

MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: David Blatt, Director
Office: (918) 794-3944; Cell: (918) 859-8747

New Oklahoma Policy Institute Issue Brief Finds State Question 744 to be “The Wrong Solution” for Oklahoma

(Tulsa, July 20, 2010): State Question 744, the proposed constitutional amendment that would peg the annual education budget in Oklahoma to funding levels in six neighboring states, is the wrong solution to a real problem, according to a new issue brief from Oklahoma Policy Institute.

“We know that education funding in Oklahoma has failed to keep pace,” said David Blatt, OK Policy’s Director and the report’s author. “However, the challenges faced by common education in Oklahoma are shared across the broad spectrum of state government. By mandating huge spending increases for common education without an overall expansion of state revenues, SQ 744 creates the strong likelihood of setting the state further behind in all our other critical areas of public investment, including higher education, health care, human services, and public safety. This outcome would harm all Oklahomans, including our schoolchildren and teachers.”

According to the formula that would be entrenched in the state Constitution, Oklahoma’s per pupil expenditures would have to reach the regional average over the next three years. Since the regional average is itself a moving target, OK Policy projects that this mandate would require funding for Common Education to increase by \$1.7 billion between FY ’12 and FY ’14. This would come at a time when the state is already facing a budget hole of over \$1 billion in non-recurring revenues and core services are struggling to recover from two years of reduced funding. This situation would necessarily require deeper budget cuts, tax increases or both, even assuming a strong economic turnaround.

As well as the impact that the funding formula would have on the rest of the state budget, the report identifies other major flaws with SQ 744. The measure’s formula would transfer decisions about Oklahoma’s budget out of the hands of Oklahomans and into the hands of legislators, voters, and judges outside our borders. The language of the ballot measure contains a host of ambiguities, and could put local funding of education into doubt. In addition, the measure fails to tie funding increases to any standards or goals for improving educational quality and outcomes.

"We believe SQ 744 is the wrong solution for Oklahoma, and we urge Oklahoma voters to vote 'no' in November," said Blatt. "At the same time, we know that SQ 744 resonates with heartfelt concerns Oklahomans have about chronic underfunding of services. We fervently hope that this ballot question will lead us to examine how to support an adequate investment in our state priorities, including a quality education for our children, in a fiscally responsible manner."

For the full issue brief and a 1-page summary, go to: <http://okpolicy.org/sq-744>