

# CT Citizens' Assembly on Property Taxes



“How should Connecticut rethink the funding/delivery of local public services?”

## What is a Citizens' Assembly?

- An innovative process to solve difficult problems by leveraging ordinary citizens' perspectives
- Analogous to a jury for public policy, a Citizens' Assembly randomly selects 100 ordinary citizens and empowers them to learn, deliberate and pass recommendations directly to a legislative hearing
- New to the US context, Citizens' Assemblies have been used in over 800 cases to solve entrenched problems from abortion in Ireland to climate and end of life care in France.

## Why does Connecticut Need a Citizens' Assembly?

### The Problem in Connecticut

- Unlike many states, Connecticut law currently forbids any taxes for local services *other* than property taxes.
- Urban areas have lower property wealth, but higher demand for local services, which creates massive imbalances. For example, the average property tax bill in Hartford is ~ 7 times higher than in Sharon, despite the fact the median income in Hartford is ~3x *lower*
- There is widespread consensus that the system is broken, but solutions are politically challenging so no reforms have been passed since 1972.

### How a Citizens' Assembly is uniquely set up to address it

- Taps a diversity of perspectives, including from people whom are normally never heard
- Ability to build consensus: a similar process in Greater New Haven in 2002 on tax issues transformed 80% opposition to a proposal to 40% in one weekend

## Key Features of the Assembly

1. First large state level, state-endorsed Citizens' Assembly in the US
2. First large scale attempt using AI tech to link assembly discussion with the larger public, aiming to reach over 10% of the state's population
3. Backed by State Comptroller Sean Scanlon, who has the constitutional right to push items to the legislative agenda on financial issues

## Impacts Beyond Connecticut

- **Catalyzing a Movement:**

- Currently collaborating with State Representatives in Vermont and Maine, with interest from Massachusetts and New York, to use this Assembly to foster similar statewide efforts, including legislation to create permanent Citizens' Assemblies
- Discussing partnership with FIDE to have Governors and Secretaries of State from Kentucky, Washington, and Pennsylvania observe the Assembly

- **Research:**

- Developing research program with Yale Citizens' Assembly Program and Nobel Laureate Oliver Hart to adopt Citizens' Assemblies for corporate governance
- Working with researchers at UConn and Yale on additional research questions, including impact of macro-listening, dispersal effects of assembly and more

## Connecticut Compact

Connecticut Compact is a registered 501(c)(3) and a charitable education organization working to build consensus on our most pressing challenges and opportunities.

The state of Connecticut is the initial focus of their work. See our website: [ctcompact.org](http://ctcompact.org)

## Paths to Impact

Multiple strategies to drive direct legislative change, including:

- Commitment from State Comptroller Sean Scanlon to endorse process and hold dedicated legislative hearing to assembly outputs
- Commitment to bring all four caucus leaders to the assembly in person
- Commitment to highlight assembly recommendations during gubernatorial debate
- Network of media relationships including network TV outlets, newspapers

## Timeline and Budget

~\$661,000 pledged, ~\$190,000 gap

