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**Wisconsin Perspectives on TABOR
And a Freeze on Property Taxes**
A Survey of Public Opinion

Summary

Wisconsin policymakers are having serious discussions about policies to curtail growth in government spending and taxes in the 2005 state legislative session. Legislation under discussion generally includes two separate concepts: one focusing on government spending and taxation at both the state and local levels and the other focused on government spending and taxation at the local level only. The taxpayer bill of rights (TABOR) proposal would limit spending by the state and local governments through legislation or a constitutional amendment. The property tax freeze would limit property taxation by local units of government.

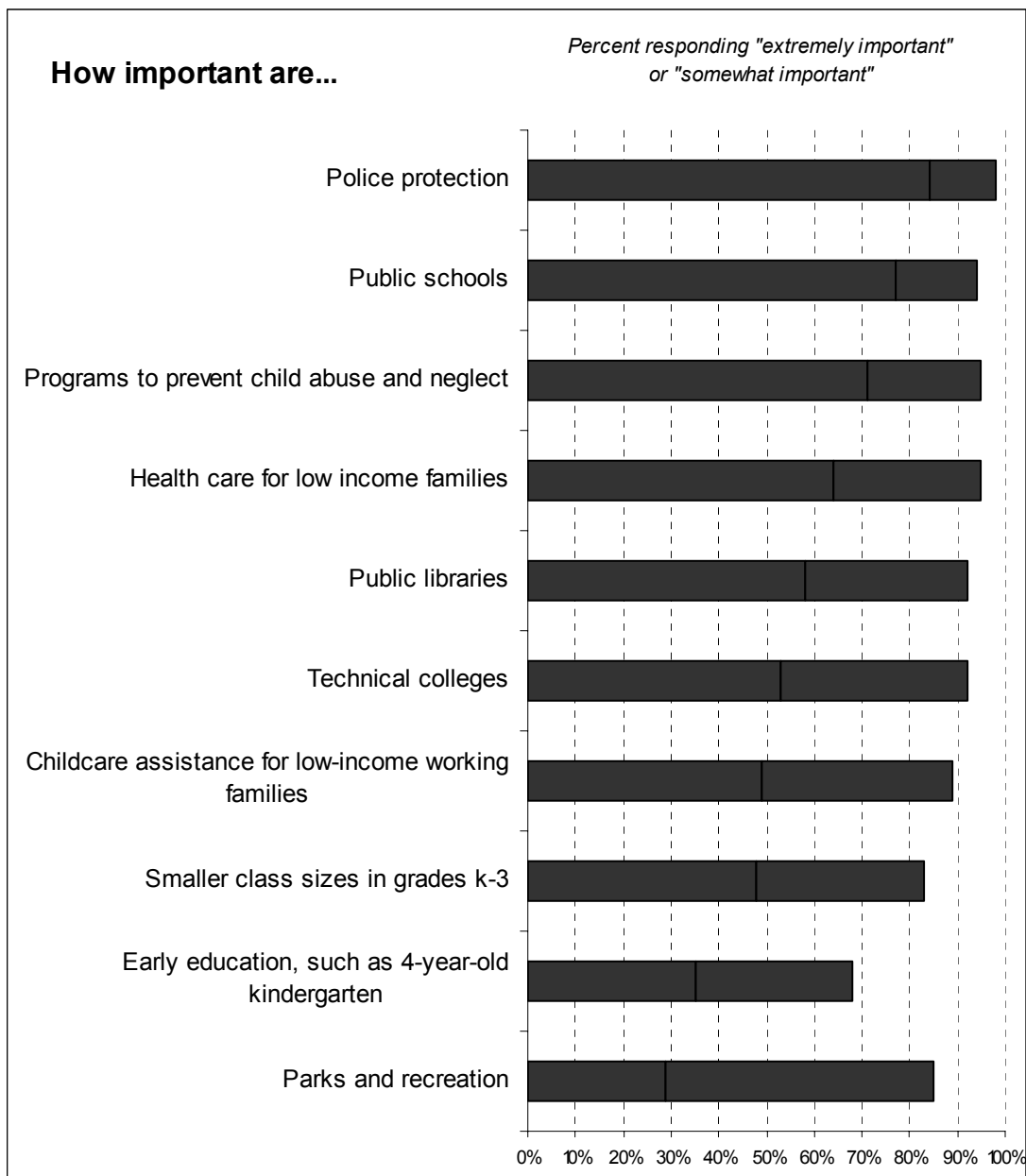
In light of the discussion about these two important concepts, the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families contracted with the Public Policy Forum, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization based in Milwaukee, to survey and analyze public opinion about proposals to limit spending and taxation and attitudes towards the potential effects of those proposals would have on services to children.

