



Assemblymember

Vivian E. Cook

Reports to the People

Summer 2015

Dear Neighbors:

My greetings and best wishes are extended to you at this wonderful time of year. I am pleased to provide you with my summer news report and encourage you to take a moment to read it and share it with your friends and neighbors. This report contains highlights of the 2015-16 New York State \$150.3 billion Budget, as well as information about important legislation that was signed into law this year. This year's budget supports vital programs and services for New York's families and most vulnerable individuals, and also puts families first by restoring much-needed funding for our schools, making it possible for more students to achieve a college education. In addition, the budget funds numerous economic development projects to create more jobs while improving the quality of life for families across the state.

I am honored to have been reappointed by Speaker Carl Heastie as Chair of the Committee on Committees, which has oversight on all of the standing committees in the Assembly. I am also a ranking majority member of the Housing Committee, which is responsible for legislation concerning housing and housing preservation and governs a number of state programs, many of which directly affect Rochdale Village. In addition, I am the ranking member of the Committee on Ways and Means, Rules, Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, and Insurance. Over my years serving in the Assembly I'm proud to have had the opportunity to help ensure that the needs and concerns of the Southeast Queens community have been, and will continue to be, addressed, and to help secure funding for some of the many valuable programs and services at Rochdale Village, York College, Rockaway Boulevard Senior Center, Neighborhood Housing Services of Jamaica, and Brooks Senior Center, to name a few. I am proud of the vital services that these organizations provide to so many that depend on them.

In closing, if you are in need of any further information or assistance you are welcome to call or stop by my office and we will be happy to assist you. I hope that you enjoy a happy and healthy summer.

Sincerely,

Vivian E. Cook

Highlights of the New York State Budget

Assemblymember Cook announced that the 2015-16 state budget puts families first by restoring much-needed funding for our schools, making it possible for more students to achieve a college education and helping New York's struggling families. The \$150.3 billion plan also funds numerous economic development projects to create more jobs and continues the state's fiscal discipline by holding spending growth to less than 2 percent for the fifth consecutive year.

"Enacting a good budget means making sure that the priorities important to New York's families are put first," Assemblymember Cook said. "The Assembly Majority stood up for the programs that make a difference in people's lives and secured needed investments that will make New York a stronger place to live, work and do business."

Investing in our schools

"When it comes to our schools, students have to be our top priority. We must be doing everything we can to ensure they are getting the quality education they deserve," said Assemblymember Cook. "By securing critical increases in funding to ensure our schools have the resources they need, this budget puts students first."

The budget secures a \$1.6 billion increase in education aid over last year, for a total of \$23 billion.

This includes:

- a \$19 million increase to support grants for a total of \$90 million;
- a school aid run increase of nearly \$1.3 billion, which includes \$428 million for Foundation Aid;
- \$603 million to cover more than 50 percent of the remaining Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA);
- \$269 million to fully reimburse districts for expenses they have incurred such as transportation and BOCES;
- \$75 million in grants for struggling schools;
- \$20 million in grants, including aid for libraries, teacher centers and bilingual education; and
- \$2.3 million to support a rate increase for 4201 schools for a total of \$98.5 million.

The funding is tailored to support the schools that need it most, with 68.5 percent going to high-need districts, 25.7 percent going to average-need districts, and 5.8 percent going to low-need districts.

To help students attending nonpublic schools, the final budget adds \$7.9 million in Comprehensive Attendance Policy funding. Total nonpublic aid in the budget is \$171.4 million.

Additionally, the budget includes a \$30 million increase in pre-K funding for 3- and 4-year-olds, while protecting last year's pre-K investment in New York City.

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Welcome to Albany - York College



Assemblymember Cook meets with York College Department of Social Work students, President Marcia Keizs, and faculty who traveled to the Legislature on their annual lobby day in Albany.

Rejecting drastic changes

“The negotiation process that comes along with passing a state budget unfortunately makes it impossible for us to just strip out what we disagree with. We fought tooth and nail and were able to achieve concessions,” said Assemblymember Cook.

