



Assemblymember Vivian E. COOK



Reports to the People

Spring 2022

Dear Neighbors:

The 245th Legislative Session began on January 5, 2022. I am pleased to announce that after much deliberation the NYS Budget was passed on April 9, 2022. The 2022-23 Budget includes critical measures to revitalize the economy and support families. We have faced two difficult years of physical, emotional, and economic distress and uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Now we are facing new challenges as New York's families are being burdened with rising inflation that is putting more stress on our finances. The \$220 billion plan addresses these new challenges by providing vital tax cuts and relief, investing in education, supporting crucial services, and funding programs that will help the state's economy continue to grow. The final state budget is a bold step forward for the working families of our state and paves the way for a brighter future for all New Yorkers. The spending plan will help lead New York's economic comeback, by investing in vital health, education, and inflation-fighting policies. This fair and fiscally responsible plan is what our state needs to boldly move forward.

In an effort to support higher education projects in our district, this year I was proud to lead the endeavor to secure the additional funds necessary to complete the Academic Village and Conference Center at York College, a large capital project that will provide much-needed additional program space for the College while generating many construction and development related jobs in our community. While I was pleased to be able to secure York College \$41 million in state funding in the past, much more investment is needed to finalize this development. In addition to this important project, I am pleased that during my tenure in the Assembly I have been able to secure funding for a number of worthwhile local community organizations which include York College, Rochdale Village, Friends of Rochdale Village Library, Rochdale Village Senior Center, Rochdale NORC, Rockaway Boulevard Senior Center, Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica, P.S. 223 Afterschool Center, and The Thomas White Jr. Foundation. I will continue to work on behalf of all my constituents to fight to bring funding into the district that will be beneficial to the community I represent.

As a way of giving back to the community, I donate the space for my district office, thus saving New York State thousands of dollars yearly. I am proud to report that I was able to keep my office open and available to you throughout the pandemic, which allowed my staff and I to provide vital assistance to community members seeking unemployment and other critical services. My office is located at 142-15 Rockaway Blvd. and my door is always open. Please feel free to stop by or call if you are in need of any information or assistance. I love to have the chance to talk with our community residents and hear about your activities and achievements, as well as your concerns.

In closing, I hope that you find the budget highlights provided in this newsletter helpful and informative. It has been my honor and privilege to serve our district through these last two difficult years, and I look forward to continuing to serve as your representative in the New York State Assembly.

Sincerely,

Vivian E. Cook
Member of Assembly

New State Budget Invests in Our Families' Futures

After two years of battling a deadly pandemic, families are now facing the brunt of rising inflation as the increased costs of everyday necessities like groceries and gas are taking a toll on household budgets. Assemblymember Cook and her Assembly Majority colleagues fought hard during the budget process to put urgently-needed money back into New Yorkers pockets.

The 2022-23 state spending plan gives our residents' budgets some relief by accelerating middle-class tax cuts, providing an extra child tax credit and Earned Income Tax Credit payment and providing \$2.2 billion in property tax relief checks. The budget also includes a state gas tax holiday to ease drivers' pain at the pump caused by lingering effects of the pandemic and the current global state of affairs. In addition, in order to assist the many New Yorkers for whom finances have become more difficult to manage, the final budget provides a \$250 million fund to help with utility arrears for those faced with unexpected higher energy bills this past winter and thus further supports the state's investment in safe, affordable housing.

"When crafting the final budget, we worked to increase funding for important programs while, at the same time, remaining fiscally responsible and managing federally-provided funding – all in an effort to keep our state moving in a positive direction. We're helping working parents succeed by expanding affordable childcare options and supporting small businesses as they regain their financial footing. We're prioritizing public safety, improving our roads and bridges, and taking important steps to protect our environment. And we are strengthening our support of our schools and health care facilities and providing long-overdue wage increases for our heroic health care workers," stated Assemblymember Cook.

"I believe that the state budget prioritizes what New Yorkers care about the most," she added. "These important investments and much-needed sources of relief will help families regain stability, take on new opportunities, and thrive."

