

INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

For immediate release (2/18/15)

For information, contact: Melissa Bernardin

New study reveals lawmakers & residents agree: NH government can and should do more to reduce poverty

Most believe 4 in 10 residents are “working but poor”

Concord, NH -- New Hampshire residents and lawmakers share a common belief that state government can and should do more to keep people out of poverty. Recent public opinion research commissioned by the Investing in Communities Initiative also found that Granite Staters perceive poverty as a more real and pervasive problem in the state than official statistics indicate.

“The research tells us that the public has a very different view of poverty than official statistics suggest,” said Melissa Bernardin, Investing in Communities Initiative Director. “They see that many of their friends and neighbors are living on the edge and that they, too, face significant economic uncertainty.”

“The good news is that people have hope that we can do something about it,” she said.

The research was conducted over several months in 2014 to gauge public attitudes towards poverty—including its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. The research included a telephone survey of 600 NH residents, five focus groups, and interviews with a bipartisan cross-section of 69 NH legislators, to see how lawmakers’ views matched up with public opinion. Myers Research & Strategic Services, a public opinion research firm, conducted the work on behalf of the Investing in Communities Initiative (ICI). The Initiative is a nonpartisan project founded in 2013 to build capacity among NH organizations that advocate for low-income and vulnerable people.

“The results tell us some very important things,” said Andrew Myers, principal and CEO of

Myers Research. “People understand the difficulties facing low-income families in New Hampshire. They get it. This may be the Granite State, but people don’t have hearts of stone.”

“Most importantly,” he said, “they want state government to do something about poverty.”

According to Myers, “NH residents understand that other actors, such as nonprofit groups and churches, have a role in addressing poverty. Yet, they believe that government is best suited to solve the problem.”

New Hampshire typically ranks well in state-by-state rankings of poverty and economic distress. The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that 8.7% of state residents fell below the Federal Poverty Line in 2013, less than in surrounding states and well below the national average. However, survey respondents painted a different picture. When asked what portion of state residents they think are living in poverty (using their own judgment, without an official measurement), they said that more than a quarter (27%) of the state’s population is poor. When asked to include the ranks of the “working poor,” they estimated that 37% of the state’s population - almost 4 in 10 people – is “working but poor.”

“From the survey results and focus groups, it’s clear that many people are just a costly car repair away from financial ruin, or know others who are,” said Myers.

Interestingly, lawmakers interviewed perceived a lower level of poverty in the state (18 percent) than their constituents (27 percent).

Still, more than half of the lawmakers – a full 57% -- reported having been poor themselves. Of NH residents surveyed, one in four (25%) said they currently have only one month of savings or less to rely on in case of an emergency.

Even with differing views about the prevalence of poverty, the study found agreement among lawmakers (both Democrats and Republicans) and New Hampshire residents as to perceived causes of poverty and potential solutions. Residents showed strong support for measures to create pathways out of poverty, such as raising the minimum wage, improving access to job training, as well as improving access to affordable child care that will enable parents to work. In

fact, 55% of people surveyed said they want the state government to do more to address poverty.

Among legislators interviewed, 61% said that the state government is not doing enough to address the causes of poverty. They also pointed to “empowerment” types of solutions that emphasized pathways into the job market, although it should be noted that the set of lawmakers interviewed – while bipartisan -- was not statistically representative of those in office today. (See description of methodology, attached.)

According to Bernardin, “Many in the Statehouse agree that government can and should do more – that government support for tools such as job training, child care, mental health and substance abuse treatment will help people find and keep jobs that pay enough to support their families.”

For more information, contact Melissa Bernardin at the Investing in Communities Initiative, (no longer at this number).

The Investing in Communities Initiative is a nonpartisan project dedicated to strengthening the skills, knowledge and expertise of New Hampshire’s nonprofit advocacy field in support of public policies that foster health, wellness, and improved economic and social conditions for all New Hampshire residents.

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RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose

- The purpose of this research was to inform policy advocates working with and on behalf of low-income and vulnerable people in New Hampshire. The goal was to help advocates to better understand how the public and lawmakers view poverty – its causes, consequences, and potential solutions.

Focus Groups

- Myers Research & Strategic Services, LLC, began its research by conducting five focus groups of NH residents in April 2014. The groups were conducted among both low-income and middle-income NH residents. A major goal of the focus groups was to explore top-of-mind attitudes about poverty, which could inform and guide the creation of the telephone survey.

Telephone Survey

- Myers Research & Strategic Services, LLC, designed and administered a telephone survey of a random selection of 600 New Hampshire adults, ages 18 and above. The survey was conducted by professional interviewers from June 30-July 6, 2014 and 27 percent of respondents were reached on cell phones. The margin of error associated with these data at a 95 in 100 percent confidence level is +/- 4.0 percent.

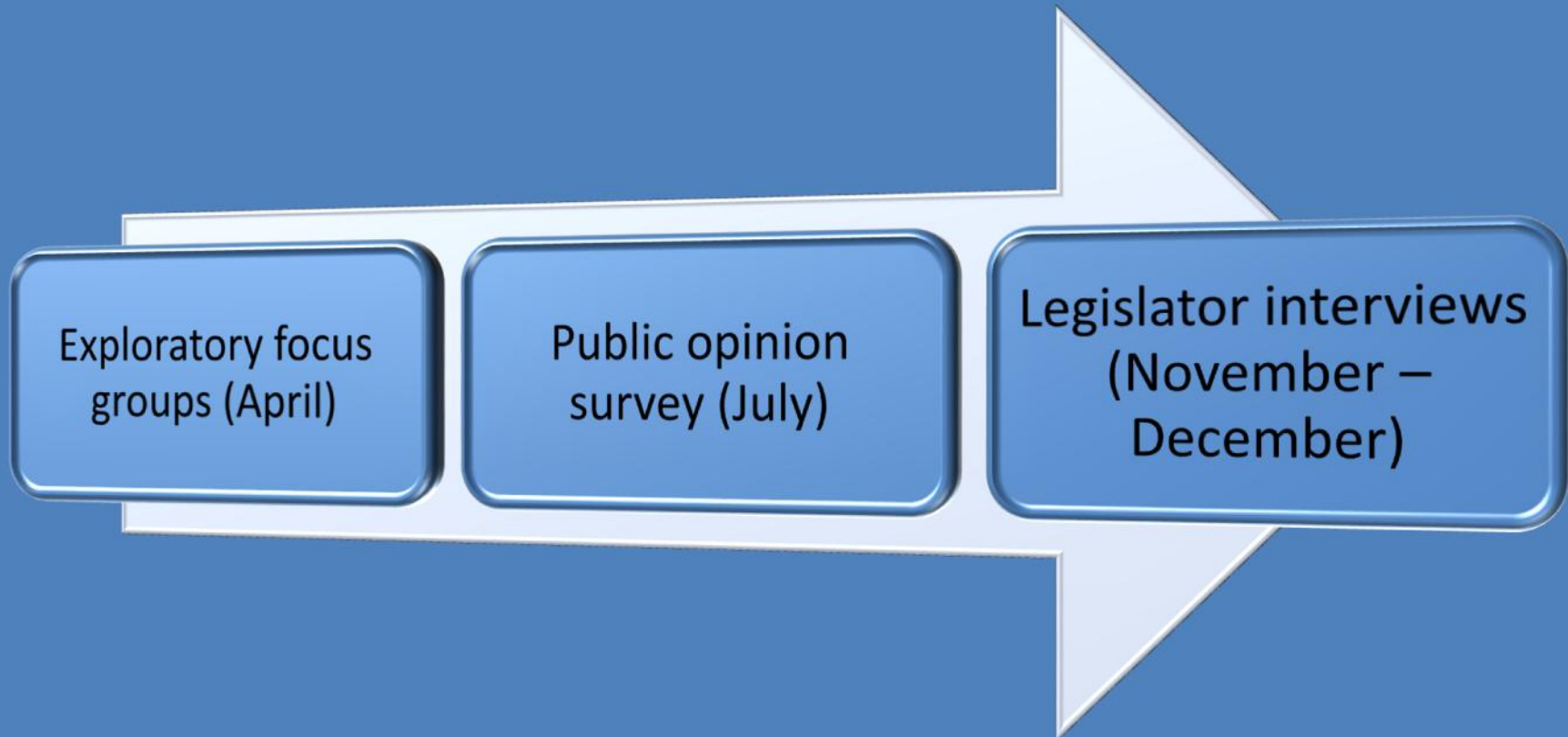
Lawmaker Interviews

- Myers Research & Strategic Services, LLC, designed and administered this telephone survey, which was conducted by professional interviewers from November 10 – December 12, 2014. The survey reached 69 NH legislators who either served in the NH General Court before the 2014 general election or were elected for the first time in November 2014.
- A scheduler hired by the Investing in Communities Initiative solicited lawmakers for interviews in an attempt to get a broad cross-section of views from both parties, as well as from members who had significant experience in the State House and Senate. Special efforts were made to interview members who had served in key committee roles, although researchers ultimately were not able to reach every lawmaker whom they had wanted to interview. There is a slightly higher proportion of Republicans among Senate interviewees (60%) than are currently serving in the state Senate (58%). There is a higher proportion of Democrats among the House interviewees (51%) than are currently serving in the House (40%).
- ***The findings from interviews with lawmakers, while useful, are not scientifically representative.*** Because random selection was not used to sample legislators, the data should not be viewed as representative of all state legislators in NH. These lawmaker interview results cannot be projected to a population with a specified degree of statistical reliability.

***New Hampshire
Investing in Communities Initiative
Summary Briefing
on 2014 Public Opinion Research
January, 2015***

This poll was commissioned by Investing in Communities Initiative, 64 North Main Street, 3rd Floor, Concord, NH 03301. For more information call Melissa Bernardin at 603.856.7369 or email mbernardin@ici-nh.org.

