

## Poll: Most N.J. voters favor ballot question that would force judges to pay more for benefits

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**Matt Friedman/Statehouse Bureau**

By

**TRENTON** — New Jersey voters overwhelmingly favor Election Day ballot measures to borrow money to finance higher education institutions and to **require Superior Court judges** and state Supreme Court justices to pay more toward their pensions and benefits, a new poll released today shows.

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll found 70 percent of likely voters support a state constitutional amendment on judicial pay, and only 18 percent are opposed.

The issue arose after the state Supreme Court ruled that sitting judges are exempt from a new state law requiring public workers to pay more because the constitution forbids cutting their salaries.

The proposed amendment clarifies that the Legislature has the authority to increase the pension and benefit payments of sitting judges.

The other ballot measure, which the poll found is supported by 62 percent of likely voters, would approve borrowing \$750 million to finance construction projects at public and private college and universities. In August, a poll found support at 56 percent of those polled. Twenty-seven percent are opposed — the same number as in August.

Former Gov. Tom Kean, Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester), Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver (D-Essex) and Robert Barchi, the new president of Rutgers University plan to campaign on behalf of the bond issue Monday at the Rutgers' New Brunswick campus.

"As we get closer to the election, support for the higher education bond seems to be solidifying, reflecting the lack of vocal opposition so far," David Redlawsk, director of the poll, said. "The benefits amendment is even more popular, most likely reflecting a sense that judges, too, should be subject to the same increases in costs that all other state workers have endured."

The poll of 619 registered voters was conducted Sept. 27 to Sept. 30 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

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New Jersey State Supreme Court

The state Supreme Court has ruled New Jersey judges and justices do not have to pay more toward their pensions and health benefits. Top row, left to right: Justice Anne M. Patterson; Justice Barry T. Albin; Justice Helen E. Hoens; Judge Dorothea O'C. Wefing; Front row, left to right: Justice Virginia Long (retired); Chief Justice Stuart Rabner; Justice Jaynee LaVecchia