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# Voters don't want cops, schools cut

## Poll reveals Michiganians disagree with lawmakers on priorities in next year's budget

**Karen Bouffard / Detroit News Lansing Bureau**

*Lansing* -- Michiganians have some advice for lawmakers hammering out next year's budget: Spare schools and police, slash your expenses.

As the Legislature returns Monday from its two-week vacation to hash out competing budget proposals, an exclusive Detroit News-WXYZ statewide poll finds that most voters also want to preserve funding for Medicaid, roads and job training. Programs or services that voters said should be targeted for cuts are substance abuse programs, retaining state workers, prisons and environmental protection.

The EPIC-MRA poll found voters are at odds with Gov. Jennifer Granholm's proposals to further reduce the State Police force following 100 trooper layoffs June 28 and to reduce school funding by \$59 per pupil -- issues that House Democrats and Senate Republicans also can't agree on.

Budgets passed by the House line up better with voters' viewpoints than those passed by the Senate or the governor's recommendations, according to Bernie Porn of EPIC-MRA in Lansing. But nobody in Lansing seems to be nailing voters' priorities -- entrenched differences over how to fix Michigan's economy portend budget battles that could stretch into the fall.

"It is going to be very difficult to match up the budgets of the two (chambers) because they're at loggerheads," Porn said.

"Irrespective of party, people are placing a high priority on preserving the State Police, Medicaid funding and support for education."

The Senate's budget proposal cuts \$1.2 billion out of the state's \$18.4 billion budget that is expected to be \$1.7 billion in the red for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. The House proposed cutting less than half of that amount. Once the two chambers come to agreement, federal recovery cash will be used to erase the remainder of the deficit.

The chambers have to agree on the 2009-10 budget before the new fiscal year starts to avert another state government shutdown like the brief closure in 2007 when legislators failed to approve a budget by the Sept. 30 deadline.

## Voters recognize crisis

"I'm really tired of our state Legislature not being able to get together with the executive branch," said Scott Gill, 50, of Shelby Township, a survey respondent laid off from General Motors Corp. in January after more than 28 years.

"I'd like to see the environment protected, more job training, more diversification of our economic base and fewer people in prison."

Of 600 voters surveyed statewide June 23-25 and June 27-28, 76 percent said Michigan's budget is in a "crisis situation," although 58 percent said budget cuts haven't really affected them yet. Of those who have been affected, 17 percent said they've felt the impact in education costs or cuts; 15 percent have felt it in road disrepair; 12 percent in rising costs; and 10 percent in unemployment.

Asked to rank state programs in the order funding should be cut, 69 percent of respondents said funding for State Police should be the last to be cut, followed by Medicaid funding at 67 percent, per-pupil funding for local public schools at 65 percent, and revenue sharing for local governments to fund police, fire and other local services at 60 percent.

Asked which one or two department budgets the state should cut first, the state Legislature was named more than any other area, with 37 percent saying lawmakers' budgets should be the first to go. The environment and prisons each were named by 8 percent of respondents, followed by state workers and substance abuse programs, each named by 6 percent.

## Plans focus on troopers

"Keep police and education -- cut the state personnel," said Jing Zhang, 48, of Oxford, who participated in the poll. "State personnel should (be cut) by the same rate as the population has gone down.

"Every time they want to increase tax, they say they want to cut police and education -- this is a political trick," Zhang said. "If every home could save \$400 per month on taxes, they could lease a car."

The state House didn't approve a State Police budget before going on break, and the Senate concurred with Granholm's plan to eliminate 66 trooper positions in the next budget year through attrition, but would use federal economic recovery funds to avoid trooper layoffs.

The Senate slashed \$110 per student from school aid and \$140 million from Granholm's popular Promise Grant program, which pays up to \$4,000 for college tuition over four years.

Under the House bills, federal stimulus money would be used to avoid cuts to school aid and spending for colleges and universities. The House increased funding for Promise Grants from \$80.5 million to \$140 million.

The House and Senate are roughly \$500 million apart on spending for Community Health. The House bill leaves funding for Medicaid at roughly its current level, while the Senate bill would shave about \$600 million through reductions in Medicaid payments to doctors and hospitals, increased co-pays for patients and other changes.

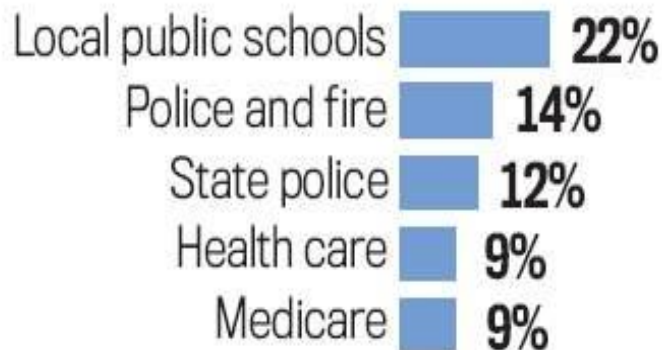
"Right now, they are struggling with how to balance the budget, and there's two visions of how to do that," Porn said. "It will all boil down to cutting areas the public is willing to accept."

The poll has a margin of error of 4 percentage points.

