

Immediate Release

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Tax Reform that Works for All West Virginians

(Charleston, WV) Today, leaders from the state's education, faith, labor and community-based organizations called on legislators to only pursue tax changes that truly benefit all West Virginians by allowing the state to continue investing in our schools and communities.

Since the end of the 2015 Legislative Session, the Joint Select Committee on Tax Reform has heard from industry and government representatives on how to change the state's tax code to boost West Virginia's economy. Missing from the Committee's agenda has been the perspective of leaders of organizations who work with the state's working families and have monitored how years of business tax cuts have drained the state budget, forcing cuts to higher education and other priorities.

This diverse coalition of organizations is coming together to support the following basic principles of fair taxation:

1. Any new tax proposal should not jeopardize schools, roads, colleges, kids, or seniors. This includes protecting services for vulnerable West Virginians.
2. Any new tax proposal should include accountability measures for tax breaks or credits so we know they are working.
3. Any new tax proposal should not increase taxes on low- and middle-income families; in West Virginia we already have an upside-down tax structure where working families are forced to pay more than their fair share.
4. Any new tax proposal should consider new and alternative sources of revenue to pay for urgent needs such as infrastructure, education and human services.
5. Any new tax proposal should avoid changes to revenue generation that would short circuit the democratic process and weaken the state's ability to meet future needs.

"We support a fair tax system that provides for high-quality schools, decent roads and other public investments that are so important to building a better West Virginia," stated Dale Lee, President of the West Virginia Education Association.

"As the Legislature moves to revamp our state's tax system this year, lawmakers should avoid doubling down on the failed policies of the past and work toward changes that will support working families and stronger investments in our economy," said Ted Boettner, Executive Director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

"The number one thing businesses look for is a well-trained, well-educated workforce," commented Christine Campbell, President of the American Federation of Teachers – West Virginia. "That's what we are in the business

of doing in West Virginia. As teachers and school service personnel, our job is to provide a foundation for strong economic growth by educating over 180,000 kids each and every day. To achieve this, however, we must have a fair and adequate revenue system that invests in our kids and in our future. When we invest in working families, when we invest in our kids, they invest in West Virginia.”

“We need a tax system that invests in things that work like education, infrastructure and work force development. Especially at a time when college has become less and less affordable, we need a common sense approach to taxes and public investment,” commented Rick Wilson, Director of the American Friends Service Committee.

“The West Virginia Council of Churches has a long-standing concern for the poor and vulnerable in our state. We believe that tax reform should not negatively impact essential services for children and seniors,” stated Jeff Allen, Executive Director of the West Virginia Council of Churches.

Almost two dozen groups have signed on to the Fair Taxation Principles with more expected to join in the months leading up to the 2016 Legislative Session. The Joint Select Committee on Tax Reform has monthly meetings until then and coalition leaders will continue to request an opportunity to speak before the Committee and formally present their recommendations.

The Fair Taxation Principles are available at www.wvpolicy.org.

Organizations signed on to the Principles are:

American Federation of Teachers – West Virginia
American Friends Service Committee
Believing All is Possible - Logan County High School
Catholic Conference of West Virginia
Communications Workers of America
Epic Youth Empowerment Group, Sherman High School, Boone County
Kanawha Institute for Social Research & Action (KISRA)
National Association of Social Workers, WV Chapter
Partnership of African American Churches
Prevent Child Abuse West Virginia
Service Employees International Union, District 1199
Southern Appalachian Labor School
West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy
West Virginia Citizen Action Group
West Virginia Council of Churches
West Virginia Covenant House
West Virginia Education Association
West Virginia Focus: Reproductive Education & Equality
West Virginia Food & Farm Coalition
West Virginia Healthy Kids and Families Coalition
West Virginia League of Conservation Voters
West Virginians for Affordable Health Care