



We Must Do Better To Support Our Seniors and Our Schools

By Anne Weisberg

As Selectman Khris Hall said in her column last week, this budget season has been “remarkably quiet.” This Saturday, May 9, New Fairfield voters will vote on a 4.86% bump up in property taxes - a smaller increase than in previous years, but an increase nonetheless.



The school budget represents roughly 67% of the town’s proposed operating budget for 2026-2027. To maintain the level of education our kids deserve, New Fairfield, like all our towns, has no choice but to rely on property taxes.

Rising property taxes affect everyone, but they are particularly tough on seniors on fixed incomes whose tax bills have

gone up because their homes have increased in value.

As the Democratic candidate to be state representative for New Fairfield (plus Sherman and parts of Danbury and New Milford), one of my top goals is easing the burden of property taxes, especially for seniors. **That’s why I propose that Connecticut give 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. 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, homeowners pay their property tax bills and then get 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 schoolchildren who benefited from property taxes paid by seniors and other neighbors at the time. 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.

But I believe we should be making it easier, not harder, for seniors to stay in the towns where they have roots - family, friends and a support network developed over decades. A program like STAR would be a step in that direction.

As a state, we must support our seniors and invest in our children. That’s why I also want the state to pay its fair share for education, including special education.

It’s time to address two problems with the current system for state funding for education:

1. State aid to public schools, commonly referred to as the Education Cost Sharing formula or ECS, hasn’t kept pace with needs. A key part - called the “foundation,” intended to represent the cost

of educating a general education student with no additional learning needs - hasn’t been increased since 2013. While the Governor announced on May 3 that New Fairfield will get \$139,244 in supplemental education aid, this doesn’t address the underlying structural problem with ECS. Gov. Lamont recently announced a new commission to study ways to improve the funding formula, and hopefully it will lead to substantive steps that the legislature can implement. I pledge to support more public school funding.

2. The state reimbursement formula for students with extraordinary special education needs (called the Excess Cost grant) places a huge share of these large and often unpredictable expenses on the school district. According to First Selectman Pat Del Monaco, this situation created an unexpected deficit of \$455,678 in this year’s school budget. The state needs to take on more of these special education expenses to spread them around a broader pool of residents.

I’m eager to hear your ideas on how we can help families and make life in our state more affordable for everyone. Please reach out to me and sign up to learn more about my campaign at www.anneforstaterep.com

