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March 25, 2021

Dear Friends,

Last week the Assembly and the Senate passed our one-house budget resolutions which are the basis for budget negotiations between the two houses and the Governor. I am very pleased to report that many of the issues that I have worked on directly are included in the Assembly budget.

Highlights of my priorities include:

- Increases in education aid and special emphasis on increasing foundation aid to school districts that have been short-changed;
- Grant relief for small businesses, especially those impacted by Covid-19;
- Assistance for families impacted by the pandemic and for not-for-profits that have been critical to serving those in need;
- New funding for clean water projects and an increase in the state's Environmental Protection Fund;
- Restored funding for local governments, higher education, health care, libraries and arts organizations;
- New capital projects funding for schools serving blind and deaf students.

Also included in the Assembly budget was an exciting new initiative that I proposed to create a NYS Digital Inclusion Grant program to address the digital divide that excludes many families from the essential digital tools to function in today's society. Based on a national model, digital inclusion programs provide affordable broadband access, a device and training and tech support to disadvantaged individuals.

Also below is the county's #SpeakUpWestchester campaign against hate. In recent years many of us have been sharing the message "Hate Has No Home" to demonstrate our rejection of the national trend toward increased acts of hate, violence and bias crimes. In the last five years, there has been an increase in hate crimes and bias related violence nationally and in New York State. The recent murders in Georgia highlight one trend in hate crimes, acts of violence against Asian-Americans. This newsletter includes information from the Westchester County Human Rights Commission #SpeakUpWestchester campaign to encourage reporting of hate crimes.

As always, if I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at 914-939-7028.

Warm regards,



Assembly Passes One-House Budget Resolution

Assembly Budget Package Targets Important Needs

The overriding goal of our Assembly one-house budget package is to focus resources on many of the pressing issue areas challenged over the past year of the pandemic. Education, health care, small business, higher education, housing, human services, not-for-profits, mass transit and local governments have all been dramatically disrupted by Covid-19. Most of last year's budget was frozen because of the pandemic economy. At the same time, every entity or business struggled to function and survive the crisis.

Education K-12

Last year there was no increase in state aid to school districts because of Covid-19. Over the past year school districts incurred new costs for virus testing, technology for remote learning, PPE supplies and other new expenses. Our Assembly budget restores and increases education funding for public schools by \$3.1 billion over last year, increases Foundation aid by \$1.4 billion and fully phases it in over the next three years.

In the Assembly I have played a leadership role in advocating for districts at the low end of receiving the percentage of Foundation Aid that are due to them. For many years I have organized the annual effort in the Assembly to raise the percentage and total dollar amount delivered to these districts to help address ongoing inequities.

The Assembly budget provides that every school district in the state receive at least 60 percent of their Foundation Aid funding for SY 2021-22. This means that the 77 districts in this category, a number of them in Westchester, will receive added boosts in funding beyond the base increases. The Assembly commits to funding all districts at 100% within three years. The Senate budget also includes these provisions on Foundation Aid for low percentage districts.

Our Assembly package also rejects budget proposals to consolidate and change how school districts are reimbursed for state aid which is based upon actual expenses for certain services they provide to students. These kinds of changes to the reimbursement system have been proposed in various forms by the Division of Budget for decades and would deprive aid school districts deserve to receive. Our rejection of these proposals will result in additional aid to Westchester school districts.

Our budget also provides \$10 million for districts serving homeless students and \$10 million to support mental health services in schools.

I also successfully advocated for \$30 million to help support capital projects for schools serving deaf or blind students. I have had an ongoing interest in helping these and other Special Act school districts that educate students outside of regular school districts.

Our proposed budget also includes \$75 million to create new prekindergarten slots across the state.

Economic Recovery After Covid-19 - Investments in Small Business

In January I was appointed to a new Assembly Working Group on Transitioning N.Y. Economy Toward COVID-19 Recovery. I have been especially focused on the needs of businesses that have been restricted or closed because of Covid-19 restrictions and have been working very hard to survive past the pandemic. The first priority of the Working Group has been to advance budget items that will help businesses recover. Our Assembly budget proposal includes important initiatives to meet these goals. As part of the budget negotiation process, I also serve on the Joint Budget Conference Committee on Economic Development.

The most exciting part is a new \$1 billion Small Business Reopening and Relief Grant Program. Eligible costs under the program cover a variety of business costs, including payroll, rent, mortgage, property taxes, insurance, utilities, full or pro-rated state required fees, as well as the purchase of various pandemic-related expenses such as personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary to protect workers and consumers, heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) and other related construction costs.