Overview of Research Project



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Causes of Poverty

Focus Groups – Causes of Poverty

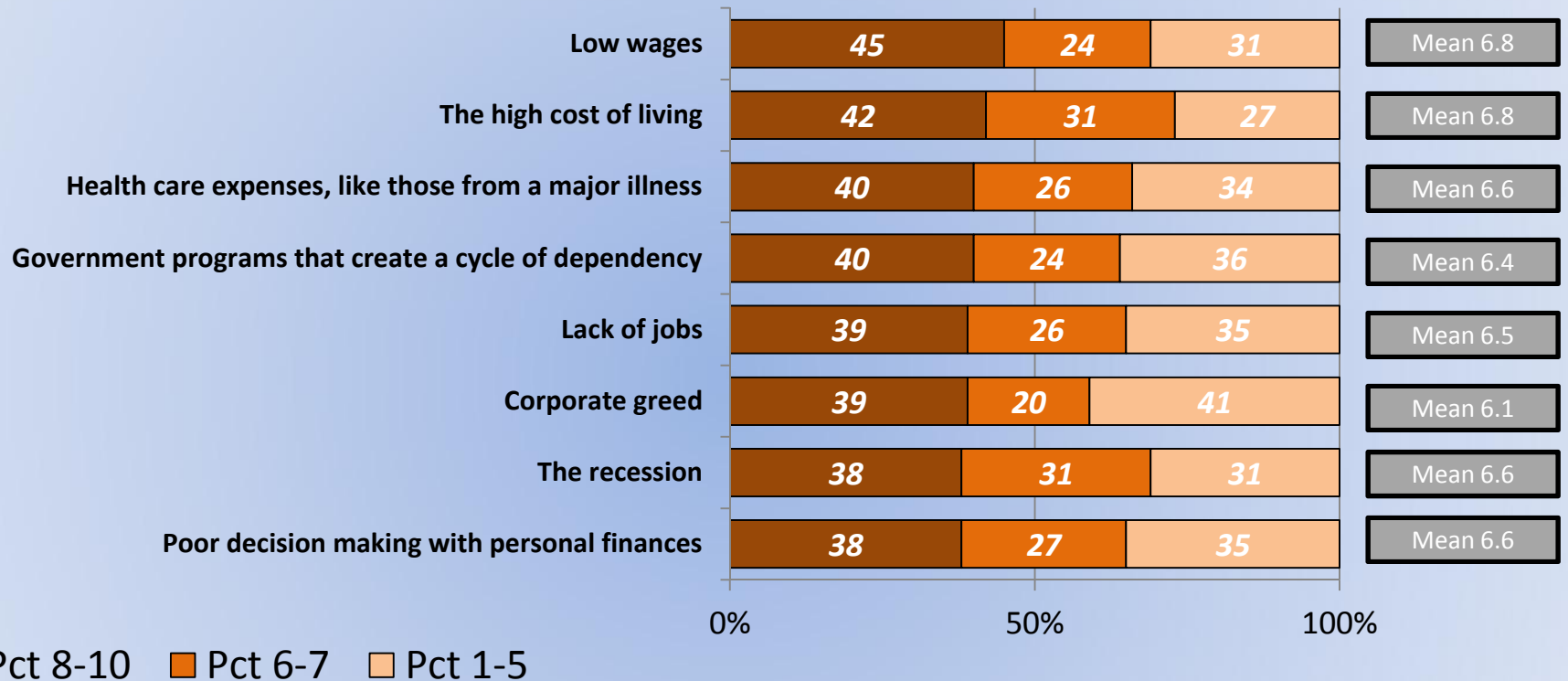
- *Three systemic causes emerged – lack of jobs, low wages, high cost of living*
- *Typically discussions of wages would circle back to increasing the minimum wage, with many participants coalescing around \$10.00/hour*

Respondent 1: "If people don't have jobs, then they can't pay their mortgages. They can't pay their rent. They can't get food. So it's like a—"

*Respondent 2: "It's a snowball effect."
-Older, Low Income Women*

*"It's going to make a difference. It might make a little bit of a difference. You have to start somewhere. There is no excuse to just leave it where it is. \$7.25 for 2014 is kind of a disgrace."
-Middle Income Man*

Top Causes of Poverty Among General Public

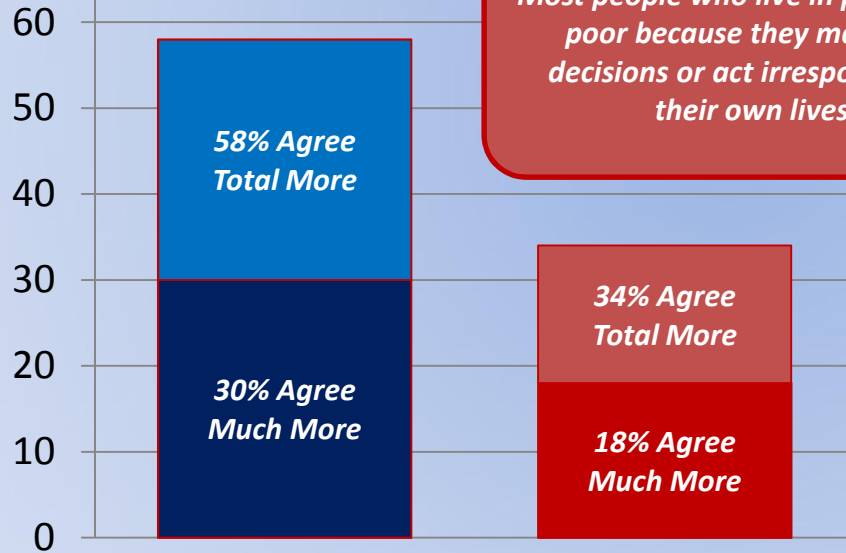


Now I am going to read you some factors that many people believe are causes of poverty. Using a scale from one to ten, where one means it is not at all a contributor to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire and ten means it is absolutely a contributor to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire, I would like you to tell me how much each item contributes to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire. Again, you can use any number between one and ten, the higher the number the higher its contribution to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire.

Granite Staters More Likely to Blame Jobs and Wages for Poverty than Bad Decision Making

Most people who live in poverty are poor because their jobs do not pay enough, they lack good health care and education, and things cost too much for them to save and move ahead.

Most people who live in poverty are poor because they make bad decisions or act irresponsibly in their own lives.

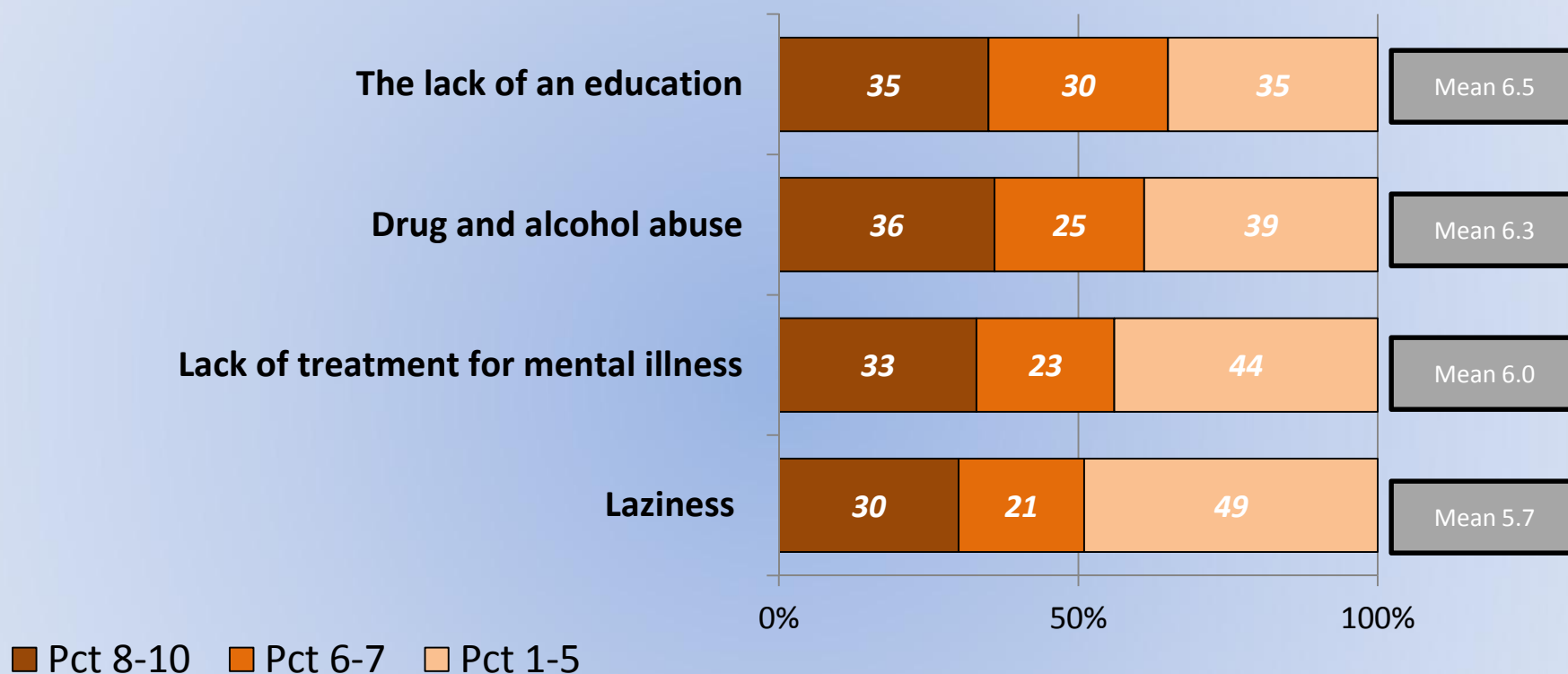


Pct Agree With "Blue" Statement	
Total	58
Women	65
Men	50
Income Under 40k	61
Income 41-80k	61
Income Over 80k	59

Gender gap is profound

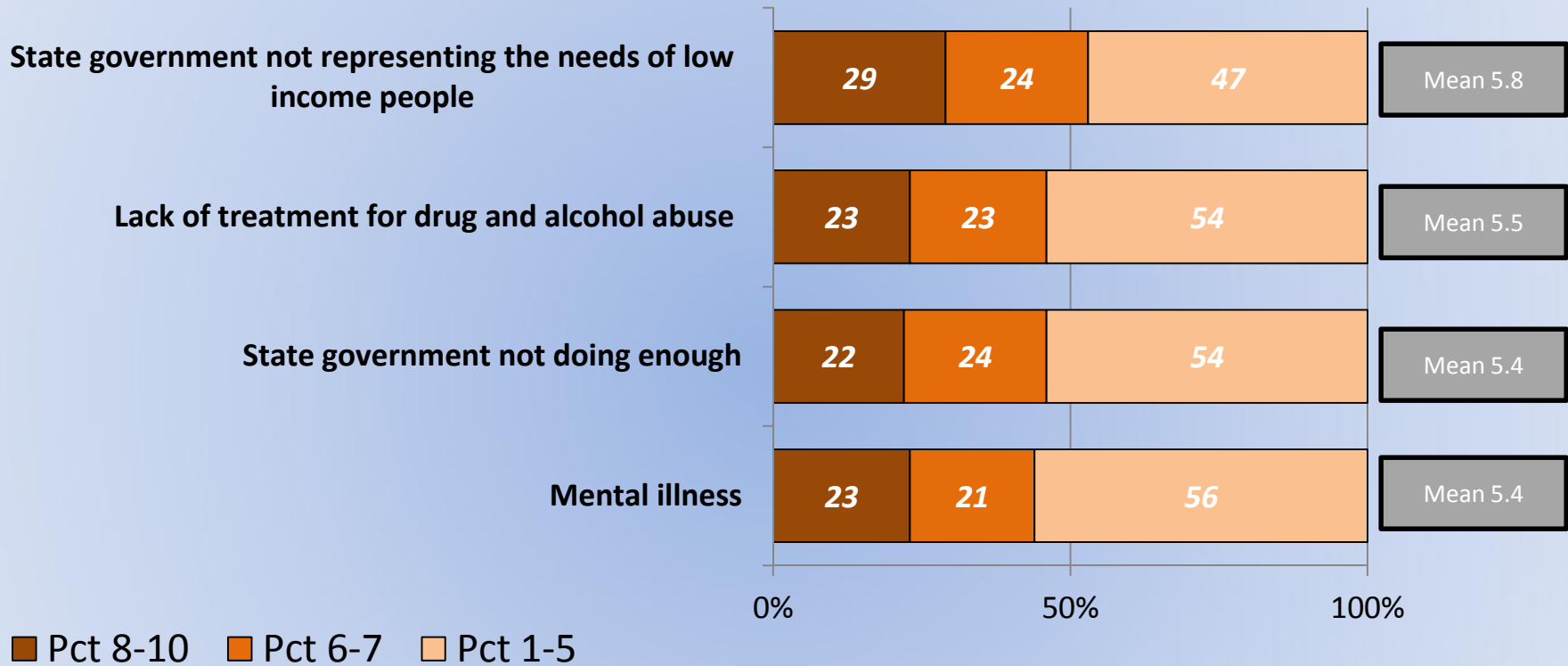
Now I am going to read you some pairs of statements, and I want you to tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or more with the second statement, even if neither is exactly right.

