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New Haven mayoral hopeful dreams up tax break plan

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By Abbe Smith, Register Staff

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NEW HAVEN — Democratic mayoral challenger Jeffrey Kerekes Wednesday unveiled a plan to give a tax break to city employees who move into the city.

Kerekes said if elected mayor, he would implement the “Come Back Home Program” as a incentive for city employees to buy homes in New Haven and become more invested in communities where they work.

He pointed out the vast majority of city employees, including 70-80 percent of teachers and police officers, live outside the city, according to an interoffice memo about union employee residency.

“I think people are really upset about sending their tax dollars to the suburbs,” he said Wednesday by phone. “If those people lived here those tax dollars would recycle back here.”

According to Kerekes’ plan, any city employee living outside New Haven would get 50 percent off of their tax bill if they move into the city and buy a home. The credit is worth up to \$3,250, which is about half of the tax bill for a home worth \$225,000, the median value for a New Haven home, according to the Connecticut Economic Resource Center.

The program would be capped at \$1 million a year, or about 300 employees. He said it would not cost the city money because he does not propose hiring someone to run it. On the contrary, the city would actually get additional revenue from the new taxes coming in from new city residents, he said.

The program would not apply to city employees who already live in New Haven.

Kerekes, founder of the budget watchdog group New Haven Citizens Action Network, joins three other Democrats in challenging DeStefano for their party’s nomination: local lawyer Clifton Graves Jr. and two former aldermen, Anthony Dawson and Robert Lee. Kerekes has said if he does not win the Democratic nomination, he will petition to be on the ballot in November as an independent.

DeStefano, who is seeking a 10th term, has said he is committed to not raising taxes. He has said his campaign goals are safer and stronger neighborhoods, better schools through the reform initiative and New Haven Promise, and continued emphasis on economic development.

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