I have been promoting the grant model. Earlier this year I introduced legislation with Senator Pete Harkham creating a state of emergency small business and not-for-profit organization grant program. I am very pleased that the Assembly proposal follows the grant approach.

Our Assembly package also sets aside \$500 million of the fund for companies that fall into priority categories, including Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE), microbusinesses with 10 employees or less, small businesses in economically distressed areas, veteran and service-disabled veteran owned/operated small businesses and veteran categories severely impacted by Covid-19.

We also include a focus on the arts with \$100 million towards a new Arts Recovery and Revitalization Program to assist with reopening efforts of arts organizations. Arts and performing arts have been devastated by the pandemic. We need to provide relief to keep these organizations viable. We also increased funding for the New York Council for the Arts, another support mechanism for local arts groups. The Assembly budget includes support for a number of other arts funding programs, including monies towards facility and capital costs for small arts organizations.

Addressing the Impact of Covid-19 on Human Services, Social Services and Housing

Covid-19 has had a dramatic impact on the economics of families and workers, on our network of human service providers and on the ability of many to maintain their housing. Through a combination of federal and state funds, the Assembly budget proposes major support in each of these areas.

Not-for-profit organizations have been on the front lines addressing the needs of many individuals faced with Covid-19 issues. Our budget includes \$100 million to support operating costs for these groups who are often struggling to provide services to those in need.

The Assembly budget includes \$3.1 billion towards rent relief, including rent arrears, utility costs, future rent and an option for payments directly to landlords. The proposal also includes \$675 million for mortgage relief. While details will be worked out in the final budget, assistance generally will be prioritized towards those impacted by Covid-19. There is also \$200 million directed towards addressing homelessness. Additional items include:

- Pandemic relief funding totaling \$2.1 billion is dedicated for individuals who do not have access to unemployment support or have been excluded from other assistance programs.
- The Assembly increases funding to support non-residential domestic violence programs to \$6 million.
- The Assembly proposes targeting childcare funds to expanding access to high needs families to support affordability, assist providers and expand slots.
- The Assembly budget restores and supports funding for mental health, addiction and substance abuse services and programs for people with developmental disabilities, including funding for community-based providers to assist with PPE costs.

Environmental Protection

Our budget supports a new round in clean water funding of \$500 million which includes funding for the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) which I helped initiate in 2015. That program has brought Westchester municipalities \$45.5 million in grants to date. A new round will bring more grants to support our local projects.

We also include a \$100 million increase to the state Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) bringing it to \$400 million to better address the demand for funding from groups around the state.

Higher Education

The Assembly budget again makes major commitments towards supporting higher education for SUNY, CUNY, community colleges and private colleges through a variety of funding streams.

A major priority is making college more affordable through TAP, HEOP, EOP, SEEK, STEP, CSTEP and other assistance programs.

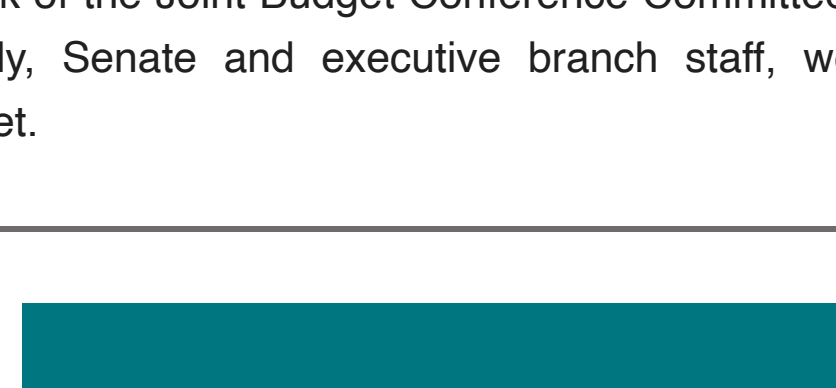
Local Governments

As a former mayor, I work closely with local officials on the challenges facing municipalities. Our state budget increases state assistance to local governments (AIM funding) and removes a provision added last year that used county sales tax revenues to pay for AIM funding for villages and towns. We also added assistance for local road projects and increased operating and capital funding for local libraries.

Health Care

Our budget restores \$376 million in proposed reductions to the Medicaid program and \$393 million in reductions to public health programs included in the executive budget. Restorations will assist hospitals, long term managed care and patients.