The executive proposed an unrealistic teacher evaluation plan that amounted to an attack on teachers. The Assembly Majority worked around the clock to negotiate changes to his original plan and blunt some of the damage. While districts will still be responsible for conducting their own evaluations, the Assembly Majority fought and won a deal so the Board of Regents – a panel of education experts – is required to provide parameters for these evaluations. This agreement will help ensure that students are really learning and that teachers aren’t just teaching to the test, Assemblymember Cook added.

Building the Higher Education Road to Success

The 2015-16 state budget implements the Higher Education Road to Success by making access to college a priority. Earlier this year, the Assembly Majority unveiled this initiative aimed at increasing the number of students enrolling in, and completing degrees at, colleges and universities. The Higher Education Road to Success also sought to remove obstacles to attending college and invests in skill-development programs to help all students become qualified candidates to fill good-paying jobs in New York’s changing economy.

The plan invests in New York’s public higher education system and includes an increase in support for SUNY and CUNY community colleges of \$100 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, for a total of \$2,597 per FTE student – representing significant mandate relief for counties. Additionally, the agreement includes a 20 percent increase to opportunity programs at SUNY and CUNY, while opportunity programs administered by the State Education Department (SED) will see a 15 percent increase:

- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP): \$4.4 million increase for a total of \$26.8 million;
 - Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge Program (SEEK): \$3.9 million increase for a total of \$23.4 million;
 - Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP): \$3.8 million increase for a total of \$29.6 million;
 - Liberty Partnerships: \$1.9 million increase for a total of \$15.3 million;
 - Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP): \$1.7 million increase for a total of \$13.1 million;
 - Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP): \$1.3 million increase for a total of \$9.9 million; and
 - College Discovery: \$187,000 increase for a total of \$1.1 million.
- The agreement supports SUNY programs as follows:**
- \$18.6 million restoration for SUNY hospitals to help support New York’s world-class teaching hospitals;
 - \$8.5 million for ATTAIN work-training computer labs – a \$500,000 increase from last year;
 - \$1.5 million increase to Educational Opportunity Centers, for a total of \$53.5 million;
 - \$1.5 million for the Graduate Achievement Placement program; and
 - \$600,000 for the SUNY Graduate Diversity Program, for a total of \$6.6 million.

The budget supports CUNY programs as follows:

- \$2.5 million for the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP), which aims to help motivated community college students earn their degrees as quickly as possible. The ASAP graduation rate is more than three times the national three-year graduation rate for urban community colleges;
- \$500,000 more for CUNY LEADS, a specially designed academic and career program for students with disabilities, for a total of \$1.5 million in funding; and
- \$250,000 for CUNY Pipeline to help bring more diversity to graduate programs.

In an effort to ensure that the buildings and classrooms students learn in are world-class, the budget provides \$605 million in capital funding for SUNY and \$181 million in capital funding for CUNY.

Additionally, the 2015-16 state budget includes \$5 million for a new New York AIMS Merit Scholarship Program, \$5 million for the Get On Your Feet Loan Forgiveness Program, \$1.4 million to allow disabled students greater access to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), a \$250,000 increase for the Social Worker Loan Forgiveness Program, for a total of \$1.5 million, and a \$50,000 increase for the Farmer Loan Forgiveness Program, for a total of \$150,000.

The budget also requires schools to use a Standard Financial Aid award letter, which includes the four-year estimated cost of attendance to help make the costs of college clear to students and parents.

“Every student in New York should have the opportunity to obtain a college education – it’s that simple,” Assemblymember Cook said. “The Assembly Majority’s Higher Education Road to Success is a



Assemblymember Cook meets Actor and Civil Rights Activist Danny Glover, guest speaker at the 2015 NYS Association of Black and Puerto Rican Legislators annual conference.

firm commitment to our children that we will work to ease barriers to college and help them reach their full potential.”

Investing in economic development

“The budget builds on the progress we’ve made to strengthen our economy as it recovers from the recession,” said Assemblymember Cook. “By continuing to invest in our communities and our workforce, we’ll help ensure sustainable economic growth.”

