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As the Government Affairs Director for the REALTORS® Association of Metropolitan Pittsburgh (RAMP), I have the honor of representing 2,200 REALTORS® in Allegheny County. Our members include residential and commercial REALTORS® and property managers, proud to look out for the best interest of the clients *they* serve, which are the taxpayers of Allegheny County.

This metropolitan region has weathered the economic woes better than many parts of the country. My REALTORS® are proud to brag about having one of the most stable housing markets in the United States. Nonetheless, my members are on the front lines when it comes to gauging both the perception and reality held by current and prospective Allegheny County property owners.

Many of you have told me of your grave concerns with the disturbing trend of residents fleeing for the border county communities where they can purchase more home for their money, and enjoy lower property and sales taxes. During the past few years my members have heard on a daily basis from clients, friends, family, and neighbors, who are seriously burdened by the property taxes they pay.

Over the past year, this concern has turned to genuine fear. The court-ordered reassessment and its new valuations loom large in property owners' minds. The uncertainty of what they will owe, whether they will be able to afford their tax bill, whether they can keep their home, is genuinely frightening people. Already, we have media reports of municipalities positioning to increase their coffers, and school districts are seeing it as an opportunity. We thank this County Council and County Executive Dan Onorato for demonstrating impressive economic stewardship by not raising the County millage for ten years now. RAMP is pleased that incoming County Executive, Rich Fitzgerald, has been very passionate in his understanding of the high property tax burdens felt by residents. On behalf of its neighbors, its friends and family, its communities, RAMP is again asking you to stand tall and resolute by renewing this commitment. Reassure your taxpaying constituents that you respect their concerns, that there *is* an elected body that listening to their pleas, and acting in their best financial interests.

Property tax increases result in a further loss of residents to surrounding counties, decreasing our tax base and revenue for the County. Property tax increases damage the economy at large, via fewer homeowners, customers, and jobs. Property tax increases fall especially hard on seniors and first-time homebuyers. Changes in the Homestead Exemption should remain off the table entirely.

Our 2,200 members who live, work, play, and *VOTE* in Allegheny County consider it a privilege to work with thousands of local homeowners every year. They know firsthand many families who cannot or will not be able to continue to reside in a county that makes the American dream and pride of home ownership more difficult.

Thank you for your commitment of time, your commitment to those who you have been elected to represent, and the consideration of these remarks.

Sincerely,

Jennifer M. Cloonan

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