These are just some of the budget highlights included in the Assembly budget. We are now in the negotiation process with the Senate and the Governor. Through the work of the Joint Budget Conference Committees and discussions among Assembly, Senate and executive branch staff, we will arrive at a negotiated budget.



Federal and State Tax Filing Extension

The Department of Tax and Finance will be extending the New York State income tax deadline to May 17. This aligns with the federal decision to do the same and provides New Yorkers still coping with the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic ample time to file.

In addition, the state Tax Department offers free tax filing resources. New York State taxpayers with an income of \$72,000 or less in 2020 can complete and submit their federal and New York State income tax returns online for free. There is no need to pay for software or a tax preparer. Nearly 255,000 taxpayers used the State Tax Department's Free File software last year, saving themselves an estimated \$51 million in the process.

To be directed to the free filing options, click here: <https://www.tax.ny.gov/jpit/efile/>. You must use the tax department website in order to not be charged a fee.

#SpeakUpWestchester Campaign Aims to Combat Hate Crimes

The recent increase in violence targeting Asian-Americans renewed the concern we have had regarding the increase in hate crimes in recent years. National, state and local statistics all show increases in bias crime and violence in recent years. Asian-Americans have been among those targeted.

The horrific scene of gun violence in Georgia, and recent incidences here in Westchester, are a reminder that we must condemn all acts of hate speech and violence.

Westchester County has initiated the #SpeakUpWestchester campaign to encourage residents to come forward if they are a victim of – or a witness to – a hate crime or bias incident. The Westchester Human Rights Commission has information about your rights available in multiple languages at their website <https://humanrights.westchestergov.com>

You can also file a complaint at their newly launched website: www.westchestergov.com/biasreporting and find the #SpeakUpWestchester graphic in different languages.

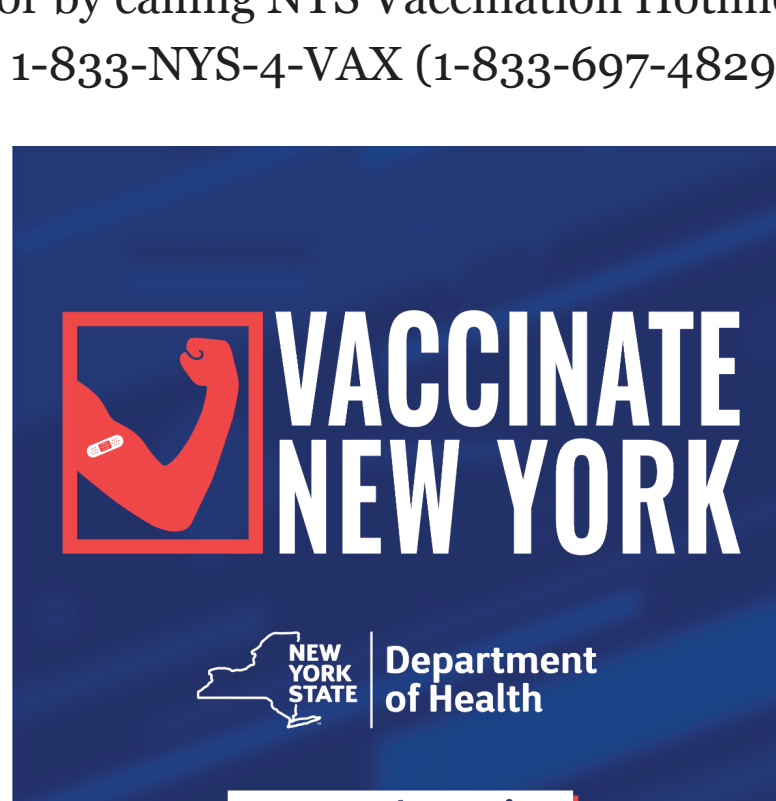
#SpeakUpWestchester

- Emergency assistance call 911
- Violent attack call local police department
- Bias or prejudice, call the Westchester County Human Rights Commission (914) 995-7710 or email HumanRights@westchestergov.com or visit www.westchestergov.com/biasreporting to report anonymously
- Hate crime or bias incident call Westchester County District Attorney at (914) 995-TIPS or visit www.WestchesterDA.net

NY State Covid-19 Vaccine Appointments

[Am I Eligible](#)

or by calling NYS Vaccination Hotline: 1-833-NYS-4-VAX (1-833-697-4829).



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