The final budget includes \$1.5 billion in economic development funding for the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, along with \$200 million over three years in grants to local governments whose sewers and water mains are in need of repair or replacement. It also includes \$400 million over five years for a new Regional Significant Infrastructure Program to promote local economic development through workforce development, manufacturing, agriculture and tourism initiatives. Additionally, \$385 million is included for a state and municipal capital program.

To help each region capitalize on its unique strengths, the state budget includes funding increases of:

- \$1.28 million for Centers of Excellence research facilities at public universities across New York, totaling \$1 million for each of the 10 centers;
- \$1 million for New York State incubators, for a total of \$6 million for the New York State Business Incubator and Innovation Hot Spot Program;
- \$500,000 for the Centers for Advanced Technology, for a total of \$14.32 million; and
- \$500,000 for local tourism matching grants, for a total of \$4.32 million.

The final budget includes \$365,000 in additional funding for the Minority- and Women-owned Business Development and Lending Program, for a total of \$1 million. The budget also requires the MWBE Disparity Study to be completed in six months. In addition, funding has been provided to create seven full-time positions at the Department of Economic Development in an effort to increase participation by Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs) in state contracting.

The 2015-16 spending plan also provides an additional \$1.5 million for the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), for a total of \$3.45 million. Through a network of regional centers, the SBDC provides business counseling and training to New Yorkers looking to start a business or further develop an existing business.

Further, the final budget includes an additional \$300,000 – for a total of \$1.8 million – for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which facilitate loans to small businesses that may otherwise not qualify for a bank loan and provide counseling for small-business owners.

The final budget maintains funding for the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPs) and the Marchiselli Highway Improvement Program and sets forth an additional \$50 million for extreme weather recovery across the state.

“This year’s harsh winter has taken its toll on so many roads and bridges throughout the state,” Assemblymember Cook said. “The budget invests in making repairs to our transportation infrastructure to ensure safe, reliable travel for our families while creating jobs.”

Increasing access to affordable child care

“There’s no reason anyone should ever have to choose between their child and their job, but increasingly, New Yorkers – especially

women – are being forced to make this decision,” said Assemblymember Cook. “This budget will help make quality child care more affordable and accessible to the families that need it most.”

The Assembly Child Care Workgroup, created in 2013, conducted several roundtables to examine the causes and effects of New York’s child care crisis, as well as develop ideas to expand and improve the state’s child care system.

Based on the findings and recommendations from the Child Care Workgroup, the budget agreement includes nearly \$34 million to improve our child care system and ensure more families have access to the quality, affordable child care they deserve. The following measures would be funded at:

- \$5 million to provide support for 600 child care slots;
- \$19.3 million for the Advantage Afterschool Program;
- \$9.3 million for Facilitated Enrollment to expand eligibility for child care assistance to working families with incomes up to 275 percent of the federal poverty level, allowing parents to stay employed while their children are cared for in safe environments;
- \$1.3 million increase for SUNY Child Care Centers, for a total of \$2.3 million; and
- \$1 million for CUNY Child Care Centers, for a total of \$1.8 million.

The budget also includes \$7.5 million – including \$1 million the governor planned to cut – for the Agri-Business Child Development (ABCD) program, which provides subsidized child care for migrant farmworkers and ensures every eligible child receives quality educational, health and social services.

Preserving vital family programs and services

The Assembly remains committed to helping New Yorkers in need. The 2015-16 budget restores \$24 million in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) aid for every program eliminated in the governor’s original budget proposal. The agreement funds the following vital programs at:

- \$3 million for Non-Residential Domestic Violence Services to assist domestic violence victims not residing in shelters;
- \$1.6 million for the Displaced Homemakers program to provide counseling and job training to homemakers to help them secure employment and become economically independent;
- \$1.6 million for Preventive Services to provide prevention, intervention and treatment services to keep families together and children safe;
- \$1.5 million for Career Pathways to provide training to low-income young adults to prepare them for jobs in high-growth sectors;
- \$1 million for the Emergency Needs for the Homeless program to address homelessness and offer essential services to those in need; and
- \$1 million for the Kinship Caregiver program to help caregivers access health, education, financial and legal services for children in their care.

