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Governor Christie: People Need Democrat-Controlled Legislature To Cement Successful Bipartisan Interest Arbitration Cap

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Task Force Reveals This Reform Has Saved Property Taxpayers More Than \$2.9 billion

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie renewed his call for the Democrat-controlled legislature to keep a major financial burden off the backs of New Jersey property taxpayers by making permanent the successful bipartisan cap on interest arbitration awards, in light of the findings released today by members of the Police and Fire Public Interest Arbitration Impact Task Force.

"These findings prove that the arbitration cap works, having already saved New Jersey property taxpayers more than \$2.9 billion and stands to save them billions of dollars more in the years ahead," Governor Christie said. "It wasn't easy bringing everyone together to establish this cap in 2010 and to extend it in 2014 in the face of staunch opposition. But both parties came together twice because it was the right thing to do for property taxpayers. Before this cap sunsets at the end of this year, New Jersey's leaders in control of the legislature must make this a permanent reform."

According to the report, the bipartisan 2-percent cap on property taxes coupled with the 2-percent cap on interest arbitration awards saved property taxpayers an estimated \$2.9 billion in property taxes by 2015. The decrease in salary growth due to the arbitration cap has saved property taxpayers approximately \$428.7 million in police salaries and an additional \$102.2 million in firefighter salaries; combined over \$530 million in additional savings to taxpayers.

Legislation that established and extended the 2-percent cap on interest arbitration awards for local law enforcement and firefighters have been bipartisan efforts. In total, the Legislature voted 227-1 in passing the 2010 and 2014 bills, for which the Senate President and Assembly Speaker, respectively, were the lead sponsors.

However, with the cap about to sunset on Dec. 31, there is little time left to extend these important taxpayer protection measures. If the cap is not extended, property taxes could rise again to the 7-percent annual increase level that existed prior to the Governor's reforms.

In the five years before Governor Christie's reforms, the average total property tax bill rose by 25.8 percent or \$1,554. But in the past five years under the caps, the average total property tax bill rose by just 10.3 percent or \$777.

The cap reforms also streamlined the costly process for police and firefighter arbitration. In 2009 and 2010, arbitration cases took 744 days and 775 days, respectively, to be decided. After the reforms, cases took 80 days in 2015 and 90 days to resolve in 2016.

The report concluded these significant tax savings have been achieved, as New Jersey's crime rate has decreased at a fourfold greater pace than the five-year period preceding the 2-percent caps. The crime rate decreased by 22.3 percent between 2011 and 2016, compared to 5.8 percent between 2006 and 2011.

Police and fire recruitment has also been on the rise under the caps. There was a 92-percent increase in eligible firefighters placed on the hiring list in 2015 compared to 2010, and a 43-percent uptick in eligible law enforcement officers on the list in 2016 compared to 2010.

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"The arbitration cap strikes the right balance in protecting property taxpayers and public safety," Governor Christie said. "Even with the 2-percent cap, the average pay for police in New Jersey is the second-highest in the nation and the average pay for firefighters is highest in the country."

From 2006 to 2011, the average police salary rose from \$75,301 to \$89,066 (18.3 percent). From 2011 to 2016, it rose from \$89,066 to \$93,360 (4.8 percent). New Jersey police salaries during that time stayed at either the highest or second-highest in the nation. From 2006 to 2011, the average firefighter salary rose from \$78,079 to \$95,107 (21.8 percent). From 2011 to 2016, it rose from \$95,107 to \$99,675 (4.8 percent).

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