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House Rules Committee
HB 3453

May 29th, 2013

To Whom It May Concern,

As you know, the Josephine County Public Safety levy recently failed. The measure failed, not because residents did not want an adequate criminal justice system, but because they could not afford the levy. Ultimately, it may be necessary to reduce the wages and benefits of public safety employees to a level commensurate with the economics of the counties in which they are employed.

Josephine county is not a wealthy county. In few places is that more evident than the Illinois Valley. Our local sawmill will soon be permanently closed. We have no manufacturing, no large scale agriculture and considerable numbers of low income, fixed income and unemployed residents.

In voting down this levy, county residents aren't being "cheap tightwads". It's not that they aren't "stepping up". They are poor. Most residents are living at or below the poverty level.

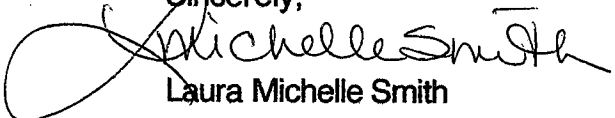
According to recent information, HB 3453 would impose an income tax on county residents which could be considerably higher than the levy. The repercussions of such a tax would be devastating. Contrary to improving living conditions through increased safety, living conditions will likely spiral downwards.

Large numbers of full-time working people in Josephine county receive assistance through programs such as WIC, UCAN or Oregon Trail cards. Many are on OHP. Others are only just getting by and barely avoiding taking assistance. Local seniors on fixed incomes are already making dangerous choices between paying for needed medications, food or electricity.

Our property taxes may be among the lowest in the state and nation, yet homeowners are cutting economic corners in order to pay taxes and insurance - many are currently in foreclosure. Renters are struggling to make rent. With higher taxes, the number of people sinking farther into poverty and requiring assistance will increase.

I realize that these are complex difficult issues. Please consider this situation and proposed solutions carefully with regards to the harsh financial realities of the county's many residents.

Sincerely,


Laura Michelle Smith