

Community leaders relieved that Governor's ballot question not going forward: Warn it would have had disastrous consequences

Community leaders representing senior citizens, higher education, health care, and public safety organizations were relieved that the Supreme Court ruled today that Governor Carcieri's proposed non-binding questions could not appear on the November ballot. They warned of the disastrous consequences for the state had the question dealing with constitutional spending caps been supported by the voters.

The group said that spending caps have been tried and failed. Putting a rigid and unrealistic spending formula in Rhode Island's constitution would guarantee big cuts in important services such as transportation, education, public safety, and health care.

Colorado remains the only state in the nation to have enacted a constitutional spending formula similar to the one proposed by the Governor. In that state it is misleadingly called the "Taxpayers Bill of Rights" (TABOR). After living with it for over a decade, Colorodans were so frustrated by the declines in public services that last fall they voted to suspend the measure.

"We are extremely concerned about the effects that spending formulas would have on certain populations, like seniors, who are a growing population with greater needs. Spending caps would cause drastic cuts in vital services like health care, transportation, fuel assistance, and long-term care, and tie the hands of policymakers to respond to changing needs" said Kathleen Connell, State Director of the AARP.

Andrew Snyder, [President of the RI Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics](#), highlighted the risk to children. "We need to learn from Colorado's experience. During the thirteen years that TABOR has been in effect, the number of Colorado children receiving their full vaccinations plummeted and Colorado's national ranking dropped from 24th to 50th. At the same time, the percent of low-income children without health insurance doubled. In Rhode Island we've worked hard to provide health insurance to all children so they have access to primary and preventive care. It's not only good for kids, but a good investment for the state by preventing more costly emergency room visits. The reduction in state spending that results from arbitrary limits would put our children's health at risk and not be cost effective in the long-run."

According to The Poverty Institute at the Rhode Island College School of Social Work, had a constitutional spending limit such as the one being proposed by the

Governor been in place over the past decade, state spending in the coming fiscal year would have been \$500 million (or 16%) less.

“We are already concerned about the tuition increases we’ve had to implement at the state colleges over the past few years” said Frank Annunziato, Executive Director of the American Association of University Professors. “Imagine if the state budget was \$500 million less this year. Again, we need to learn a lesson from Colorado where higher education funding per resident dropped by 31% during the 10 years of TABOR. Tuition skyrocketed and those faculty who were able to left state schools, taking their expertise and research dollars to other institutions. We could not afford to have that happen in our state.”