NEW POLL REVEALS NEARLY 70 PERCENT OF MARYLANDERS SUPPORT PROPOSED MARYLAND EDUCATION CREDIT

Voters Place Value In Potential To Help Lower-and-Middle-Income Families To Obtain A Quality Education As A Way Of Breaking The Cycle Of Poverty

ANNAPOLIS, MD. 11-16-15---An overwhelming majority of Marylanders support the proposal to create a Maryland Education Credit, according to a new OpinionWorks poll: http://www.educationmaryland.org/library/resources/EducationTaxCreditPollMemo.pdf.

Two-thirds of voters support the proposal and place great value on its potential to help lower- and middle-income families obtain a quality education in both public and nonpublic schools by offering a tax credit to businesses that donate to nonprofit student assistance organizations. The telephone survey of 600 randomly selected Maryland registered voters was conducted Aug. 13-29, 2015. The findings have a potential sampling error of no more than ± 4.0 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

Support is found in all segments of the electorate and in all corners of the State, peaking at 74 percent among African-Americans and 82 percent in Prince George’s County. A large majority of voters residing in the state capital (71 percent) support the proposal, with only 19 percent opposing. Notably, support for the Maryland Education Credit is strongly bipartisan, with Democrats favoring the Education Tax Credit at a 69 percent rate and Republicans favoring it at 66 percent.

“This proposal is strongly supported by voters, and for a variety of understandable reasons,” said Steve Raabe, founder and president of OpinionWorks. “Voters appreciate the assistance it will provide for lower- and middle-income students, they believe businesses have a positive role to play, and they see a benefit to families being able to choose the school they feel is best for them.”

Modeled on successful programs in 16 other states, including Pennsylvania, the Maryland Education Credit would provide a 60 percent tax credit, rather than a charitable deduction, of up to $200,000 to businesses that donate to nonprofit student assistance organizations (SAO) that provide financial assistance to K-12 students for educational expenses, including tuition, transportation, special education services, tutoring, and educational technology. Led by Sen. James E. DeGrange Sr., D-Anne Arundel, and the late Del. Jim Proctor, D-Prince George’s County, the Maryland Education Credit has received significant bipartisan support in both chambers of the General Assembly since 2006, but remains stalled in the House Ways and Means Committee.
“Given the overwhelming support among Maryland voters for this proposal, and its potential to benefit students most in need in our public and nonpublic schools, I am more committed than ever to ensuring its successful passage,” said DeGrange.

**Topline results from the poll show strong support across the State:**

- When offered a brief description of the proposal, 63 percent of voters statewide support it, with only 28 percent opposing.
- After hearing several facts about the Maryland Education Credit, voters’ support increases to 68 percent, with 31 percent strongly in favor. Opposition falls to 23 percent, with only 14 percent of voters strongly opposing.
- Following their initial reaction to the proposal, voters were asked to respond to reasons why they would support the proposal. Nearly three-quarters (71 percent) expressed support for the Maryland Education Credit because it would give “families in low-income neighborhoods the opportunity to choose a school with better educational outcomes that would help break the cycle of poverty in those neighborhoods.”

Jane Johnson is the recently retired executive director of the New Song Community Learning Center in the Sandtown-Winchester community of West Baltimore. She had peace of mind knowing that her only son, Chauncey Wylie, attended Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, a Catholic high school in Baltimore City serving low-income students. He is now a freshman at Loyola University Maryland.

“One of the reasons that drugs and crime are such a serious crisis facing Baltimore right now is the fact that many school-aged kids see absolutely no way out,” said Johnson, a mother of four. “There are great stories of individuals, often athletes, finding their way without engaging in the crime and drug trade. However, for so many kids it is the only way that they see.

“Education is the most important way for students to find out that there is an opportunity for a better life. Chauncey attends New Song Academy from Pre-Kindergarten through middle school. Although New Song Academy is a public school, the Learning Center, a non-profit organization, is its operator. Cristo Rey then gave my son a chance and I am forever grateful. I pray that many more students like Chauncey may be afforded these same opportunities.”

The average elementary school tuition for Catholic schools in Baltimore is $5,498, according to the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The percentage of non-Catholic students in those schools is 49 percent. More than 30 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals in the elementary schools that are supported by the Division of Schools.

The poll indicated that Marylanders have deep concern for the difficulties in Baltimore City. Eighty-two percent of voters across the State said they are concerned “personally” about the problems in Baltimore, and a majority (51 percent) said they are “very concerned personally.” Voters are also looking for the State to be part of the solution with 74 percent believing the State of Maryland should “play an active role in trying to help solve the problems in Baltimore.”

If the Education Credit were to “cause some students to move from their public school to a private or religious school that their family feels is better suited to their needs,” only 10 percent of the State’s voters would see that as “a bad thing.” Four times as many would see that migration as “a good thing.”
In Maryland, there are currently 25 state business tax credits, but none for business investment in K-12 education. In the poll, 62 percent agree with the idea that “The State of Maryland should give tax incentives to businesses to support education through voluntary donations.” Only 19 percent disagree with that fundamental proposition.

“The Maryland Education Credit would be a win-win for our students and the partnerships between public and non-public schools,” said Scott Wilfong, the recently retired chairman and CEO of SunTrust Bank’s Greater Washington/Maryland division. “It is time to be innovative and bold in our approach to investing in all students, regardless of where they attend school, so that they can succeed. This is a tool urgently needed especially in Baltimore City, where too many families are struggling to provide their children with a bright future.”

The OpinionWorks Poll was conducted Aug. 13-29 by landline and cellular telephone. The results are based on interviews with 600 registered voters across Maryland. Interviewees were drawn randomly from the database of registered voters, supplied by the State Board of Elections and matched with landline and cellular telephone numbers by a commercial vendor. The sample was balanced geographically and by political party during interviewing, and respondents were screened to ensure that only registered voters were interviewed. Weights were applied to bring the voter sample into compliance with the demographic breakdown of the registered voter population.

About OpinionWorks: OpinionWorks conducts frequent opinion studies at the state and local level across the country and is the polling organization for The Baltimore Sun. For more information: http://www.opinionworks.com/.

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