



Testimony to the Mandate Relief Commission
Friday, March 16, 2012
Buffalo, NY

Lt. Governor Duffy, respective members of both the legislature and Governor Cuomo's administration, I thank you for the opportunity to testify briefly today before the Mandate Relief Council.

My name is Brian Sampson. I am the Executive Director of Unshackle Upstate, a non-partisan, pro-taxpayer, pro-economic growth, education and advocacy coalition made up of business and trade organizations from all parts of Upstate New York.

I want to first acknowledge the work of both the Governor and the legislature in the past year in attempt to revitalize New York's economy and strengthen a business climate that has waned significantly in recent years. From our perspective, it has been a breath of fresh air to finally be able to push positive legislation instead of always playing defense. When we hear it is all about jobs, jobs, jobs...it makes us smile.

But even with accomplishments of last year and the progress we have made this year, New York's businesses are still facing an uphill challenge. Consider New York's standing when compared to the rest of country.

- 49th in Business Tax Climate (*2012 Tax Foundation*)
- 49th in State and Local Tax Burden (*2010 Tax Foundation*)
- 48th in Cost of Doing Business (*2011 CNBC*)

I need to point out that these rankings have a similar source. It is New York's high regulatory environment and the significant costs of unfunded state mandates that flow from municipalities and school districts - ultimately landing in taxpayer's laps. It is why Unshackle Upstate and our members were leaders in the enacted property tax cap. But always explicitly stated that the tax cap in and of itself would not solve the problem. A multi-faceted approach to mandate relief coupled with the tax cap was necessary.

Today, I submitted a lengthy list of mandate relief and regulatory reform recommendations, both Unshackle Upstate specific as well as the “Let New York Work” agenda. I am a proud founder and partner of the Let New York Work Coalition and I think our agenda encompasses sensible solutions to long standing issues that cripple our school districts and municipalities. These solutions, which are fair and exude a common sense approach to solving issues, will allow more financial flexibility for the critical services provided by our schools and local governments and relieve the burden on taxpayers.

Before my time expires, I want to thank the governor, and the legislators that voted yes, for their courageous battle to enact Tier VI. As you know, pension growth represents a significant portion of municipal tax increases and businesses pay 35% of all property taxes in the state. The Tier VI retirement plan that was passed yesterday, despite fierce opposition, will provide long-term savings that will allow our local government and the State of New York to invest in our future and set the framework to ensure that our best days are still ahead. The changes made yesterday will help to lower the burden on taxpayers and private sector businesses and will help us preserve local services and provide a good education for our children.

Just as we did with Tier VI, we will need strong leadership to tackle the rest of the Let New York Work agenda as well as our list of regulatory relief items for our business community. It will not be easy, but it can be done.

Let me be clear...we don't need more spending nor do we need more taxes. What we need to do is change the laws and regulations that prevent our local elected leaders from putting our tax dollars to work where they will be most effective. And we need to loosen the grip that state agencies have on our employers so that private sector businesses can create more jobs.

As Senator Mary Landrieu once said, “Our solutions must be beyond anything we have ever considered ... We should not be afraid to try bold new approaches.” Please know that we cannot rest on our successes. Let us continue to make bold decisions that will indeed change our future for the better.

Thank you.