Second Tier Causes of Poverty Among General Public



Now I am going to read you some factors that many people believe are causes of poverty. Using a scale from one to ten, where one means it is not at all a contributor to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire and ten means it is absolutely a contributor to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire, I would like you to tell me how much each item contributes to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire. Again, you can use any number between one and ten, the higher the number the higher its contribution to the problem of poverty in New Hampshire.

Bottom Tier Factors Among General Public



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Comparing Perceived Causes of Poverty Between Legislators and General Public

	Legislators	General Public
Top Tier Causes	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>JOBS</i> Education <i>COST OF LIVING</i> Drug and alcohol abuse <i>WAGES</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>WAGES</i> <i>COST OF LIVING</i> Health care expenses Cycle of dependency <i>JOBS</i> Recession Poor decision making</p>
2 nd Tier Causes	<p style="text-align: center;">Recession Health care expenses Poor decision making Mental illness</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Corporate greed Education Drug and alcohol abuse Laziness</p>
3 rd Tier Causes	<p style="text-align: center;">Cycle of dependency Corporate greed State gov't not doing enough Laziness</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">State gov't not doing enough Mental illness</p>

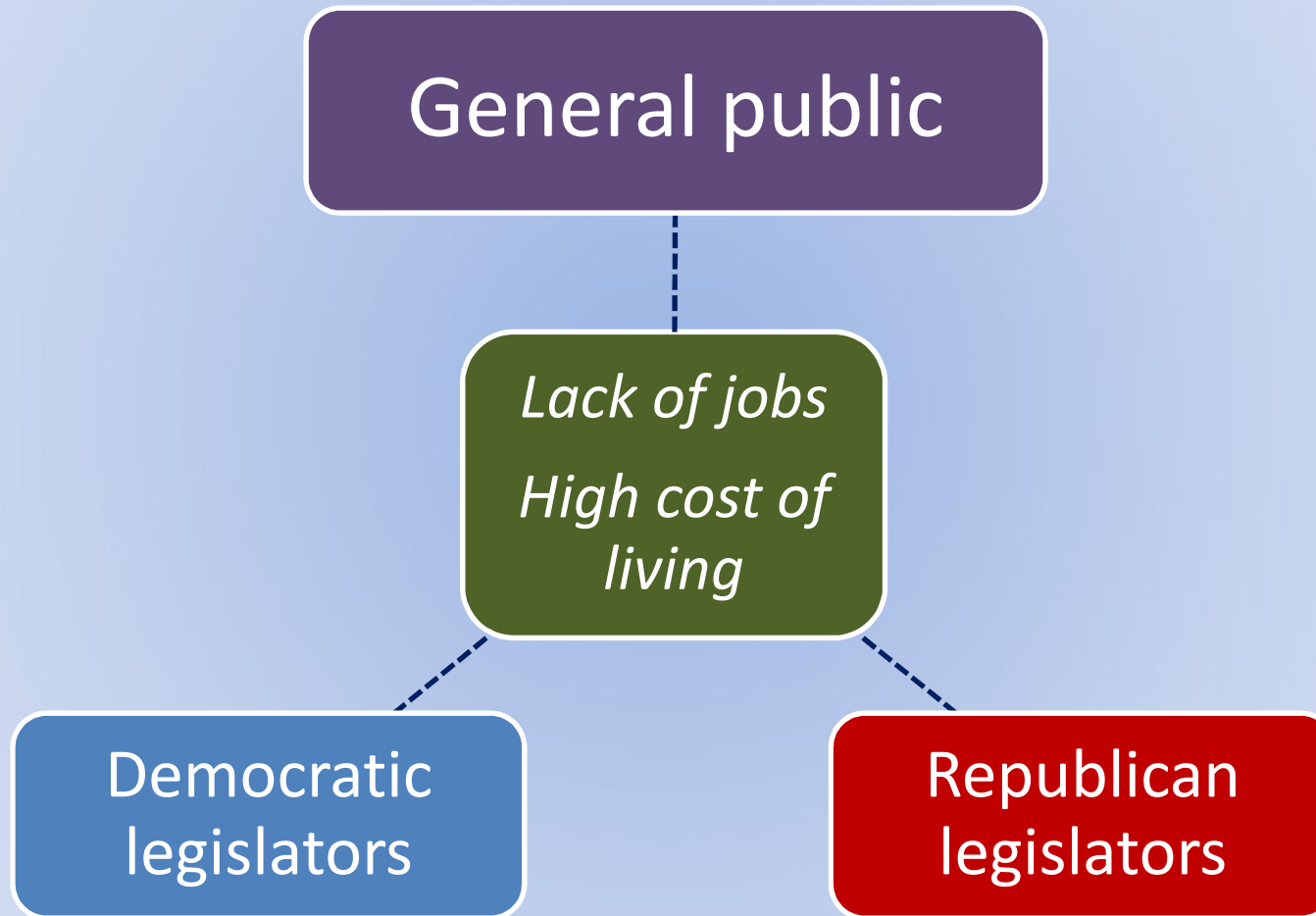
Causes of Poverty Where Democratic and Republican Legislators Come Relatively Close Together

	Total	Caucus with Democrats	Caucus with Republicans
Lack of jobs	7.3	6.9	7.7
The lack of an education	6.9	7.3	6.5
The high cost of living	6.9	7.3	6.5
The recession	6.3	6.8	5.9
Mental illness	5.9	5.9	5.8

Mean on 1-10 scale

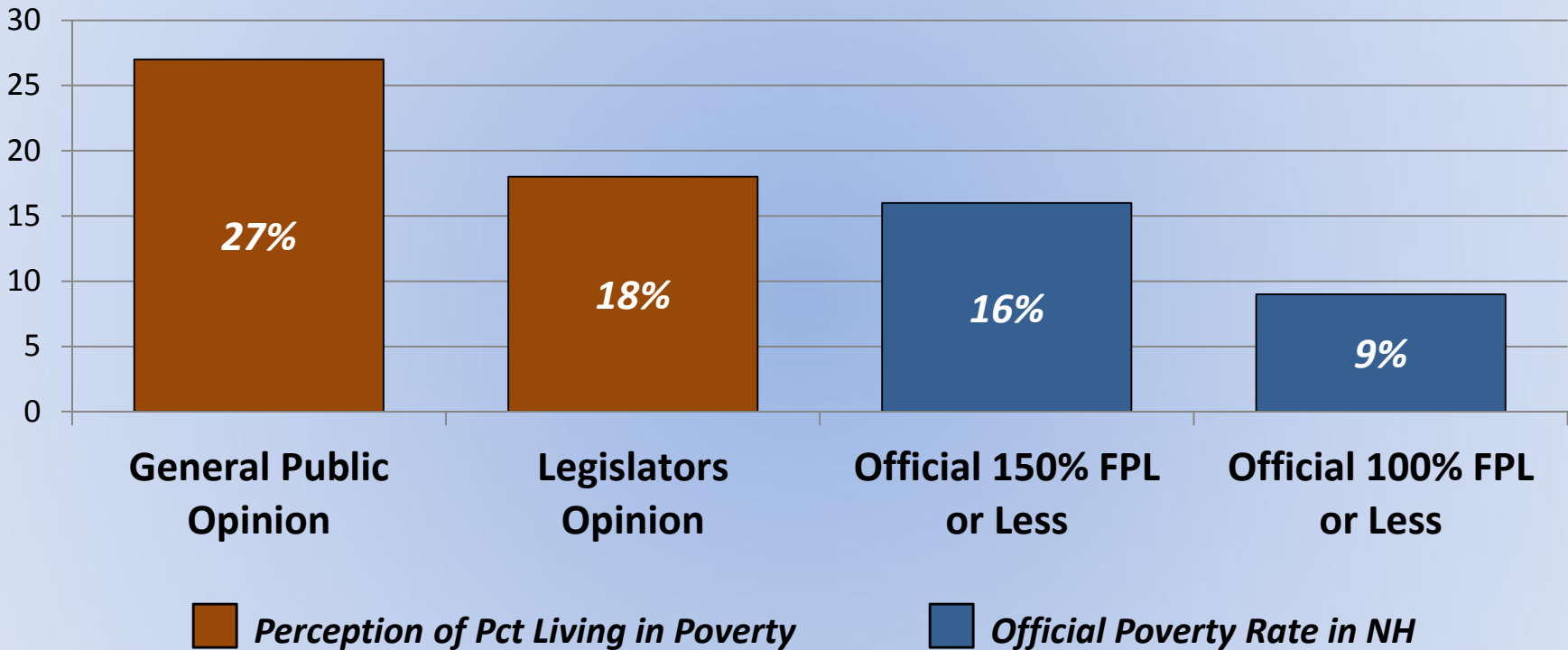
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Causes of Poverty -- Convergence



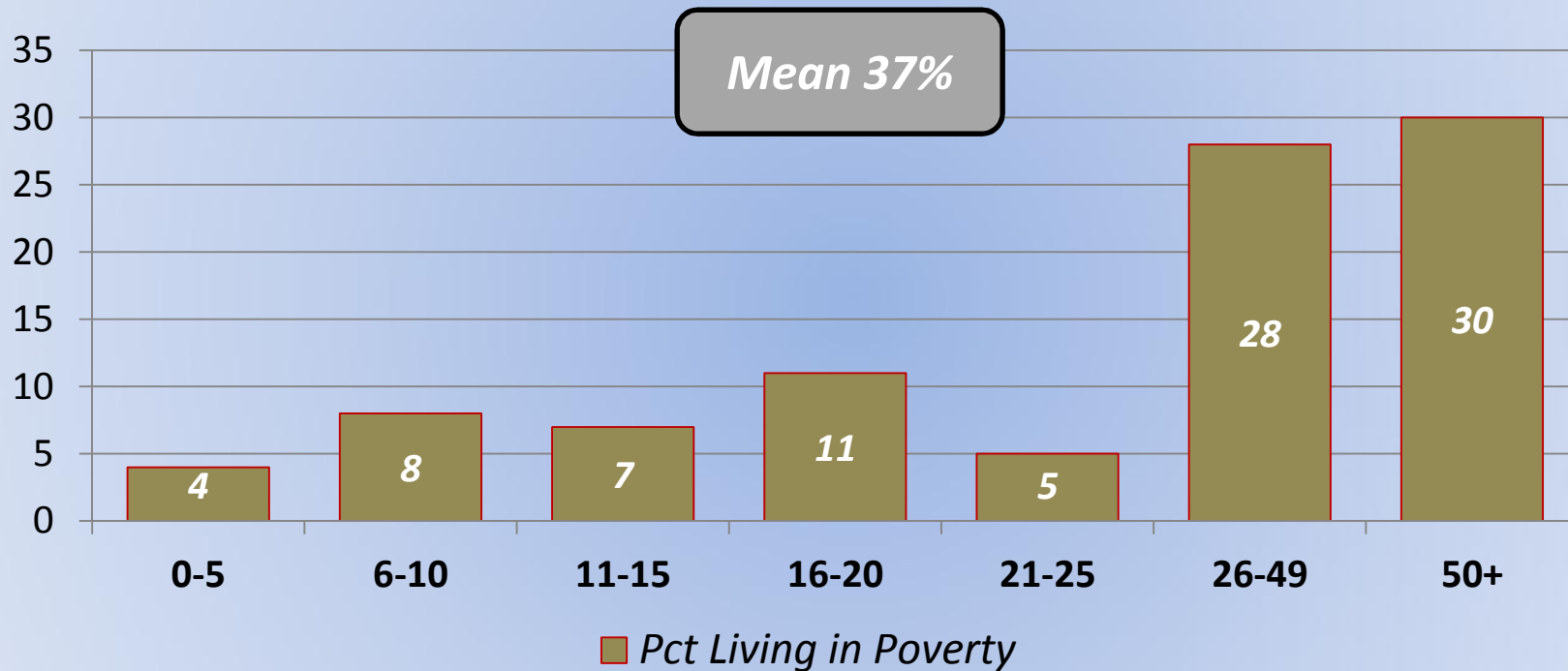
Perceptions of Poverty

Significant Gap Between Poverty Rate and Perceptions Among General Public and Legislators



Switching gears, approximately speaking, what percentage of New Hampshire's population do you think are currently living in poverty?

