



## Testimony of Commissioner Joe Briggs

### Local Government Interim Committee on May 22, 2024

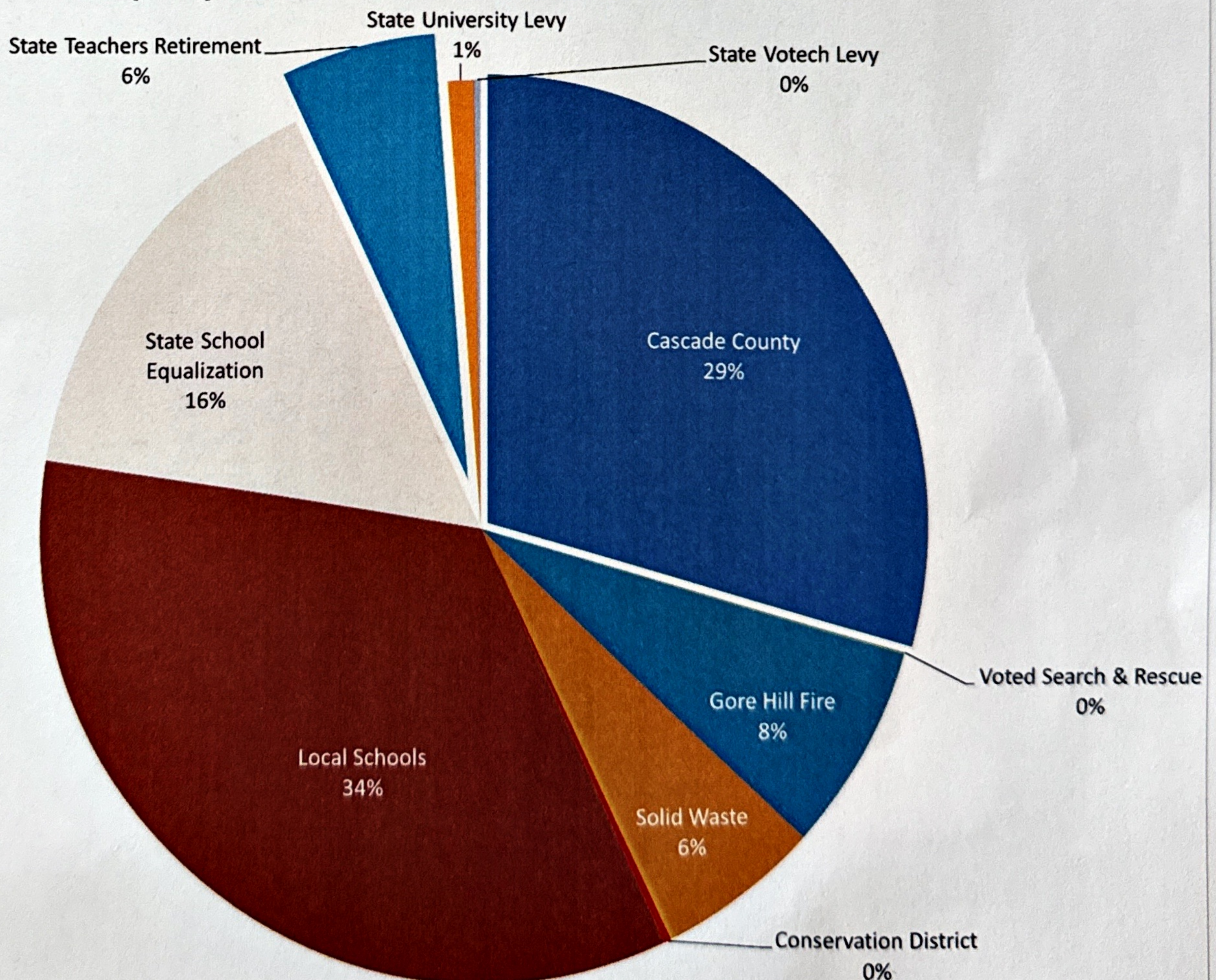
This chart shows the division of the property tax dollars collected in Cascade County within School District #1 but **OUTSIDE** of the City of Great Falls.

Of every dollar collected by Cascade County through Taxes and fees billed through the property taxes system:

School District # 1 directly receives	\$ 33.94
The State of Montana Receives directly receives	\$ 22.93
Other agencies and services directly receive	\$ 13.77
Cascade County retains for funding local government	\$ 29.36

**Counties are the property tax collector for the local schools, the State of Montana, Cities and towns, special districts and even the university system, but retain only a portion of the revenue collected. In that role we are required to apply however many mills the various jurisdictions, having no say in the number of mills assessed other than our own.**

**2023 Property Tax Distribution**  
**Property Outside of Great Falls within SD #1**



Additionally, counties are limited in their ability to raise taxes each year to one half the average rate of inflation for the prior three years. This has been the case for longer than I have been a commissioner which is twenty years. Over that course of time, Cascade County has been able to continue to move forward through frugal management and actively working to grow the tax base. Unfortunately, not all counties have been able to achieve growth in their tax base and as such are struggling to provide basic services let alone keep pace with the increasing mandates for services.

There are other counties, however, where rapid growth has created significant infrastructure issues where the costs outpace their growth in the tax base. Each jurisdiction needs flexibility to adapt to their unique conditions.

The way the property tax system is designed makes one size fits all solutions difficult if not impossible. I realize that the legislature is under pressure to control property taxes, but even at your level options are rather limited. Control of the appraisal system and the algorithms that convert market value to taxable value are within the legislature's scope of control, but any changes to those calculations also create a shifting of the tax burden between the different classes of property. The most straightforward way to provide property tax relief would be to reduce or eliminate the 95 mills and fund school equalization from an alternate state revenue source.

The chart below shows how Cascade County deploys that portion of the property tax dollars that it retains for its own use. I would also note that Cascade County carries very little debt, having a total of 1.5 million in indebtedness at this point in time.