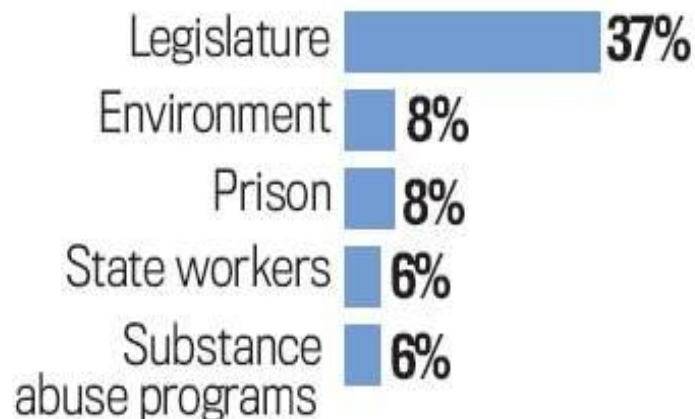
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# Cutting the budget

Top five programs and service areas that should be protected the most from budget cuts, according to a statewide poll of Michigianians:



Top five that should be cut first to balance the budget:

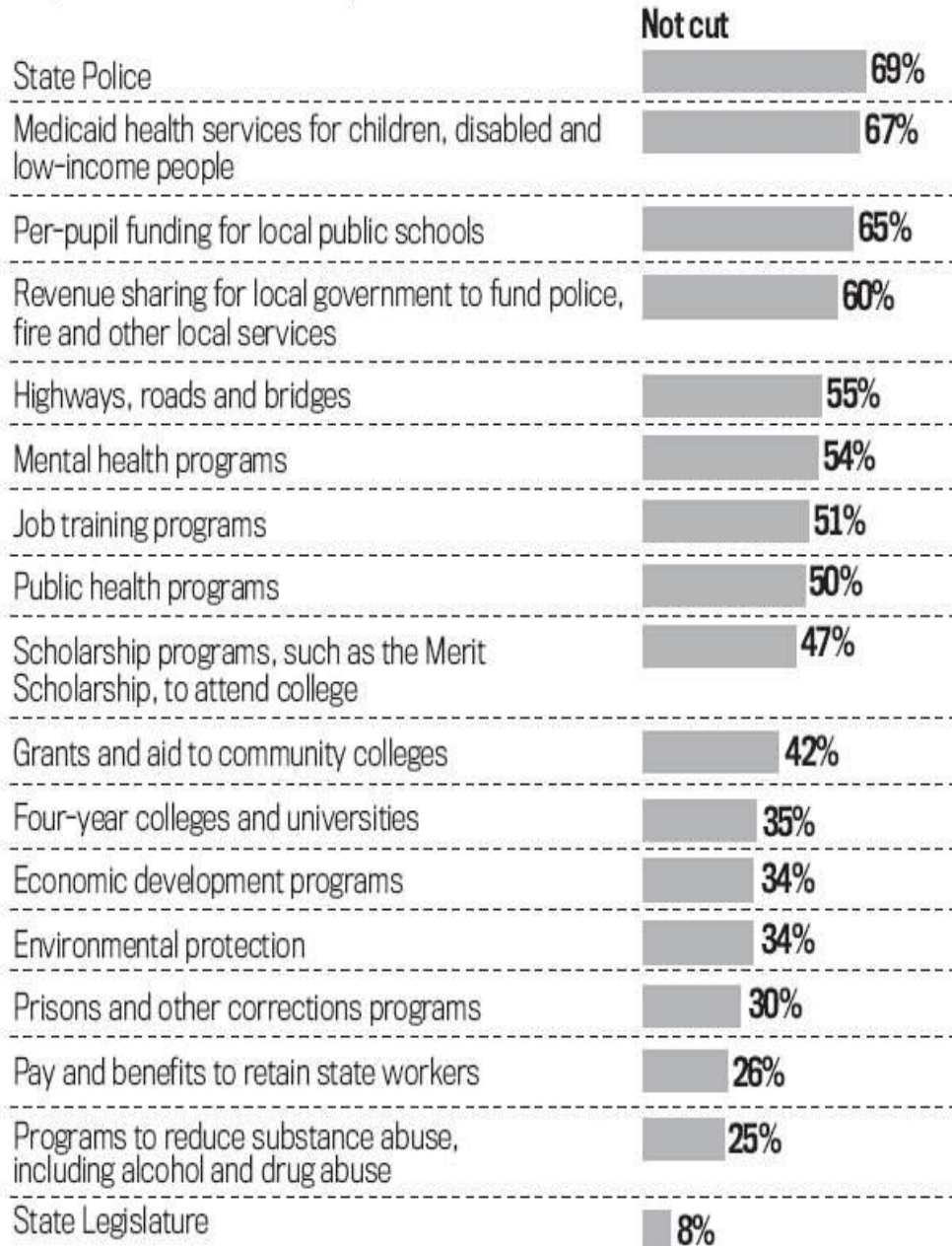


Source: EPIC/MRA statewide poll of voters in June.  
Margin of error: +/- 4 percentage points.

The Detroit News

## Suggestions on where to cut budget

Asked in a statewide poll, nearly 70 percent of Michigianians said State Police should not be cut as Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature try to close an expected \$1.7 billion deficit for the next fiscal year. Programs and services respondents to a statewide poll said should not be cut:



Source: EPIC/MRA statewide poll of voters in June. Margin of error: +/- 4 percentage points.

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