The following budget highlights provide more specific information on programs and funding.



Assemblymember Cook welcomes Dr. Berenecea Johnson Eanes, President of York College, to Albany during the 51st Annual New York State Black and Puerto Rican Legislative Association Weekend.

Giving New Yorkers the Relief They Need to Overcome Rising Inflation

- Includes \$2.2 billion to create a one-year property tax rebate check for households that are eligible for School Tax Relief (STAR) and Enhanced STAR, and that have incomes at or below \$250,000
- Accelerates the phase-in of middle-class tax cuts that began in 2018, saving taxpayers \$162 million in SFY 2022-23 and \$615 million in SFY 2023-24
- Includes \$188 million to provide a one-time supplemental Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that's equal to 25% of their 2021 EITC benefit, averaging \$190 per taxpayer
- Includes \$287 million for a supplemental Empire State Child Tax Credit for families, which is calculated as a percentage of a taxpayer's 2021 Empire State Child Tax as follows:
 - 100% for families under \$10,000 with a maximum of \$334 per child
 - 75% for families between \$10,000 and \$25,000 with a maximum of \$250 per child
 - 50% for families between \$25,000 and \$50,000 with a maximum of \$167 per child
 - 25% for families over \$50,000 with a maximum of \$84 per child
- Increases the New York City Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), holding a \$250 million impact
- Establishes a gas tax holiday from June 1, 2022, to Dec. 31, 2022, saving motorists approximately \$585 million
- Suspends the 8 cents per gallon motor fuel tax and 8 cents per gallon sales tax on gasoline and diesel purchases, a combined savings of 16 cents per gallon
- Provides counties with the additional option of capping their sales tax at \$4 per gallon, which could save people more money at the pump if prices remain elevated
- Counties are currently allowed to cap their sales tax at \$2 or \$3 per gallon
- The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the highway and bridge fund will be reimbursed for lost gas tax revenue from the General Fund
- Provides \$250 million for a utility arrears fund



Assemblymember Cook and President Eanes are joined by York College faculty and students during this year's New York State Black & Puerto Rican Legislative Association Weekend. Thousands of people from across New York State participate in the many workshops and programs offered over the weekend and attend the Gala Dinner that is a highlight of the event. The students were able to learn more about state government and the challenges faced by our government officials during these unprecedented times.

Improving Affordability and Quality of Higher Education Systems

- Includes \$60 million in additional state operating support funds for SUNY and \$60 million for CUNY
- Includes \$48.8 million for SUNY and \$59.6 million for CUNY to fully reimburse each system and eliminate the "TAP gap"
- The TAP gap is the difference between TAP funding for students and actual tuition costs
- Provides \$150 million to expand TAP eligibility to 75,000 additional part-time students and \$5 million to restore TAP eligibility for incarcerated individuals
- Increases state support by \$13.7 million for SUNY state-operated campuses, \$2.1 million for SUNY community colleges and \$2.8 million for CUNY senior colleges for a total of \$18.6 million to raise the amount campuses receive for Excelsior tuition
- Accelerates the reset of the tuition rate that SUNY and CUNY receive for the Excelsior program by a year
- Provides \$53 million each to SUNY and CUNY to hire additional full-time faculty members
- Includes a \$225 million increase in expansion capital for SUNY and \$110 million for CUNY
- Provides an increase of \$6 million to all opportunity programs, for a total of \$203 million
- Provides an additional \$1 million for a total of \$2 million each for SUNY and CUNY mental health services
- Provides a \$1 million increase to SUNY's High Needs Nursing Programs for a total of \$2.7 million and \$1 million to CUNY's expansion of nursing programs for a total of \$3 million
- Includes a tax exemption for all state loan forgiveness programs

