

Coalition acts to save tax rebates for low-income seniors, blind and disabled Californians

Contributed by Lake County News Reports
Thursday, 20 November 2008
Last Updated Thursday, 20 November 2008

On Wednesday, thousands of Californians across the state took action to save the renters' rebate, an important program recently defunded by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Organizers sought to send a loud and clear message that Californians do not accept elimination of this crucial program for low-income senior, blind and disabled Californians.

The statewide day of action came in response to Gov. Schwarzenegger's use of the line-item veto power to eliminate \$191 million in tax rebates for low-income elderly and disabled Californians. This was the governor's single biggest line-item veto in the budget.

The governor defunded the entire Senior Citizens Property Tax Assistance program, also known as the "renters' rebate," a program that has been in effect for decades.

With no forewarning, Schwarzenegger struck all funds from the program, despite the fact that the Legislature had included the funds in the budget approved by the state Assembly and Senate.

The Senior Citizens Renters Tax Assistance program, which has been in effect for four decades, makes senior and disabled renters who earn less than \$44,096 eligible for up to \$347.50 as a tax rebate.

Many eligible Californians had already filed their claims and were counting on these funds. With the governor's veto, the Franchise Tax Board now will not pay these claims.

Assemblyman John Laird (D-Santa Cruz), chair of the Assembly Budget Committee, characterized the cuts to the tax assistance program as "unconscionable."

Tenants Together, a statewide organization for renters' rights, advocates for the rights of California's estimated 14 million renters.

"We're outraged that the governor would take aim at low-income senior, blind and disabled renters during these difficult times," said Dean Preston, executive director of Tenants Together, California's statewide organization for renters' rights. "The state's neediest residents were counting on this money. The governor's veto is totally unacceptable."

According to Nan Brasmer, President of California Alliance for Retired Americans, "The governor's veto of rebates for renters is a slap in the face to the neediest seniors. To add insult to injury, the governor also cut the tax rebate for homeowners, which also targets lower income homeowners, many of whom are seniors. We call on legislators to override the governor's veto and restore these rebates as soon as possible."

The group is collecting signatures on its online petition condemning the governor's veto of these funds. The petition can be viewed at www.tenantsstogether.org.

The coalition opposing the Governor's veto is remarkably broad. More than 30 organizations have signed onto a letter to the governor urging the governor to fully fund the tax assistance program.

Signatories included Access to Independence of San Diego, California Alliance for Retired Americans, California Church IMPACT, California Disability Community Action Network, Center for Independent Living - Fresno, Coalition for Economic Survival, the San Francisco Tenants Union and others.

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