This report summarizes the findings of the survey of public opinion. For the survey, telephone interviews were conducted January 21-27, 2005, with 600 Wisconsin adults selected at random from listed telephone numbers. Respondents included residents of 69 of Wisconsin's 72 counties and represented a cross-section of Wisconsin residents over the age of 17 with respect to political leanings, age, gender, income, education and family status.

While nearly two-thirds of those polled generally supported the concept of TABOR, support amongst those in favor dramatically declined when they perceive that the limits imposed would result in less spending for government services benefiting children. Similarly, 64 percent of those polled supported the concept of a property tax freeze, but support amongst those initially in favor declined substantially when they considered the effect of less spending on government services benefiting children. Further, respondents strongly value certain government services: from police protection to early education, the vast majority of respondents said they viewed these services as important.

Findings

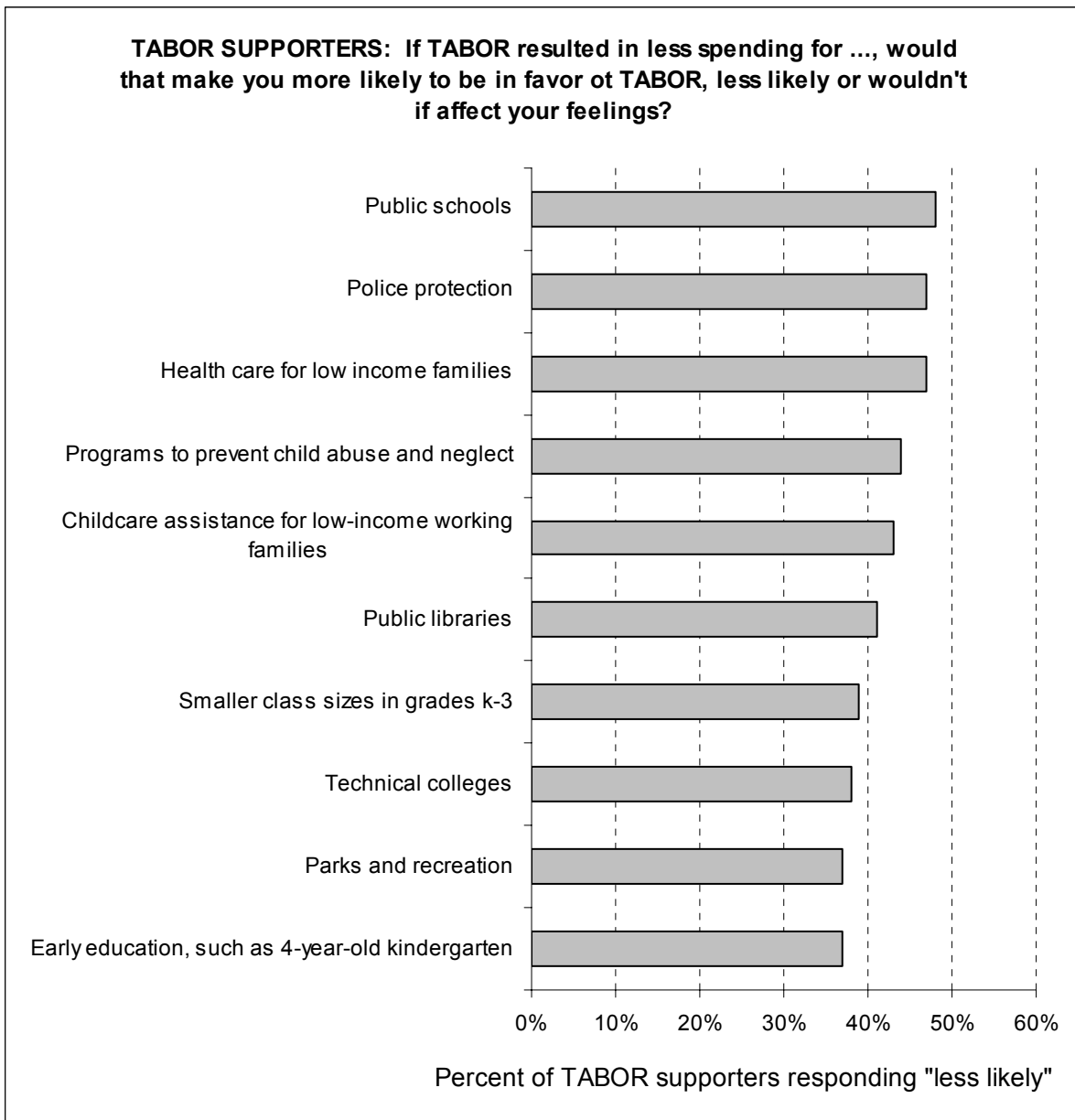
The Importance of Services. Asked to rate the importance of ten specific government services, most of those surveyed rated all of them as important and six of them as extremely important. The services, in order of the rating of importance are: police protection, public schools, programs to prevent child abuse, health care for low-income families, public libraries, technical colleges, childcare assistance for working families, smaller classes in grade school, early childhood education and parks/recreation. In most cases, government services are rated as more important by women and Democrats than by men and Republicans.