Securing Critical Pandemic Relief to Advance New York's Recovery

- Provides \$1.1 billion for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) and Landlord Rental Assistance Program (LRAP)
- Provides \$250 million to create a refundable tax credit program to help small businesses cover COVID-19-related expenses, offering a minimum credit of \$1,000 per business
- Provides \$100 million to offset the Distressed Hospital Sales Tax Intercept
- Adds \$10 million for Arts Recovery Grants, for a total of \$50 million
- Provides \$22 million for the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program
- Provides \$15 million more than the executive budget – for a total of \$35 million – for the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP), which helps homeowners avoid foreclosure by connecting them to free, qualified mortgage assistance relief services
- Provides \$4.2 million for the Nutrition Outreach & Education Program (NOEP), which helps connect New Yorkers to nutrition assistance programs
- Includes \$4 million in capital funding for the New York State Regional Food Hub building in the Bronx
- Provides \$41 million for flooding repair assistance for Hurricane Ida victims

INS IN OUR FAMILIES' FUTURES

Expanding Access to Affordable, High-quality Childcare and Support Services

- More than doubles the current investment in childcare, providing nearly \$3 billion more in childcare over the next three years alone, expanding eligibility for subsidized care from 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) to 300% FPL by Aug. 1, 2022
- Raises the reimbursement in the market rate from the 69th percentile to the 80th percentile, provides \$343 million for additional childcare stabilization grants and invests \$50 million for the capital needs of childcare providers across the state
- Requires districts to utilize federal rollover funds toward the increase of subsidy reimbursements
- Eliminates the 17.5 hour a week work requirement for parents enrolled in post-secondary education
- Provides \$53 million for children and youth services, including an increase in Medicaid rates and funding for various community non-residential programs such as:
 - Healthy Steps, which is a pediatric primary care program that supports healthy early childhood development and effective parenting
 - Childhood Trauma Informed Network, which aims to enhance resources, collaboration and communication among individuals and agencies implementing trauma-responsive practices
- School & Home-Based Crisis Intervention, which provides intensive crisis care to children between the ages of 5 and 18 and serves as an alternative to hospitalization for children and adolescents experiencing emotional distress
- Provides \$25 million to create a five-year property tax abatement for property owners who create a new childcare center or expand an existing center
- Provides \$15.6 million in start-up funds to expand childcare centers on SUNY campuses, CUNY senior colleges and SUNY and CUNY community colleges
- Restores \$21.9 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding, which includes:
 - An additional \$5 million in funding for Advantage After School Program, which provides structured activities for kids to help them succeed academically
 - \$3.2 million for non-residential domestic violence services
- Includes an additional \$1 million for the Disability Advocacy Program (DAP), for a total of \$6.3 million

Supporting Local Schools, Libraries, and Our Children's Mental Health

- State funding for school aid totaling \$31.2 billion, an increase of \$2.1 billion, or 7% over last year, and \$120 million over the executive budget proposal
- Increases Foundation Aid by \$1.5 billion, fully phasing it in by the 2023-24 school year
- Increases special education provider rates by 11%
- Includes \$40 million to increase the teacher workforce
- Provides \$18 million in ongoing funding for the My Brother's Keeper program
- Allocates \$125 million annually for a three-year UPK step-up program, for a total of \$375 million
- A portion of this would fund new pre-K slots at the current program level, and another portion for an RFP process to pay \$10,000 per pre-K slot
- Includes a \$3.5 million increase in aid for public libraries over the executive budget for a total of \$99.6 million – a \$5.5 million increase over last year
- Also includes \$20 million in additional capital for library projects for a total of \$34 million
- Expands the \$50 million RECOVS Matching Grant Program to allow school districts to match grant funds with any funds, not just federal pandemic relief funds
- Also allows Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to be eligible to apply for these grants

Ensuring New Yorkers Experiencing Mental Health and Substance Abuse Challenges Receive the Help They Need