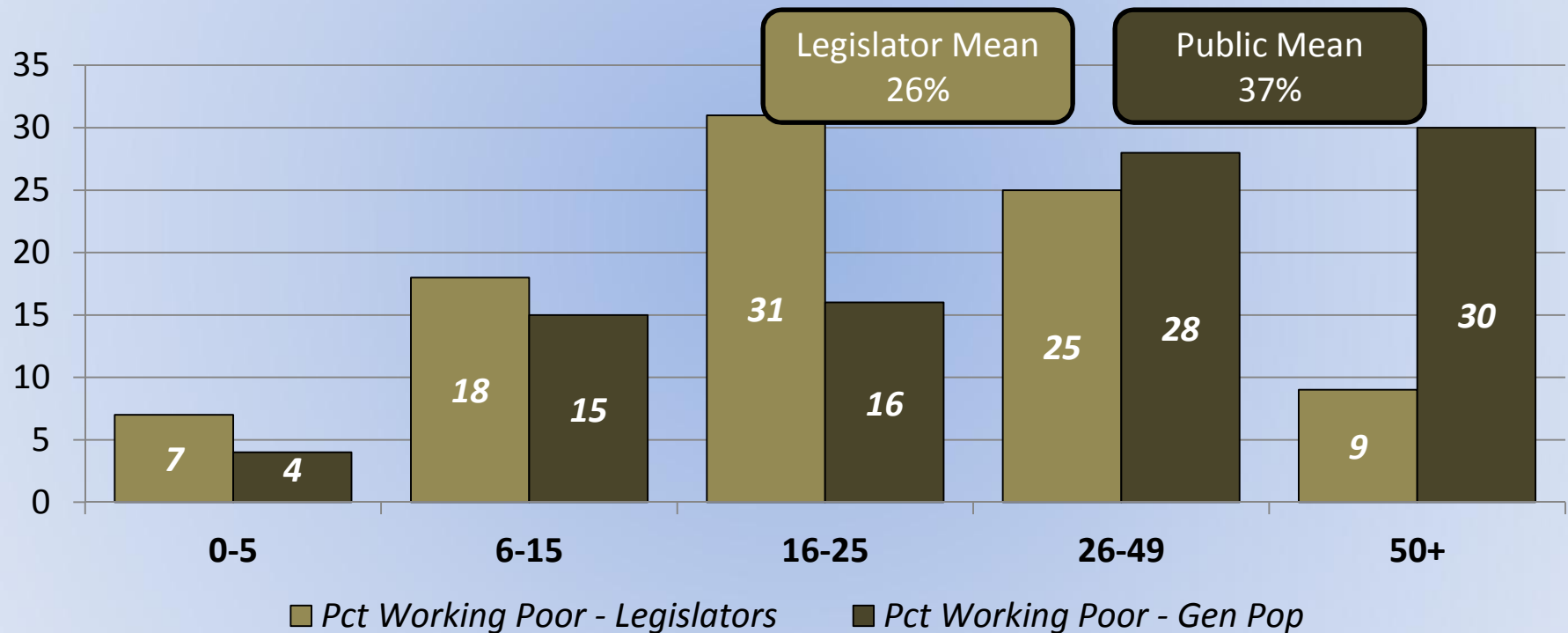
On Average, Adults Think That Almost 4-in-10 Granite Staters Are Working, But Poor



Again, approximately speaking, about what percentage of New Hampshire's population do you think are working, but poor?

Significant Gap in Legislator and Public Opinion on Assessments of Current Level of Working Poor in NH

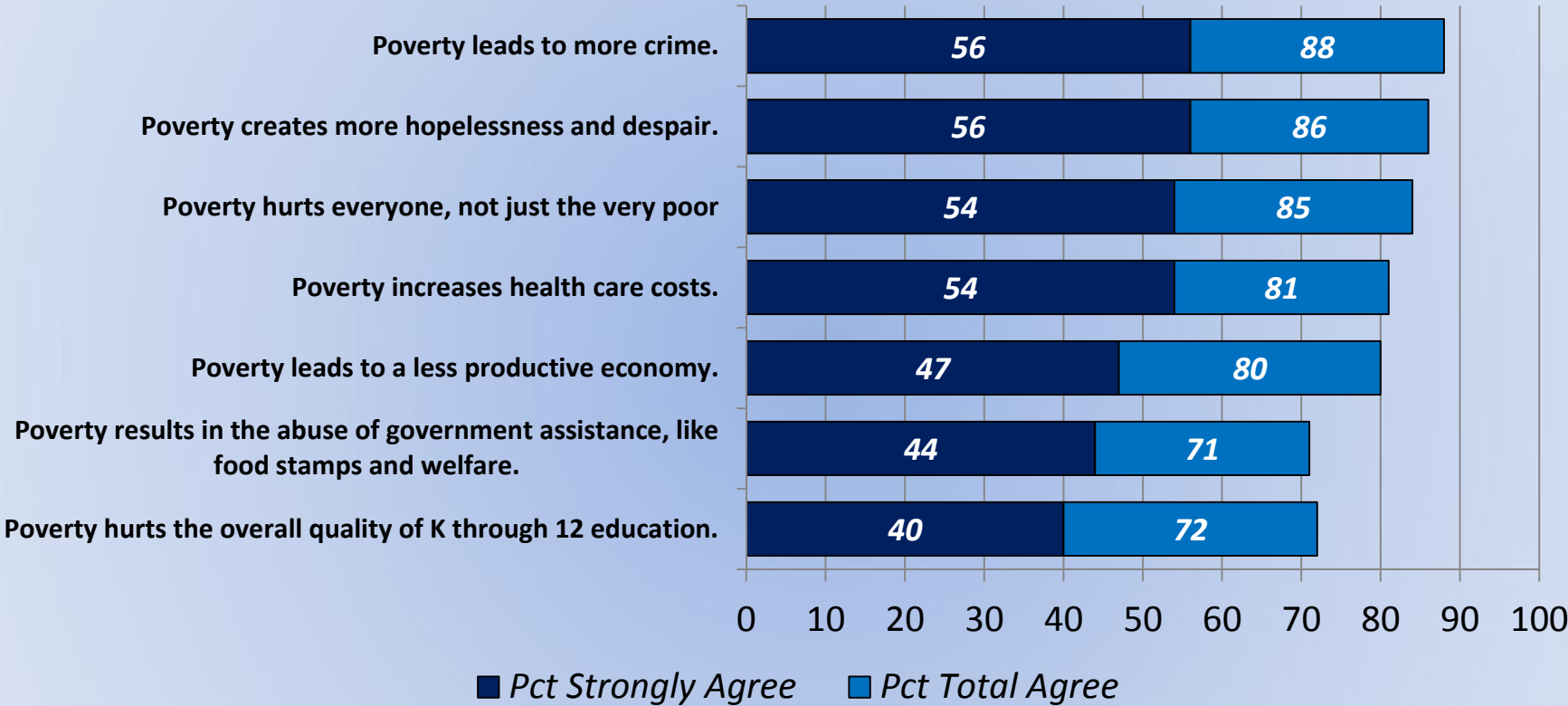
3-in-10 Granite Staters Believe At Least Half of the State's Population Are Working But Poor



Approximately speaking, about what percentage of New Hampshire's population do you think are working, but poor?