TABOR Awareness. The majority of Wisconsinites (54%) have never heard of the taxpayer bill of rights or TABOR. However, men are more likely than women to have heard of TABOR, and awareness of TABOR increases with age, and particularly among those intending to vote in the next state election.

TABOR Support. When TABOR is described as a proposal to set limits on spending and taxes by state and local government, the majority of Wisconsin adults (65%) say they favor the concept in general. This is true regardless of political philosophy or party affiliation, although self-described conservatives and Republicans are more likely to be in favor. A geographic distinction was found as well, with Wisconsinites living in the Southeast region being more likely to favor TABOR than those living elsewhere in the state.

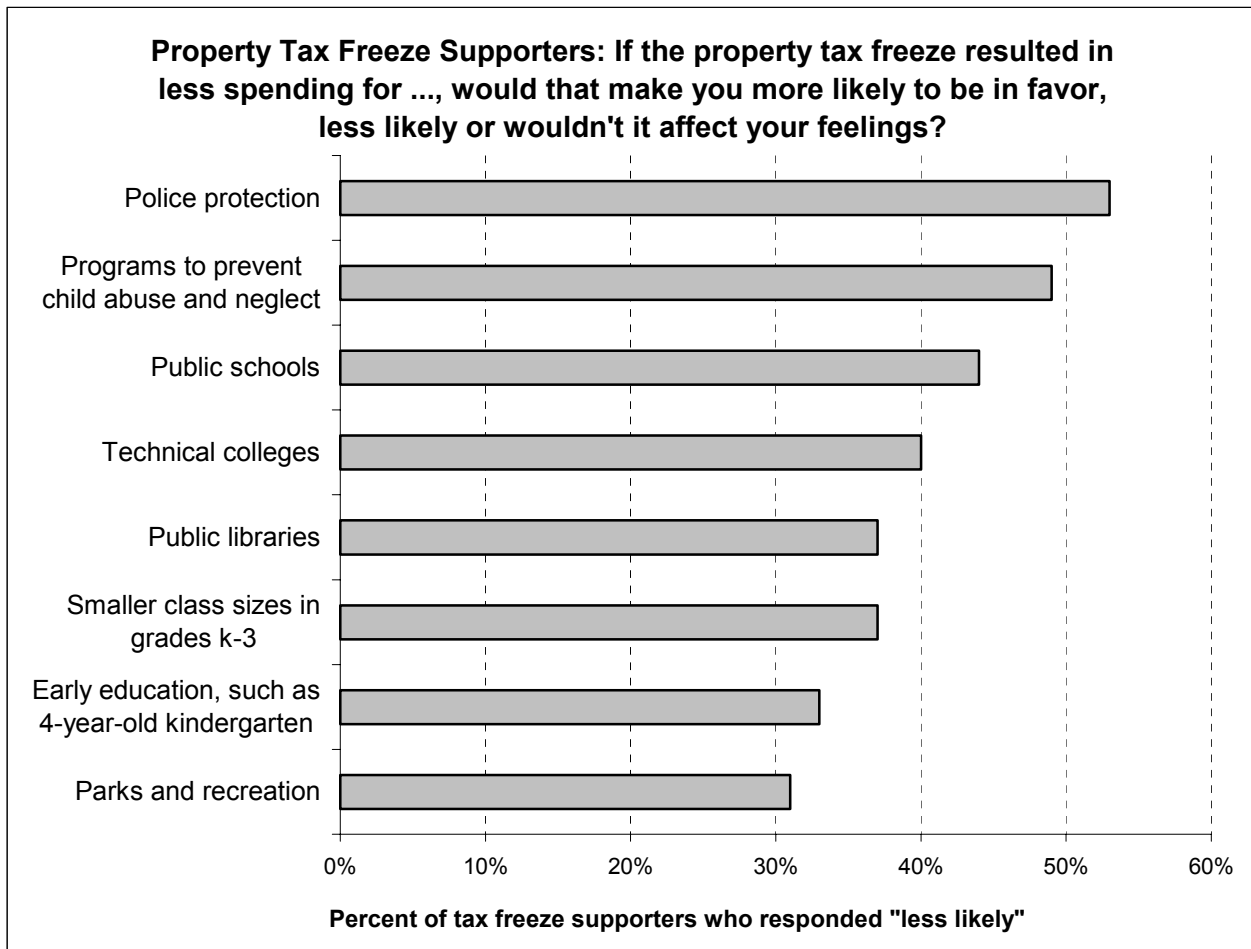
A Link Between TABOR and Services. Support for TABOR declines dramatically when supporters believe that it would result in less spending for services they regard as important. Of the 65 percent who supported TABOR, over 40 percent said they would be less likely to favor TABOR if it resulted in less spending for: childcare assistance for low-income working families, police protection, programs to prevent child abuse and neglect, public schools, or health care for low income families, and public libraries.



Property Tax Freeze Awareness. Most Wisconsinites (61%) have heard of the property tax freeze proposal, but a large minority (37%) has not. Awareness increases dramatically with age, and likely voters are somewhat more likely to have heard of the property tax freeze. Men are more likely than women to report having heard of this proposal.

Property Tax Freeze Support. When voters are told the property tax freeze would limit the ability of local governments to increase property taxes above current levels, the majority (64%) favor the concept. Self-described liberals tend to oppose the concept whereas most moderates and conservatives favor it. Registered Republicans is another demographic group more likely to favor a property tax freeze than are Democrats or Independents.

A Link Between the Property Tax Freeze and Services. Between roughly one-half and one-third of those surveyed who support a property tax freeze say they would be less likely to favor a freeze if it resulted in spending cuts for any of the following seven government services (in descending order of importance): police protection, child abuse prevention, public schools, technical colleges, smaller classes in grade school, public libraries, early childhood education, or parks and recreation.



The Value of Government. By a wide margin, most Wisconsin residents believe they get excellent or good value for the tax dollars they pay for state and local government. Municipal governments and public schools especially are perceived as providing excellent or good value for the taxpayers' investment.