“Families who fall on tough times need a strong safety net while they work to get back on their feet,” Assemblymember Cook said. “In the richest country in the world, no one should be left without the basics: food, clothing and shelter. The Assembly Majority has always stood by the most vulnerable members of our society, because everyone deserves a helping hand during their time of need.”

Expanding access to affordable housing

“Housing is a basic necessity, something many of us take for granted. But unfortunately, too many families are struggling to find safe, affordable homes,” said Assemblymember Cook. “This year’s budget invests in our communities and expands affordable housing options.”

The budget provides \$415.6 million for housing and community development programs, allotting \$225 million for repair and rehabilitation programs, including:

- \$100 million for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) capital repairs, while also requiring the NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal and NYCHA to develop a plan detailing how the funds will be used; and
- \$25 million for Mitchell-Lama Repair and Revitalization.

It also provides \$34.7 million for community development programs and \$155.5 million for affordable housing programs, including \$25 million for the Restore NY Communities initiative and \$9.7 million for the Main Street Program.

The budget agreement includes \$20.3 million for Neighborhood and Rural Preservation programs. And it restores \$742,000 in funding to the New York City Housing Authority Tenant Watch Program.

Responding to New York’s homelessness crisis

“We’re facing a homeless crisis here in New York, and we need to take immediate action to address it and prevent more families from losing their homes,” Assemblymember Cook said. “The initiatives included in the state budget will help ensure more New Yorkers have



Assemblymember Cook, seated at her desk in the Assembly Chamber where she votes on bills that may become law, takes a moment to speak to Mr. Omar McGill, Assembly Page.

access to safe, stable places to live, because no one should be forced to sleep on the street.”

The 2015-16 state budget provides nearly \$440 million for homelessness services and programs over the next four years, including:

- \$220 million to provide rental subsidies for domestic violence victims, seniors and families struggling to afford rent;
- \$124.5 million to provide services that allow individuals to live independently in supportive housing outside the homeless shelter system;
- \$40 million for the Living in Communities (LINC) program, which provides rental subsidies for working families living in shelters;
- \$34.2 million for shelter, transitional housing and homelessness prevention programs;
- \$15 million for a new pilot program in New York City aimed at preventing evictions by increasing housing allowances;
- \$4.5 million to assist runaway and homeless youth; and
- \$1 million for emergency homeless needs.

Continuing the fight for accessible, affordable health care

“Quality, affordable health care is a right that should be guaranteed to each and every New Yorker,” Assemblymember Cook said. “No one should be left to fend for themselves when they fall ill or need lifesaving treatment. This budget helps ensure people get the high-quality care they deserve when they need it most.”

Thanks to the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), 2 million New Yorkers now have health insurance through the state’s health care exchange. And, to ensure more New Yorkers can afford health care, the final budget implements the Basic Health Program, which would be available under the ACA. The program would provide insurance to people whose incomes are between 133 and 200 percent of the federal poverty level and are therefore not eligible for Medicaid. The Basic Health Program would expand affordable health insurance to approximately 438,000 New Yorkers.

“The Affordable Care Act has been a huge success in New York in improving our health care system, but we must keep striving to increase access to lifesaving health care services,” Assemblymember Cook said.

In an effort to help the poor and elderly, the final budget restores \$78.9 million to Medicaid, and \$10.7 million to preserve spousal refusal, which protects couples from losing their life savings in the event that a spouse requires long-term care. In 2013, the median yearly cost of staying in a long-term care facility in New York State was \$125,732, and these costs can be ruinous for seniors on a fixed income.

Further, the final budget rejects the governor’s proposal to greatly reduce pharmacy reimbursements, which would have resulted in severe consequences for providers that care for the neediest individuals in our state.

“For the sick and elderly, being able to purchase affordable, effective prescription drugs can be a matter of life and death,” Assemblymember Cook said. “We worked to keep those costs down so a choice doesn’t need to be made between buying vital prescription drugs and putting food on the table.”

