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75 Percent of Pennsylvania Voters Favor Increasing Pre-K Funding

Strong Consensus: 94% Say Early Childhood Education Important for PA

Harrisburg, PA (June 7, 2018) – As Pennsylvania state legislators return to Harrisburg to negotiate a final state budget, a new poll commissioned by the Pre-K for PA Campaign and conducted by Harrisburg-based Harper Polling shows **75 percent of likely voters support increasing funding to expand access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-kindergarten.** The numbers have grown since a 2013 Pre-K for PA commissioned poll conducted by Lake Research Partners/Bellwether Research and Consulting had 63% of likely voters indicating that they favored increasing funding to ensure access to pre-k for all Pennsylvania kids.

“There is strong consensus among Pennsylvania voters [94 percent] that think early childhood education is important for the children of the commonwealth,” said Brock McCleary, President, Harper Polling. “Furthermore, a strong plurality of support for expanded funding is realized across all demographics, regions and registration.”

Nearly two-thirds of likely Pennsylvania voters polled by Harper from May 22-23 **also said that they would support a tax increase to expand pre-k access.** Sixty-four percent of Pennsylvanians said they would pay an extra \$50 in taxes to fund pre-k, which would equal a .01 increase in PIT (personal income tax) for the average Pennsylvania taxpayer. This number has also grown since the 2013 poll, when only 56 percent of voters polled said they were willing to pay higher taxes to support pre-k investments.

“Pennsylvanians value pre-k education for its proven benefits to each child fortunate enough to attend a high-quality pre-k, and they’re willing to dig a little deeper into their own pockets to support expanded access for kids across the commonwealth,” said Joan Benso, President and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a founding partner of Pre-K for PA. “Pennsylvania prospers when children succeed and pre-k is a key element in each child’s success.”

According to the new Harper poll results, **every single voting demographic in the state favors expanded access to pre-k by at least a two-to-one margin.** Seniors favor it by more than a three-to-one margin. Conservatives are for expanded access at a rate of two-to-one. **More than 65 percent of likely voters in Southcentral PA, a conservative part of the state, are willing to pay \$50 more per year to support state pre-k expansion.**

“No child should be missing out when nearly all residents agree,” said Jodi Askins, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC). “When it comes to the benefits of high-quality pre-k, 94 percent of Pennsylvanians agree that it is necessary for children to learn the appropriate behaviors and social skills to succeed in school. It’s time to fully fund pre-k.”

SNAP is temporary. More than 80% of SNAP participants are working in the year before or after getting SNAP, suggesting that SNAP is temporarily helping workers stay afloat when they hit hard times.

SNAP supports some of our most vulnerable populations – kids, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. About 2 of every 5 households on SNAP across the country include children. In Pennsylvania, just shy of 700,000 of the 1.8 million people on SNAP are children. About 185,000 of PA's SNAP beneficiaries are seniors. Seniors who are enrolled in SNAP have better health, less acute and long term care, and have lower Medicare/Medicaid costs in comparison with seniors who do not have SNAP. About 688,000 of Pennsylvania's SNAP participants are people with disabilities, and remaining 17,000 are able-bodied adults without dependents who are subject to SNAP work requirements.

SNAP helps people from all PA communities, not just urban communities. On average in Pennsylvania, SNAP reaches 944,462 households (1.85 million individuals) per month. These SNAP beneficiaries represent 15% of families in the commonwealth. SNAP helps 1 of 8 rural and metro households and 1 of 7 small town households afford healthy, nutritious meals. These fall just shy of the national averages (13% metro, 15% small towns, 16% rural).

How to talk about United Way's concerns with the failed House Farm Bill

Work requirements

- United Way supports the importance and value of work that sustains families and communities.
- United Way supports encouraging and promoting work, financial stability, and self-sufficiency. But work requirement proposals could negatively impact individuals and families already struggling to make ends meet.
- For individuals who aren't working, the situation is often much more complex than simply finding a job opening. Some candidates need training for skills sought by employers, lack of access to transportation, costs of childcare or disabilities and/or chronic, recurring medical conditions.
- Getting people to work requires more systemic changes which address the high cost and lack of access to child care, workforce development and skills training, among others.
- The administrative processes behind work requirements are costly to implement and represent an unfunded mandate which will cost more state taxpayer dollars. The cost-benefit does not work out to the benefit of the taxpayer, because work requirements on their own are not sufficient to promote employment and potentially create obstacles to meeting basic needs.

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- To better serve the needs of low income individuals and families struggling to make ends meet, our focus should be on addressing the barriers to employment they face; creating better economic opportunities, workforce development, skills training, and addressing the high costs of housing and quality childcare.

Protect state flexibility

- “Broad based categorical eligibility” is a popular option that lets states increase administrative efficiencies and reduce unnecessary red tape when determining who qualifies for SNAP. Forty-two states, with leadership from both sides of the aisle, have taken this option.
- By maintaining current law, states will continue to have the flexibility to adjust income cutoffs and asset limits, so working families don’t abruptly lose SNAP when they earn or save slightly more.
- Proposals to restrict or eliminate categorical eligibility would create a cliff that punishes families who are trying to do all the right things: work more hours, get a better-paying job, or save more money so that an unexpected bill or illness doesn’t push them under water.

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