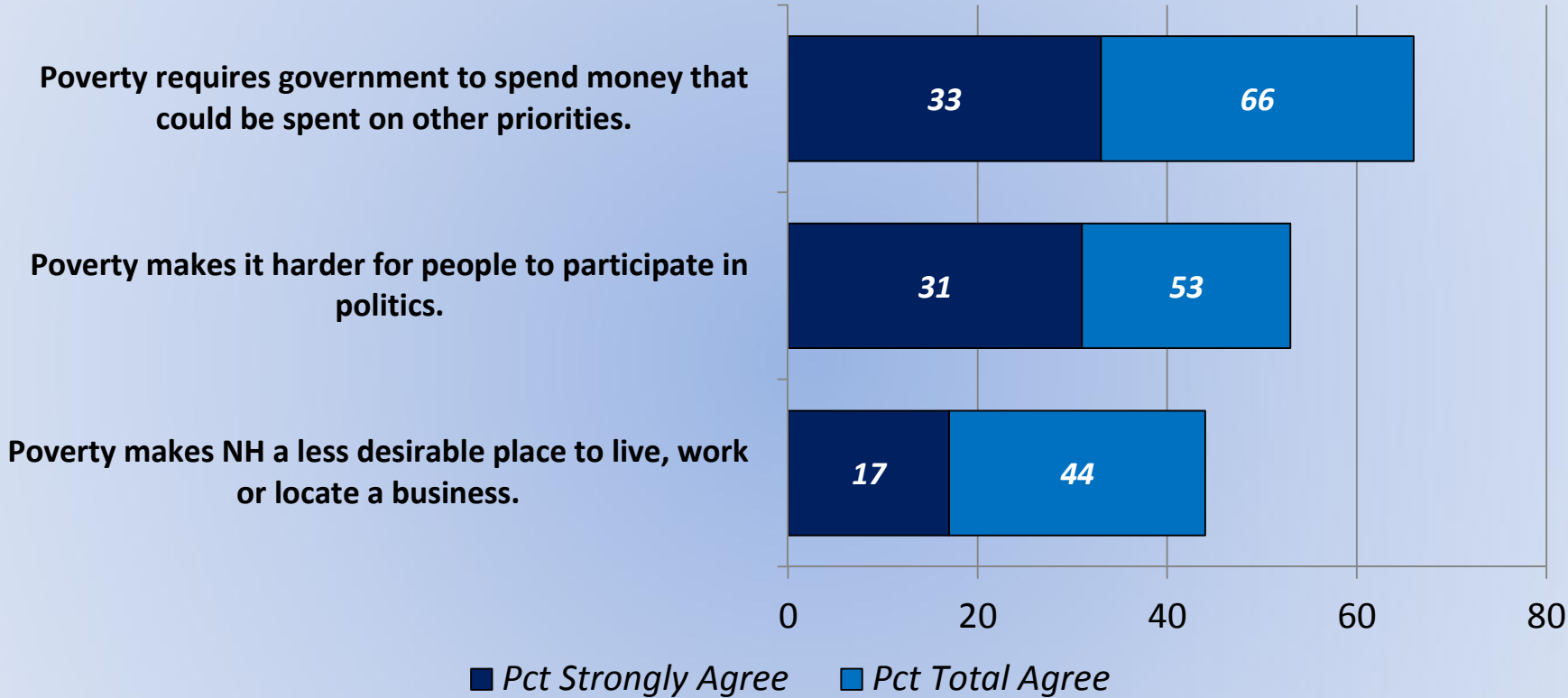
Consequences of Poverty

Broadly Agreed Upon Consequences Among General Public



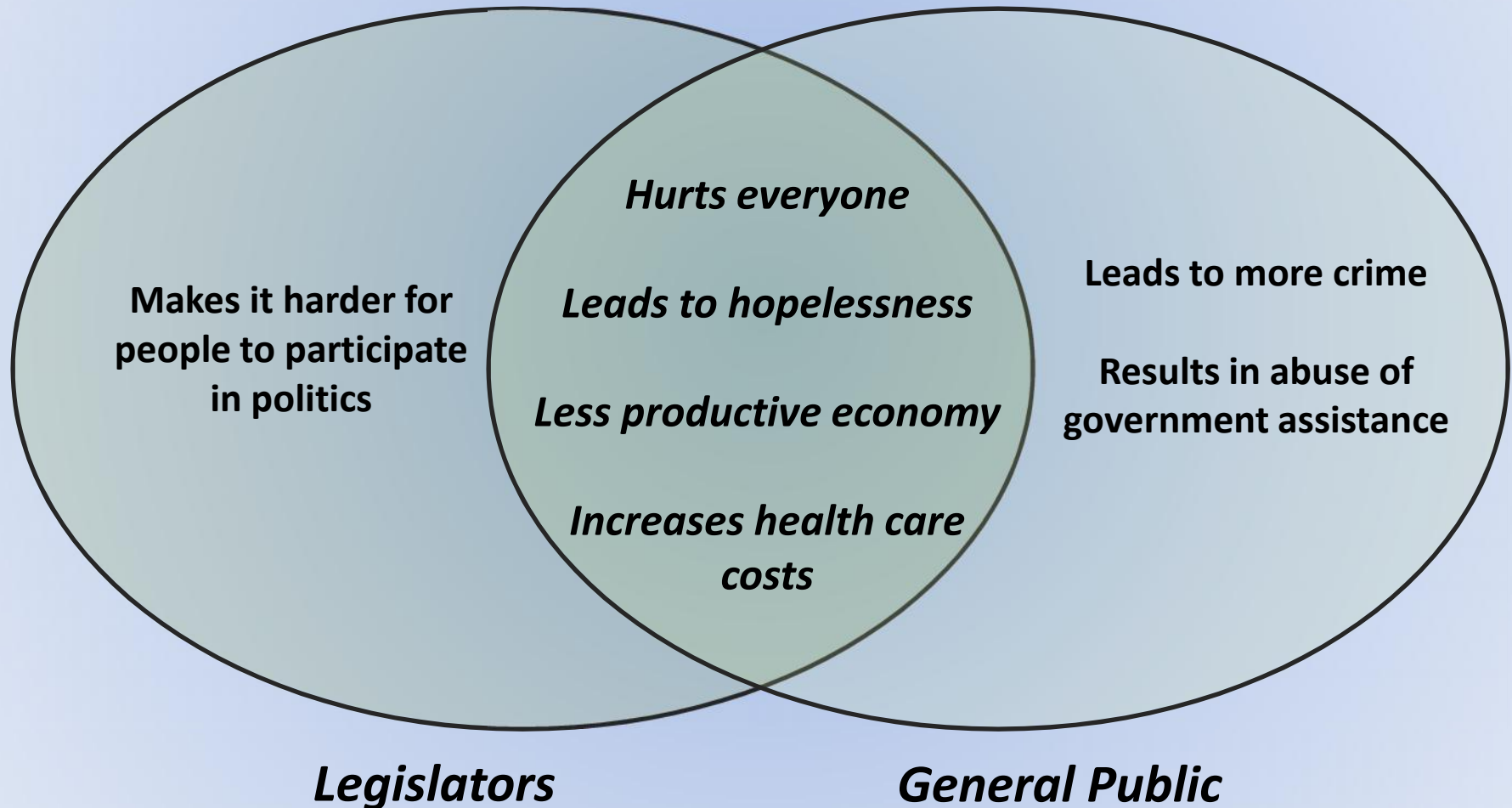
Now I am going to read you several statements about the impact of poverty in New Hampshire. For each please tell me whether you agree or disagree with that statement.

Consequences On Which There is Less Agreement Among General Public

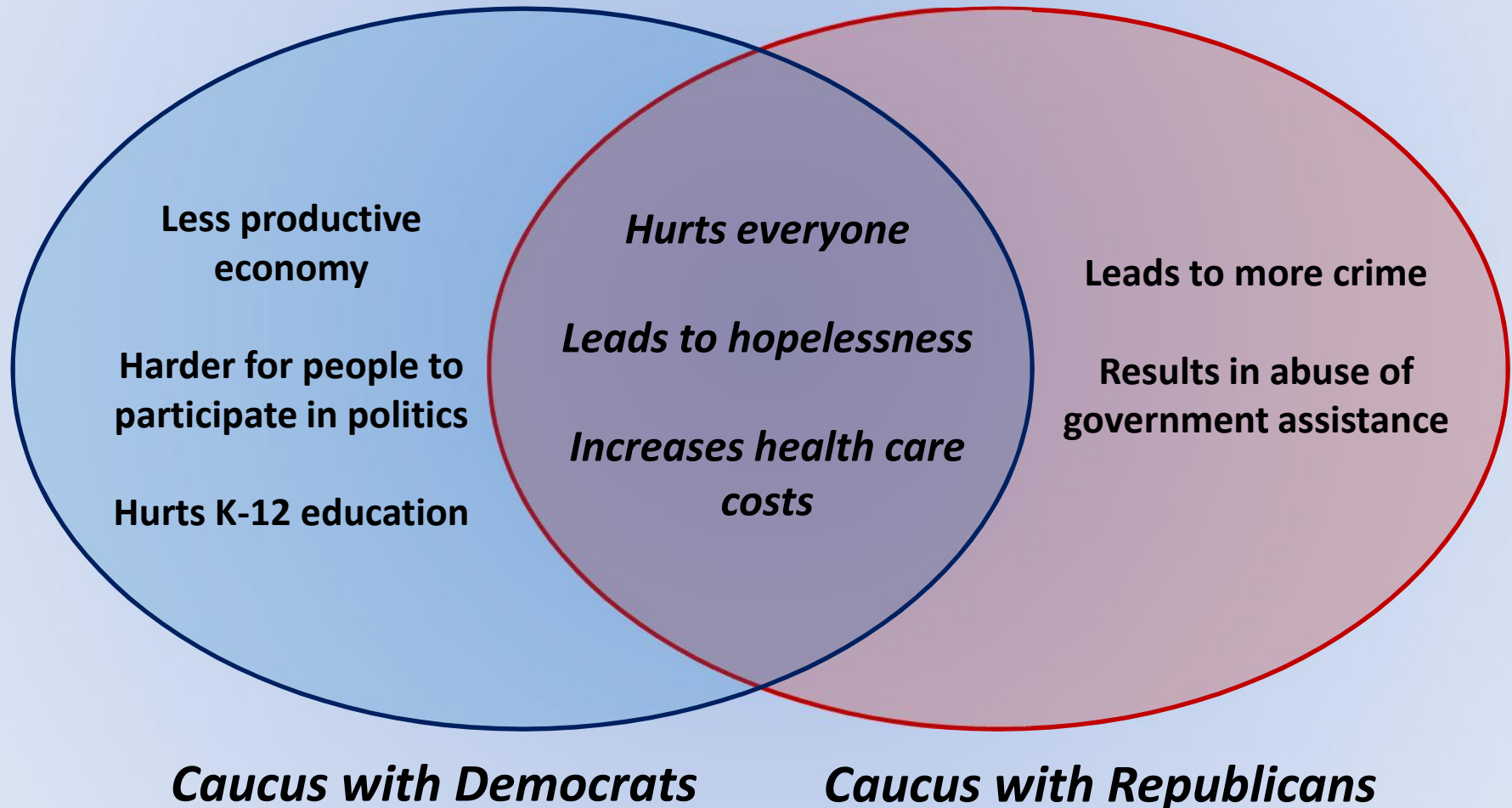


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On the Whole, Legislators Agree with the General Public on Consequences of Poverty



Some Dissension Between Democratic and Republican Legislators on Poverty's Consequences



State Government Performance on Poverty

Focus Groups Participants Saw a Role for Government

Moderator: "Who can do that? The state can do that?"

Respondent 1: "The government should be able to do that. The government is throwing enough money to other countries. They should be providing that. "

Respondent 2: "There are some smaller things. Create incentives for companies to pay a livable wage, for companies to make products here. Build a mental health system. Instead of treating people, we send them to jail. There's no real help for people with mental health issues."

-Older, Low Income Women

Moderator: "Who can deal with this? Who is best to deal with the issue of poverty?"

Respondent: "It has to be the government."

-Middle Income Man

"This being focused on what the government should do, they should make access to programs that help people leave poverty easier to find."

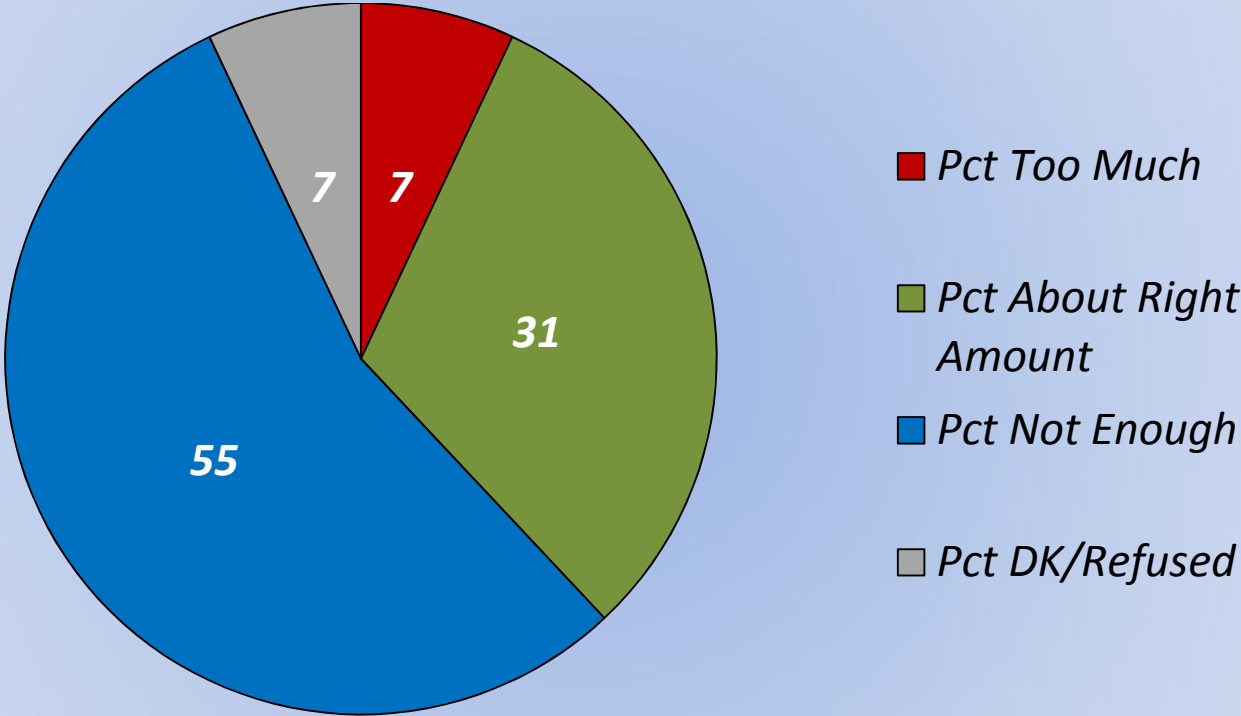
-Younger, Low Income Woman

Moderator: "Are there any programs that the state does that are working?"