Moreover, the final budget rejects the governor’s proposal to permit private equity to be invested in as many as five hospitals. Currently, hospitals are only allowed to be not-for-profits. Allowing corporate investment and ownership of hospitals may lead to incentivizing profits over the well-being of patients. In addition, \$355 million is provided for rural health care facilities to facilitate mergers with larger hospitals.

“Hospitals should be committed to giving patients the best quality of care, not turning a profit,” said Assemblymember Cook. “Allow

ing corporate investment would incentivize cost-cutting instead of focusing on patients. Cut-rate care won't cut it for New Yorkers.”

The Assembly Majority understands the importance of combating the growing heroin and opioid epidemic devastating communities across our state. That's why the final budget includes an additional \$1 million – on top of the \$7.8 million in the governor's budget – to support opiate abuse prevention and treatment services, as well as an additional \$2 million to be used to hire additional substance abuse prevention and intervention specialists. The budget also provides that schools will be able to have employees trained to administer opioid overdose treatments to someone experiencing an overdose.

Demonstrating a strong commitment to vital public health programs, the final budget includes:

- a \$21.3 million restoration for 39 discrete health programs that would have had their funding cut by 15 percent and been restructured into five grant pools, including:
 - \$6.8 million for public health workforce programs;
 - \$5.5 million for maternal and child health programs;
 - \$5.5 million for chronic disease prevention and control programs; and
 - \$2.6 million for health outcomes and advocacy programs.
- \$4 million (\$1 million more than the governor's proposal) for the Nurse Family Partnership, a community health program that assists first-time and low-income mothers;
- \$3.3 million for the Enhancing the Quality of Adult Living (EQUAL) program to improve quality of care for residents of adult care facilities;
- an additional \$1.5 million for the Spinal Cord Injury Research Program to encourage innovative research into the treatment and cure of paralysis and damage caused by spinal cord injury, for a total funding of \$8.5 million;
- \$2 million to support infertility services;
- a \$1.2 million restoration to save the New York State physician profile website, which allows New Yorkers to search for licensed doctors that fit their needs, as well as learn more about their current doctor, including any malpractice or other claims against them;
- \$750,000 in additional support for family planning services;
- \$525,000 for the HIV/AIDS Community Service Program (CSP);

- \$525,000 for HIV/AIDS Multi-Service Agencies (MSA);
- \$500,000 for Community Health Advocates;
- \$400,000 for the Primary Care Development Corporation;
- \$200,000 for the National Lymphatic and Tissue Bank;
- \$50,000 for the New York State Breast Cancer Network; and
- \$39,000 for the New York State Coalition for School-Based Health Centers.

Strengthening NY's criminal justice system

The Assembly Majority held a public hearing on the need for criminal justice reform and plans further hearings with community leaders, law enforcement officials, legal experts and other stakeholders to ensure that these important issues are discussed in an open and transparent forum and to develop meaningful reforms.

The final state budget invests in legal services that safeguard access to justice for at-risk populations. The agreement includes the following:

- a total of \$12.27 million to support various legislative restorations, including \$1 million for the New York State Defenders Association;
- \$5.58 million in the Legal Services Assistance Fund, including \$2.8 million for civil and criminal legal services grants and \$1.2 million for Prisoners' Legal Services;
- \$2.2 million for domestic violence-related civil and criminal legal services support;
- \$715,267 for alternative to incarceration programs;
- \$600,000 to support immigrant legal services; and
- \$600,000 for Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants.

“Ensuring fairness and justice within our criminal justice system is essential to keeping our communities safe,” Assemblymember Cook stated. “These investments will help restore faith in our legal system while protecting public safety.”

Supporting our veterans

The final budget includes \$350,000 for the Veterans Entrepreneurial Assistance Program to provide veterans the training they need to start a new business.

“Our veterans and their families have made unimaginable sacrifices to defend our freedoms,” Assemblymember Cook said. “Now it's time we look out for them and provide them with the opportunities and support they need to get ahead.”

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



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