“Buckle up, Marylanders,” said Maryland Public Policy Institute President and CEO Christopher Summers. “There are only a few solutions to this problem. One is to reduce the spending mandated by the Kirwan Commission’s plan. But this is unlikely given current political realities. The second is to require less funding from local jurisdictions and more from the state. But this is a distinction without a difference since the same hard-working people are taxed either way. The third is to increase taxes at the local level or the state level or both.”

Since the initial Blueprint was published, advocates for the plan have repeatedly portrayed its cost to be a tenth of its true magnitude by avoiding utterance of the word ‘annual.’ For instance, Kalman Hettleman, a member of the Kirwan Commission, recently **wrote in Marylandmatters.org** that “the eventual price tag of \$4 billion in 2033 has been ballyhooed.” However, the total cost of the Blueprint was revised upward in 2019, almost immediately after the plan was released, by the Kirwan Commission itself from \$31.9 billion to \$40 billion by 2033. Given inflation since then, full implementation of the Kirwan plan will likely exceed that number, making the **true cost at least \$4 billion annually**, not merely \$4 billion by 2033.

And that cost is already being felt by local taxpayers.

TAX TO COVER \$4 BILLION	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
Statewide	36%	63%
Democrat	51%	48%
Republican	15%	84%
Independent	25%	73%
White	29%	69%
African-American	50%	50%
Other	34%	65%
Female	38%	61%
Male	33%	66%
Progressive	55%	44%
Liberal	53%	47%
Moderate	34%	65%
Conservative	16%	84%

In late May, the Montgomery County Council approved a final \$6.7 billion fiscal 2024 budget with a **4.7%** property tax increase to cover massive education spending hikes. In Baltimore, Mayor Brandon Scott's **proposed budget** included an "unexpected" \$79 million increase in education spending. Anne Arundel County, meanwhile education funding now takes up **half of its \$2.14 billion budget**, causing property tax hikes this year that will likely prove inadequate as those costs continue to rise for the next decade thanks to the Blueprint.

After learning about the true cost of the plan to their communities, local leaders have expressed surprise, if not dismay:

- Baltimore Mayor Scott said, "It was a gut punch."
- Montgomery County Chief Administrative Officer Rich Madaleno said the 10% proposed property tax increase proposed by County Executive Mark Elrich "would go solely to education."
- Calvert County School Superintendent Andrew Townsend said the 10.5% increase in school funding is "unprecedented" and needed to meet the mandates of the Blueprint for Maryland.
- Cecil County Public Schools CFO Denise Sofa: "There isn't extra money that can offset our expenses on our budget, we have to add expenses to match the state's revenue."

"Marylanders deserved to know the true cost of the Kirwan Commission's plan before they started seeing that cost arrive in the form of lower paychecks and higher property tax bills," Summers said. "Of course, we all want to provide an excellent education for the children of our state, but the cost of providing that education must be reasonable, transparent, and proven to be effective. As our poll shows, a majority of voters disapprove of further tax hikes to fund education spending hikes."

ABOUT THE MARYLAND PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

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