Respondent: "Yes. My wife is involved in some social work programs where she has a really great effect."

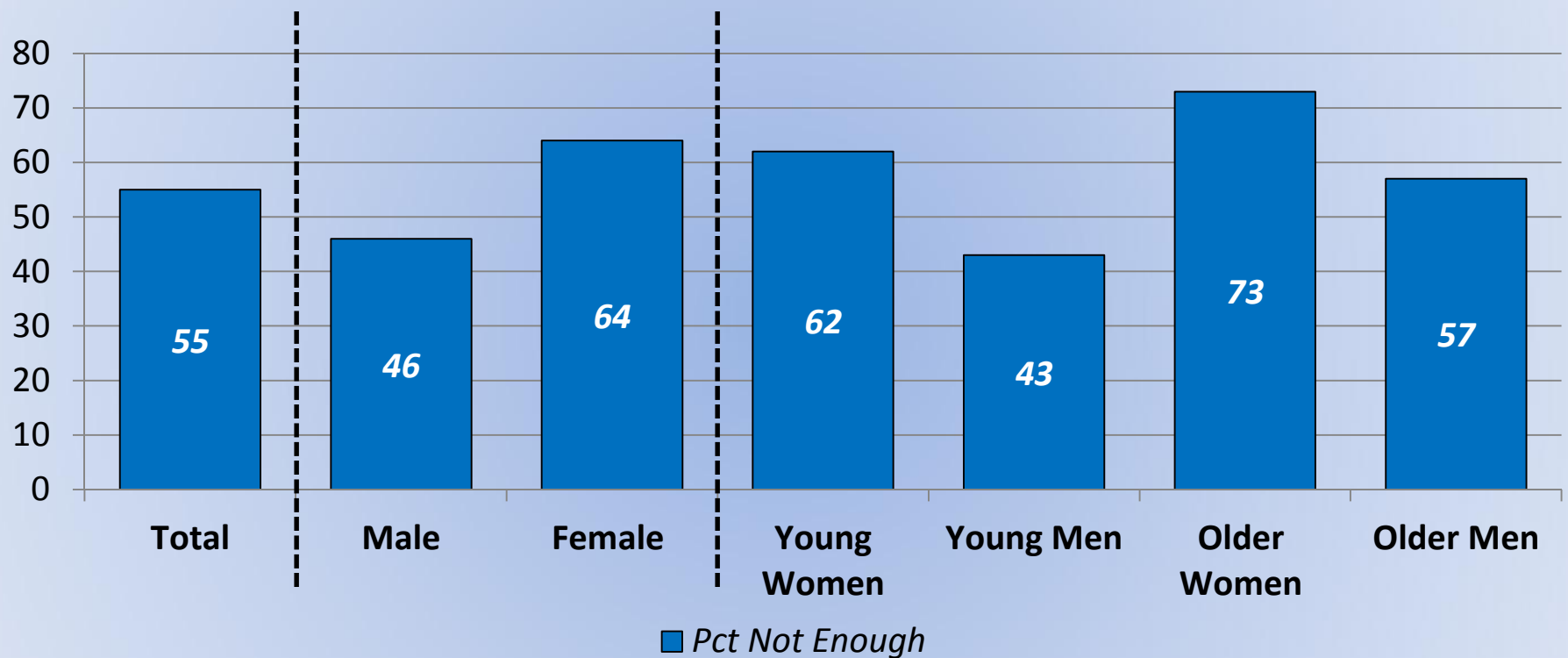
-Middle Income Man

Majority of Granite Staters Believe State Government is Not Doing Enough to Address Poverty



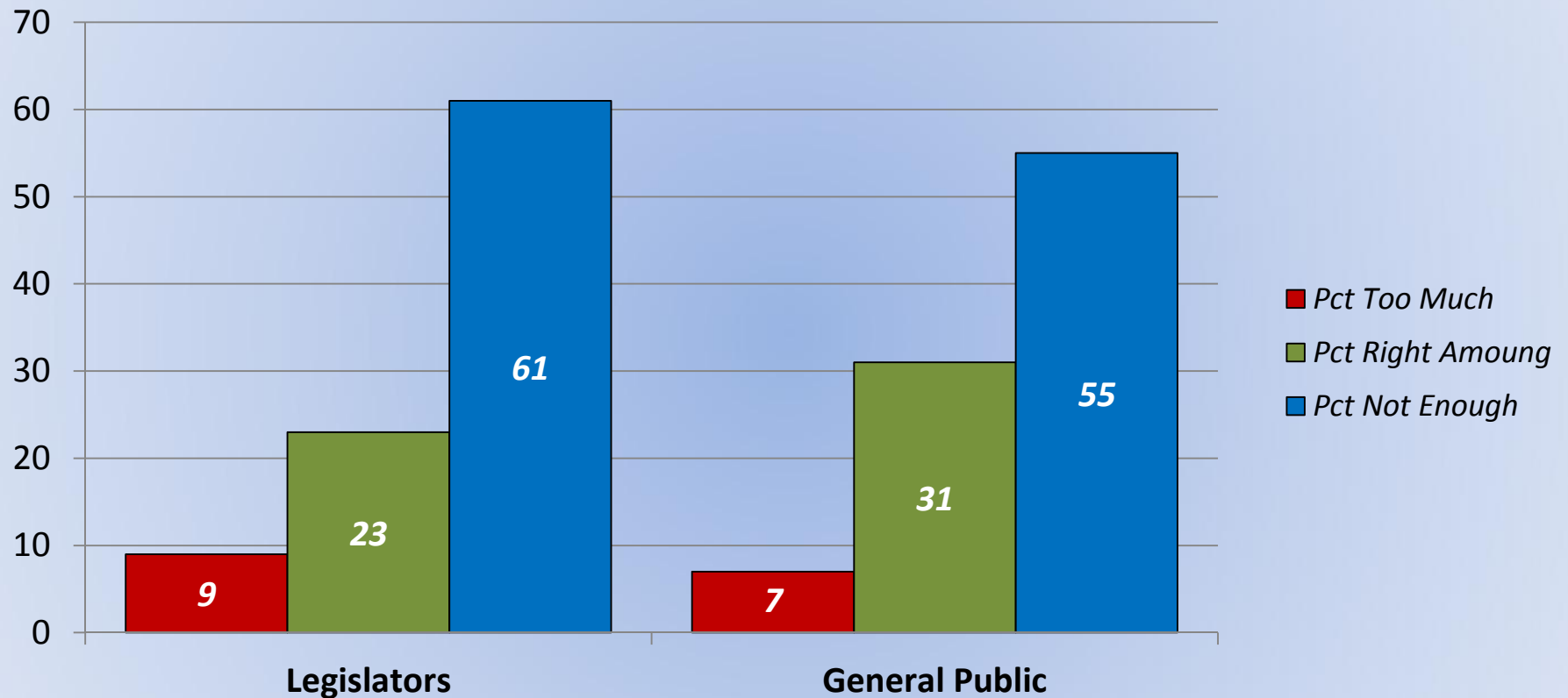
And overall, do you believe state government in New Hampshire is doing too much, about the right amount or not enough to address poverty in New Hampshire?

Women, Particularly Those Over the Age of 50, Likeliest to Believe Government Is Not Doing Enough to Address Poverty



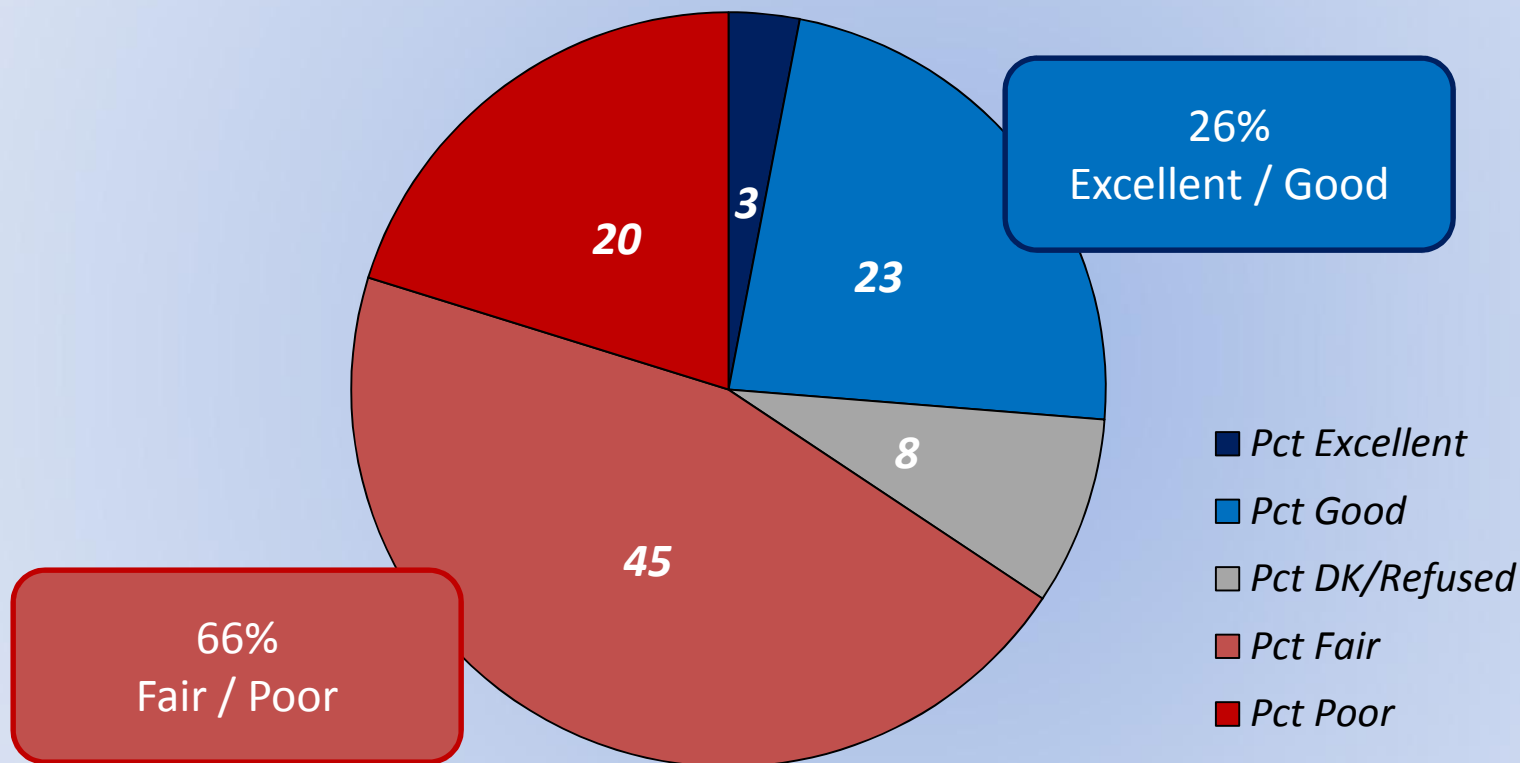
And overall, do you believe state government in New Hampshire is doing too much, about the right amount or not enough to address poverty in New Hampshire?

