



# Messaging The Cost-of-Living Refund

## OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

**With voters concerned about the rising cost of living and about making the tax code more fair, the Cost-of-Living Refund receives broad support.**

### VOTERS: HELP WORKING PEOPLE & MAKE TAXES MORE FAIR

The Cost-of-Living Refund emerged from more than a year of public opinion research, policy analysis, and legal vetting by key stakeholders and experts. David Binder Research conducted ten focus groups and multiple national and state-level polls, many in partnership with state firms. We know that:

**The idea is popular:** 69 support/23 oppose nationally, 72/22 in Colorado, 69/19 in California (question text below).

- Majority support across parties: 76 Dem/60 Rep/67 Ind (Nat'l), 88D/59R/69I (CO), 79D/52R/63I (CA)
- 62% are enthusiastic about it, with supporters more enthusiastic than opponents (43/24, CO).

**Gives voters a reason to vote:** Less likely voters, who are potential turnout targets, favor the measure (+9) more than definite voters.

**Avoids welfare stereotypes:** 68% say it's "a tax cut to working and middle class families to help with the rising cost of living and housing." 22% say it's "a government welfare handout paid for by increasing taxes much too high." (CO)

**Most voters would be more likely to support a candidate who backs this proposal.** (54% more likely/17 less likely in CO, 70/18 among Dems).

- "If you agreed with a candidate for Governor on most issues, and you learned that they supported this proposal, how would that affect your likelihood of supporting that candidate?"

**Support for the measure remains solid in the face of opposition messaging,** growing slightly in some surveys and falling slightly in others.

- **Nearly all positive messages are more convincing than the strongest negative message,** even when testing aggressive negative messages (e.g. 49% found the strongest positive argument very convincing in CO vs. 26% for the strongest negative argument). See pro messages below.
- None of the negative messages was much stronger than any other, including these:  
*It's too expensive and we can't afford it.*  
*It's the biggest handout in history that will make people stop working and rely on government welfare. Recipients make bad decisions and will spend it on big-screen TVs or drugs. It will create a bloated bureaucracy. We need to spend the money instead on education or infrastructure.*  
*People will have more kids to get more money. It's the largest tax increase in history and will hurt businesses and the economy.*

**Voters support both the tax cut and the tax hike on the wealthy--the tax increase isn't a negative for them.**

- "The wealthy are using loopholes and accounting tricks to avoid paying their share of taxes" 67% say a Most or Very Important problem in CA
- "Making the tax code more fair should be a priority" 83/13 agree in CO (54 strongly)
- "People are working full-time and still can't afford basic needs" 75% Most or Very Important in CA
- "It is important to stand up for middle class Coloradans" 88/8 agree in CO (59 strongly)

**Expanded definition of work makes the overall policy more popular.**

- Including family caregivers and students builds public support: In Colorado, 80% support that expansion, 13% oppose. In CA, twice as many prefer expansion as not. Nationally, Reps slightly favor expansion, Inds support 2:1, and Dems support overwhelmingly.

**“Voters support both the tax credit for working people and asking the wealthy to pay their fair share in taxes.”**

**Rising cost of living and housing is a top issue for many voters, and this policy provides a response.**

- “Our economy makes it too tough for the middle class to make ends meet.” 46% agree strongly (the top economic concern). GW Battleground Poll, March, 2018.
- “Californians indicated that the high cost of living, including housing costs and housing availability, is the most important issue facing the state, followed by the issue of jobs/economy.” USC Dornsife/LA Times Poll, Nov. 2017. 66% say it’s difficult to make ends meet (same poll, Jan. 2018).
- Private polling in Colorado also finds “the rising cost of living and housing” is a top issue.
- At the same time, 72% nationally believe “government economic policies since the recession helped middle class people” not much or not at all. Pew Research Center poll, Feb. 2015.

*pay a smaller share in taxes than middle class people. It’s about time we unrig the system and have a tax break for the rest of us. This measure requires the super rich to pay their share of taxes, and provides the largest middle class tax cut in state history.” (79% convincing, 52% very convincing in CO)*

- **Inequality:** *“The wealthiest Americans have gotten richer and richer, but it hasn’t reached everyone. While they get more tax breaks, the poor and middle class are losing ground. It’s time the millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share, and we make sure everyone is able to meet their basic needs. No one who works full-time should be living in poverty.” (75% convincing, 48% very convincing in CO; 80/58 in CA)*

**TOP MESSAGES: COST OF LIVING, TAX REFORM, INEQUALITY**

Across the polling, these messages were some of the most convincing to voters:

- **Cost of Living:** *“The cost of living is skyrocketing, making it hard for working Americans like nurses, firefighters, and teachers to even afford to live in the places they serve. This proposal would give working people a cost of living boost so they can make ends meet today and put away something for tomorrow.” (80% convincing, 52% very convincing in CO, 79/52 in CA)*
- **Tax Reform:** *“Our tax code is broken. Because millionaires and billionaires can afford lawyers and accountants to find loopholes and tax write-offs, they actually*

**TEXT OF OVERALL SUPPORT QUESTIONS**

- **National:** *“Expand the existing earned income tax credit to provide a tax break to working people with low incomes, including up to \$5000 per year for workers with one child or no children.”*
- **CA:** *“Expand the existing earned income tax credit for everyone in California who works and earns less than \$50,000. For example, an average family earning \$25,000 would get \$2700 a year.”*
- **CO:** *“Do you support or oppose a proposal to give a tax cut to lower and middle-income taxpayers, paid for by a tax increase on high-income people? Taxes would be raised only on those making over \$500,000 a year and no one earning less would pay any new taxes. The money raised would be required to fund tax relief of up to \$2,000 per year for people who work and earn less than \$75,000. Families with children would receive a slightly larger refund.”*