- Increases the human services cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to 5.4%
- Includes \$7.7 million to fund the statewide expansion of the Dwyer Program, which provides peer-to-peer support and counseling to veterans transitioning into civilian life and navigating PTSD, depression and traumatic brain injury
- Expands the \$50 million RECOVS Matching Grant Program to allow school districts to match grant funds with any funds, not just federal pandemic relief funds
- Also allows Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to be eligible to apply for these grants
- Provides \$2 million for the Positive School Climates Pilot Program
- Provides \$10 million in capital funding for localities and non-profit organizations to increase capacity and expand access to mental health and substance abuse providers
- Provides an increase of \$53 million for children's mental health programs under state Office of Mental Health (OMH)
- Includes \$4 million for mental health programs at SUNY and CUNY
- Provides at least \$50 million for mental health, NYS Office of Addiction Services and Supports (OASAS) and NYS Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) community-based providers
- Provides at least \$75 million for residential health care facilities and adult care facilities
- Provides \$35 million to create the 988 Suicide and Behavioral Health Crisis Hotline, which supports those experiencing a mental health or substance use disorder crisis
- Includes \$27.5 million for increased Medicaid rates for inpatient psychiatric beds
- Includes \$9 million to support workforce recruitment and retention of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners
- Allocates \$2 million for Crisis Intervention Services

Boosting Wages for Selfless Health Care Workers and Investing in Health Programs

- Supports the heroes that worked on the frontlines throughout this pandemic by providing a one-time bonus payment of \$3,000 to full-time health and mental hygiene frontline workers who earn less than \$125,000 and stay in their position for a year
- Increases the home care worker minimum wage by \$3 over a two-year period
- \$100 million to modify the proposed Distressed Tax Intercept Fund to return \$50 million to counties and \$50 million to New York City
- \$51.1 million to reject the restructuring of medical malpractice payments over two years
- \$41.21 million to reject the elimination of prescriber prevails
- \$22 million in additional funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program
- \$3.5 million in support to authorize municipal emergency fire services to receive reimbursement from Medicaid
- Adds \$904 million in funding to the Medicaid program, and \$120 million in funding to public health
- Provides \$800 million for safety-net and public hospitals
- Requires equal insurer reimbursement between telehealth services and in-person services for two years
- Expands health care coverage for undocumented immigrants for one year of postpartum coverage following the end of pregnancy, and provides Medicaid coverage for undocumented seniors aged 65 and older

Additional Budget Highlights

- The Assembly provides \$7.6 million in restorations and adds for various veterans' programs, including \$5 million in capital funding for veterans' nonprofit organizations
- Provides \$7.7 million to expand the Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veteran's Support Program statewide, which offers counseling and support for veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health challenges
- Includes \$4.9 million in administration and capital costs to establish New York State's first veteran's cemetery
- Shifts the Division of Veterans' Services to the Department of Veterans' Services to help ensure greater availability of services
- Increases the economic incentives for companies that hire veterans
- Increases the minimum funding available to city and county veterans service agencies from \$10,000 to \$25,000
- Provides an increase of \$9.8 million, or 27%, over last year to fully restore agricultural aid and provide many important funding increases, including:
 - \$4 million for socially or economically disadvantaged farmers
 - \$100,000 more for Black Farmers United of NYS, for a total of \$200,000
- Establishes a new refundable farm-worker overtime tax credit, which includes one advanced payment per year and increases the credit to 118% of a farm's overtime wage costs
- Increases the investment tax credit for farmers and the farm workforce retention credit
- Provides \$5 million in capital support for local fairs
- Provides an additional \$3 million for animal shelters for a total of \$8 million
- Requires the Board of Elections (BOE) to mail voters a postage-paid return envelope with their absentee ballot application
 - Voters who receive an absentee ballot application in person will also be offered postage-paid return envelopes
- Creates a new Division of Broadband to administer ConnectALL grants, which will be awarded to entities that will plan, engineer and construct accessible broadband infrastructure
 - Prevailing wage will apply to all grants
 - The state Department of Transportation right-of-way fiber fee is repealed
 - Allows the New York Power Authority to lease excess fiber to municipalities and allows further subletting to unserved and underserved areas of the state

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