Legislators Slightly More Likely than General Public to Say State Government is Not Doing Enough to Address Poverty



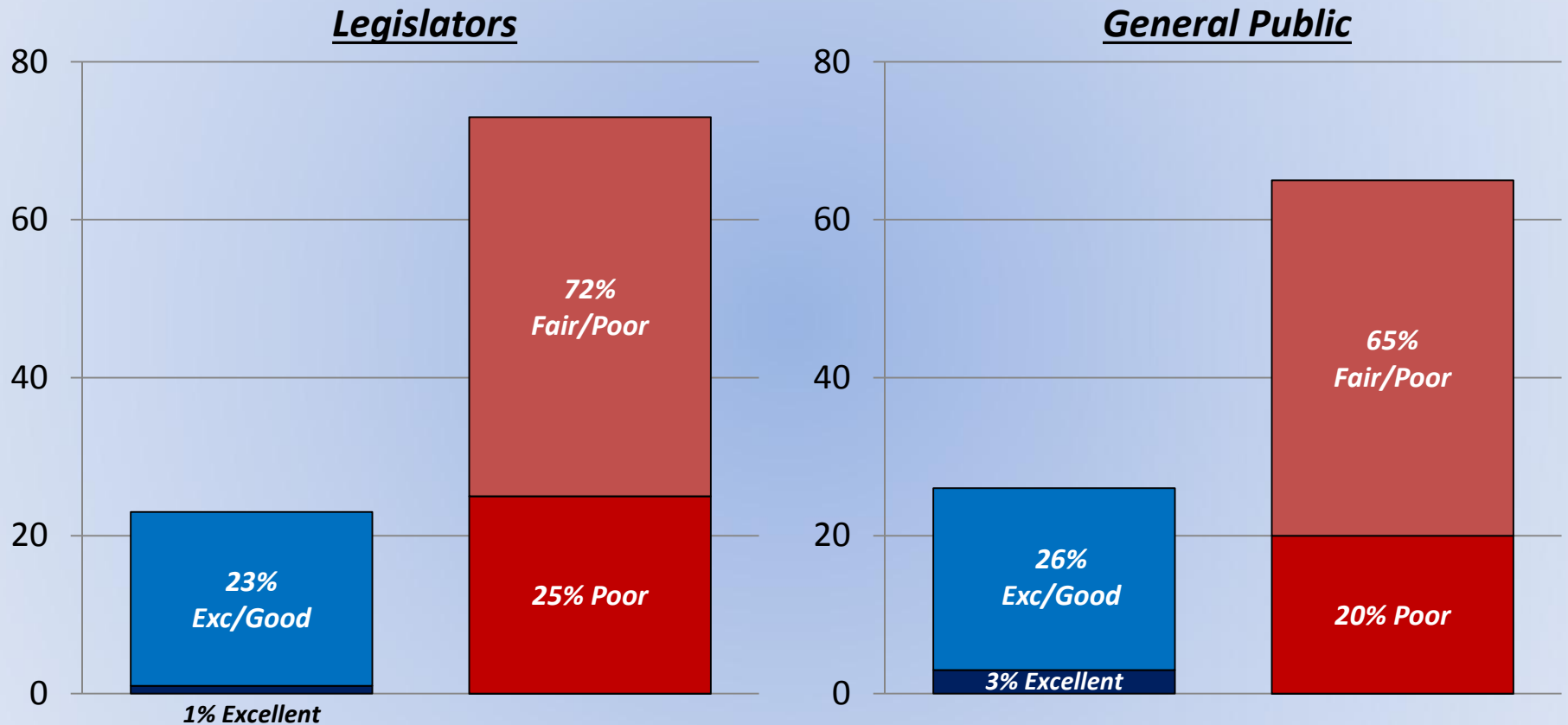
And overall, do you believe state government in New Hampshire is doing too much, about the right amount or not enough to address poverty in New Hampshire?

Two-Thirds of Granite Staters Believe State Government is Doing a Fair or Poor Job Dealing With the Issue of Poverty



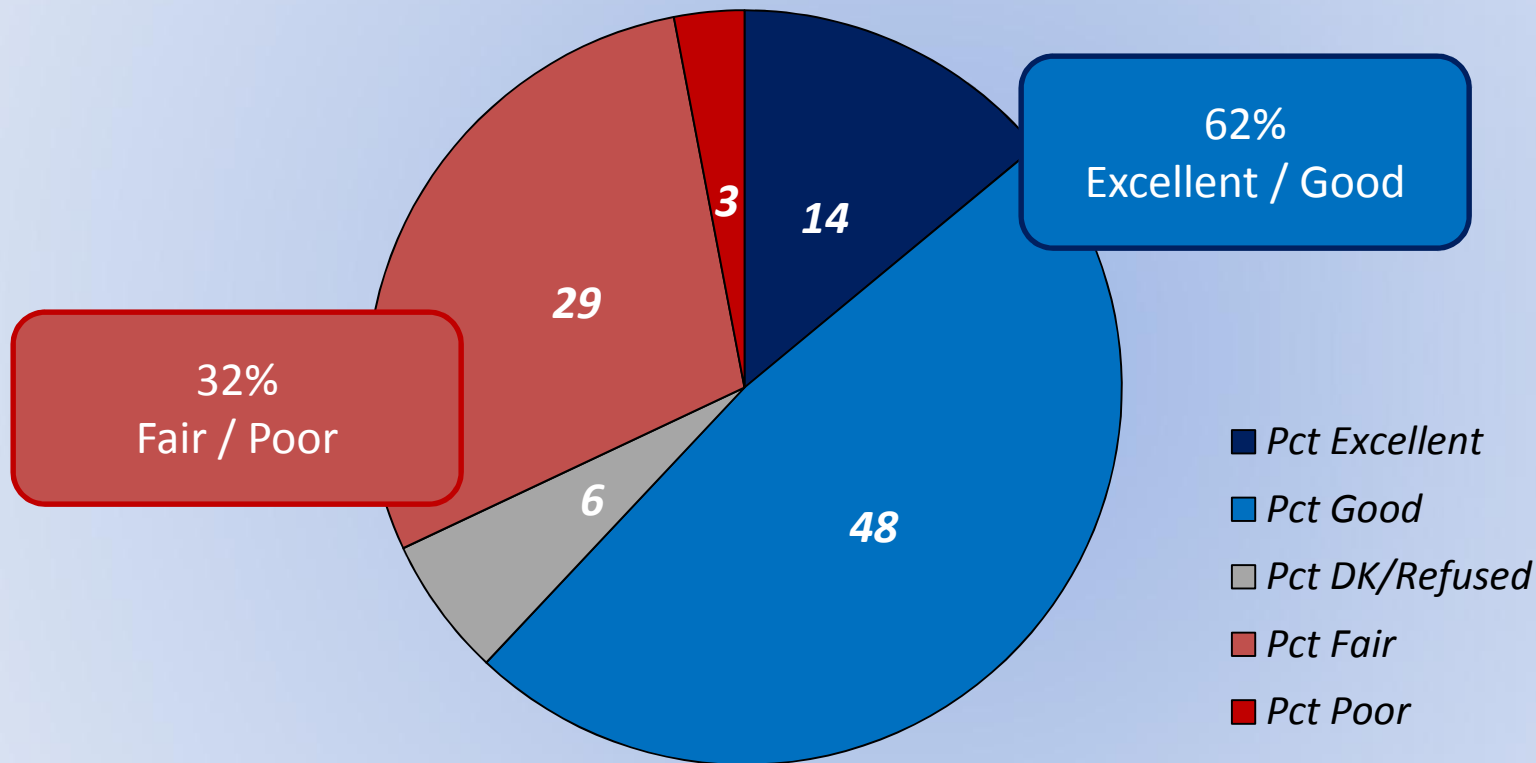
And when it comes to dealing with the issue of poverty in New Hampshire, do you believe New Hampshire state government is doing an excellent, good, just fair or poor job dealing with the issue of poverty?

Legislators Slightly More Critical than General Public of State Government's Job of Dealing with Poverty



And when it comes to dealing with the issue of poverty in New Hampshire, do you believe New Hampshire state government is doing an excellent, good, just fair or poor job dealing with the issue of poverty?

But 6-in-10 Legislators Say Non-Profit Policy Groups Do an Excellent or Good Job Dealing with Poverty

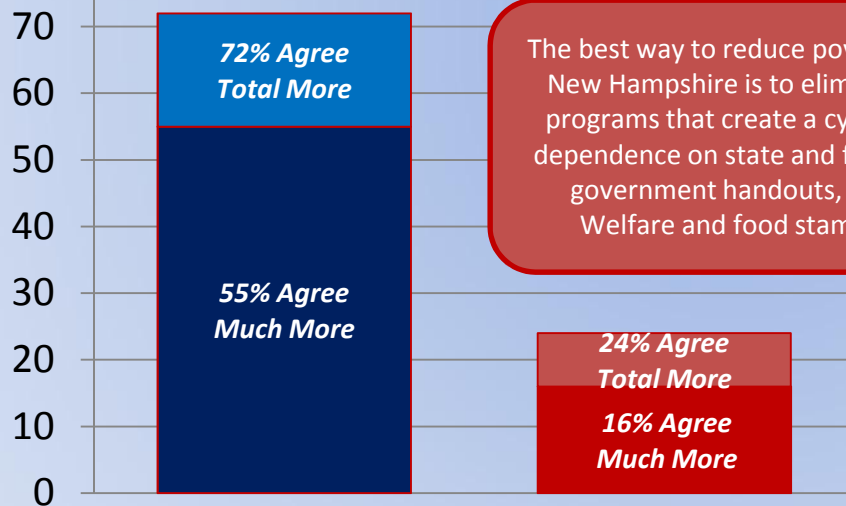


And do you believe non-profit groups focused on policies to address poverty in New Hampshire are doing an excellent, good, just fair, or poor job?

Proposals for Reducing Poverty

Notion of Giving People the Tools They Need to Get Out of Poverty Broadly Trumps Eliminating Programs that Create Cycle of Dependence

The best way to reduce poverty is to give people the tools and opportunity they need to get out of poverty -- a strong economy, a good education, skills training and help in finding a good paying job.



The best way to reduce poverty in New Hampshire is to eliminate programs that create a cycle of dependence on state and federal government handouts, like Welfare and food stamps

	Pct Agree With "Blue" Statement
Total	72
Women	66
Men	78
Income Under 40k	72
Income 41-80k	77
Income Over 80k	70

Now I am going to read you some pairs of statements, and I want you to tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or more with the second statement, even if neither is exactly right.

Minimum Wage Came Up Organically in Low Income Focus Groups

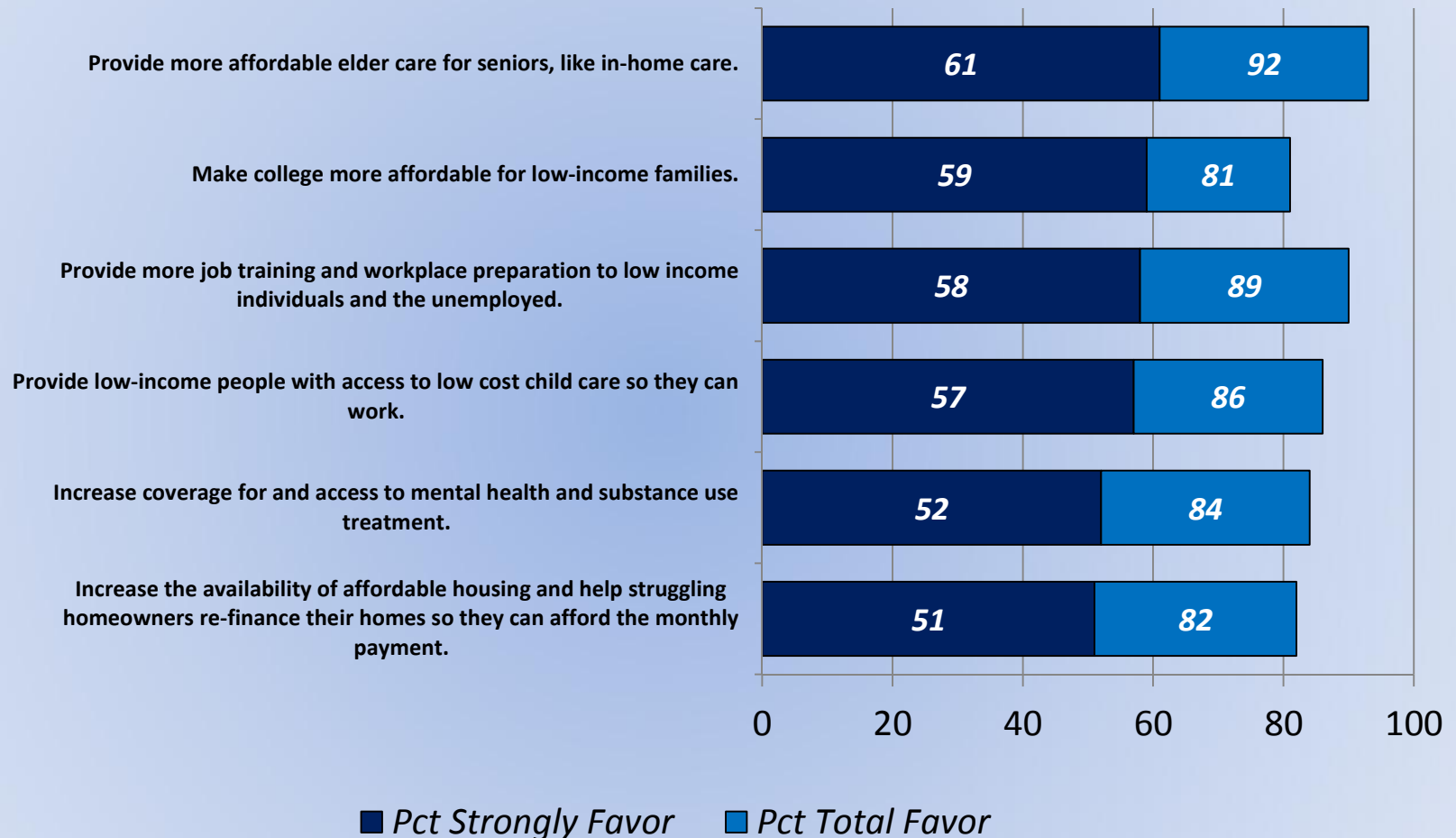
*"Minimum wage – you can't live off that."
-Older, Low Income Woman*

*"The minimum wage because I have to waitress or forget it. I had to give up holidays and weekends because I couldn't live on minimum wage. I have four kids at home."
-Older, Low Income Woman*

*Moderator: "Is poverty reducing opportunities for young people here? What are the ways it does?"
Respondent: "Yes, lack of a good minimum wage."
-Low Income Man*

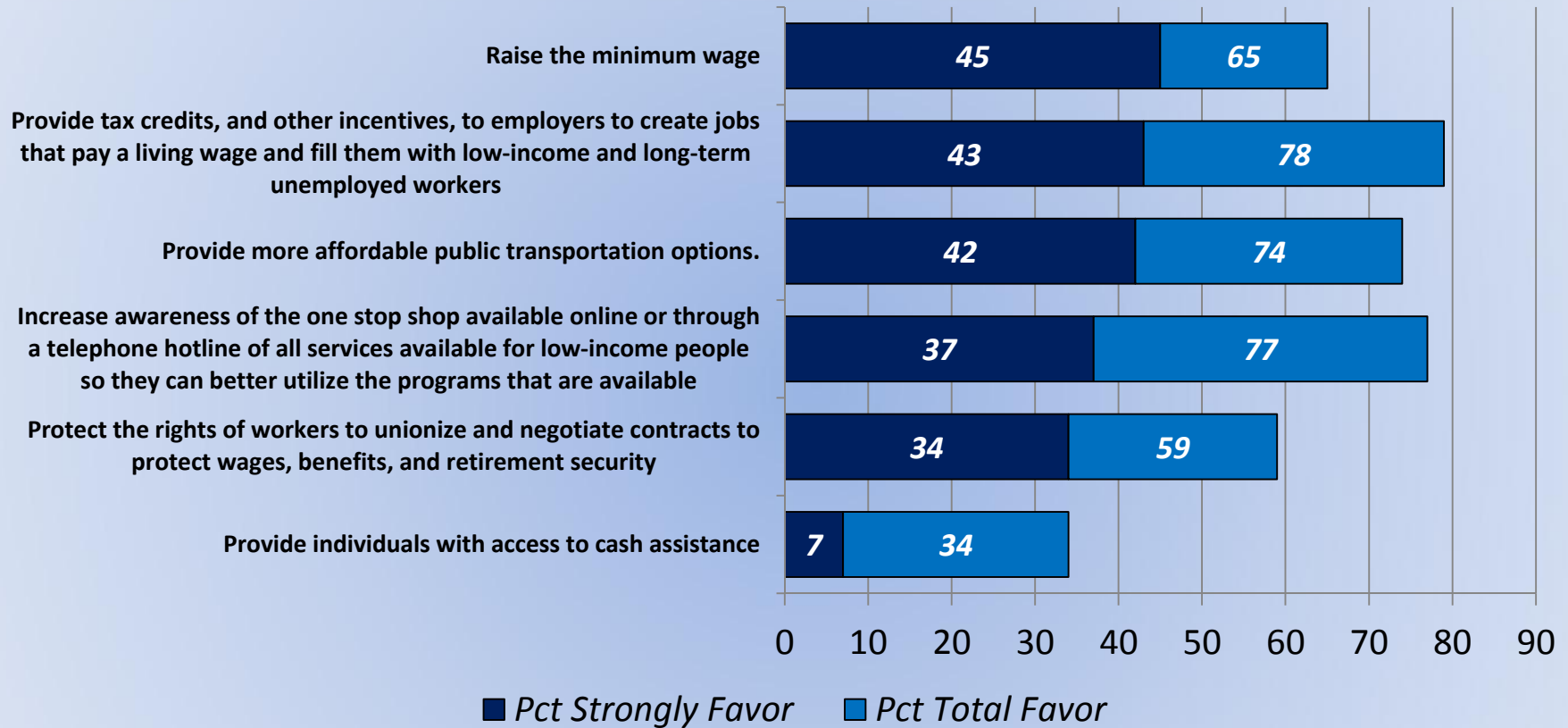
*"The wages here, they suck. Like \$7.65 to begin—that's the minimum wage that you can actually give an employee, that is pretty much nothing."
-Low Income Man*

Proposals With Most Broad and Intense Support



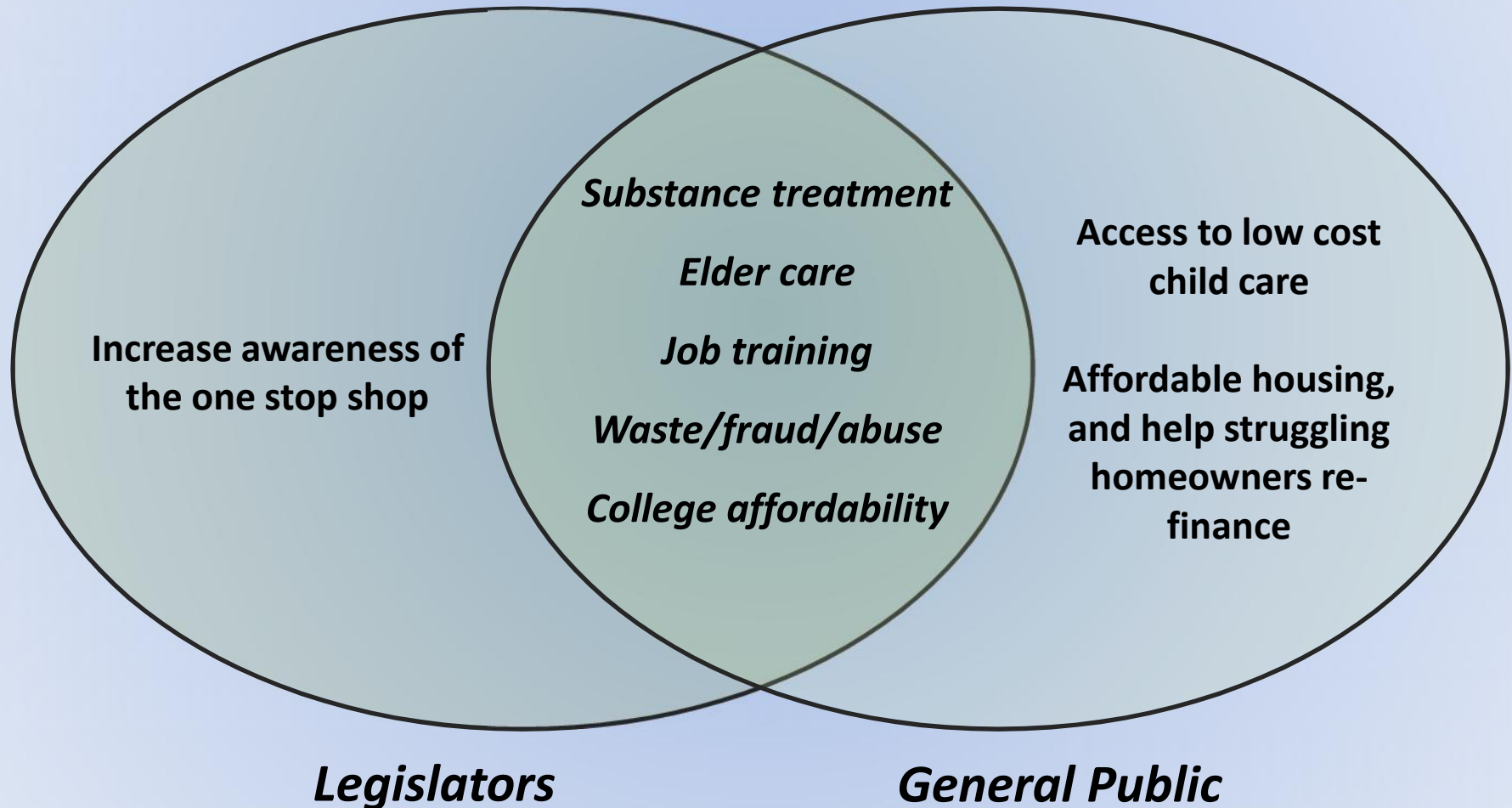
Now, let me read you a list of proposals to help reduce poverty in New Hampshire. For each please tell me whether you favor or oppose that proposal.

Second Tier Proposals Among General Public



Now, let me read you a list of proposals to help reduce poverty in New Hampshire. For each please tell me whether you favor or oppose that proposal.

Broadly, Legislators Align with the General Public on Proposals to Address Poverty



There Are a Number of Proposals Around Which Democratic and GOP Legislators Coalesce as Well

Democrats More Broadly Supportive Across the Board Though

