

## **Assemblyman Thiele: State Budget Moves New York Forward**

Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. (I, D, WF, WE- Sag Harbor) announced that he helped pass a \$153.1 billion 2017-18 state budget that makes a significant commitment to ensuring every New Yorker has clean drinking water, invests in public education, and funds a first-in-the-nation free tuition plan to help students go to college.

“This year’s state budget is so much more than a spending plan – it’s a detailed blueprint to move our state forward,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “From making sure the wealthy pay their fair share, to strengthening our kids’ education, this budget continues our progress and proves we’re committed to innovation, opportunity and supporting those that need a helping hand. This budget funds our shared New York values.”

### **Investing in clean water, rebuilding crumbling infrastructure**

The budget provides \$2.5 billion for water infrastructure to help ensure clean drinking water by repairing and replacing old pipes and water mains, as well as preventive measures, such as source water land acquisition, to keep water from becoming polluted.

“We should never have to worry that the water coming out of our faucets and drinking fountains is anything but safe for our children,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “Contaminated, dirty water can have devastating long-term effects, causing illnesses and hurting development, and we need to prevent that. We have to be proactive on something this important.”

The funding for water infrastructure, which is a \$500 million increase over the executive proposal, includes:

- \$1 billion for the 2017 Water Infrastructure Improvement Act to help municipalities upgrade their drinking and wastewater infrastructure;
- \$350 million for clean water infrastructure projects after 2021;
- \$245 million for water quality improvement projects;
- \$150 million for inter-municipal water infrastructure grants;
- \$130 million for drinking water remediation and mitigation of contaminated drinking water;
- \$110 million for land acquisition projects for source water protection;
- \$100 million for municipal water quality infrastructure programs;
- \$75 million for upgrades and replacements of septic systems and cesspools;
- \$50 million for green infrastructure projects;
- \$50 million for concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs);
- \$20 million for the replacement of lead drinking water service lines;
- \$10 million for a water infrastructure emergency loan fund; and
- \$10 million for IT system upgrades related to mapping technologies.

### **Investing in our schools and our children**

The 2017-18 state budget increases education aid by \$1 billion for a total of \$25.7 billion, a 4.1 percent increase from last year’s budget, reaffirming the Assembly Majority’s unrelenting commitment to putting every student on their path to success. The budget also increases Foundation Aid by \$700 million for a total of \$17.2 billion.

“Education is the great equalizer, but to make that a reality we need to keep driving funding to our schools,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “This year’s state budget does just that – it invests in our kids and eliminates barriers so that every student can get an education that helps shape their future.”

The budget includes a \$50 million increase in Community Schools Aid for a total of \$150 million. This funding allows schools to be converted into community schools that deliver valuable services to both students and families, including offering critical support to at-risk children, strengthening neighborhoods and preventing the schools from being taken over by the state.

Additionally, the budget provides:

- \$817 million in total funding for prekindergarten programs;
- \$35 million for after-school programs;
- \$5 million to expand half-day and full-day prekindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds in high-need school districts;
- \$2 million for Advance Placement (AP) Test Assistance;
- \$2 million for the Master Teachers Program;
- \$400,000 for Excellence in Teaching Awards; and
- \$300,000 for cyberbullying prevention.

“There’s truly no better investment than one in our kids,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “By giving our schools the funding and resources they need, we can protect vital education programs and help our kids learn, grow and get ahead.”

### **Giving students a needed boost**

“For too many students, hurdles outside of the classroom stand between them and the future they want and deserve,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “We’re committed to making sure those struggles don’t get in the way of their success, because every young person should get a fair shot.”

The budget provides \$16.7 million for Early College High School programs, which help at-risk students earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree.

To further strengthen education services, the budget includes:

- \$103 million in funding for 4201 schools for the blind and deaf;
- \$20 million for Teacher Resource and Computer Training Centers – an increase of \$5.7 million;
- \$1.5 million in restorations for the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE), for a total of \$13 million, to provide career training and job placement services, as well as \$250,000 for an enhanced credentialing program;
- \$1 million to restore funding for adult literacy education, for a total of \$7.3 million; and
- \$1.2 million for regional community schools technical centers.

In addition, the budget provides \$25 million for technology projects at nonpublic schools and \$25 million for security upgrades to nonpublic schools, community centers and daycare facilities at risk of hate crimes or attacks. The budget also provides nonpublic schools \$5 million to hire STEM teachers and \$7 million for costs related to complying with immunization requirements, along with an \$8 million increase for nonpublic school aid.

The Assembly also rejected the executive proposal to allow any school district to apply for waivers from certain special education requirements because all kids deserve a sound education.

### **Protecting public libraries**

Public libraries are essential neighborhood assets, offering everything from books and educational materials, to technology and job search tools to community programs, noted Assemblyman Thiele.

The budget restores aid to public libraries by \$9 million to ensure they can continue to provide services and resources to residents, for a total of \$95.6 million. In addition, the budget provides an increase of \$10 million in capital funding for a total of \$24 million.

### **Implementing the Excelsior Scholarship, supporting state colleges and universities**

The 2017-18 state budget makes a substantial investment in SUNY schools and helps expand access to higher education through scholarship and opportunity programs.

“Working families in New York State and across the nation are seeing the costs of a college education soar as the need for a college degree to access good-paying jobs has never been greater,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “This year’s budget allows eligible students to attend public colleges and universities tuition free, helping even more young people make their college dreams come true.”

The state budget provides funding to establish the Excelsior Scholarship, a groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind initiative to make SUNY schools tuition-free for New Yorkers who earn less than \$125,000 annually. Students who attend a private college in New York and earn less than \$125,000 annually would also be eligible for a scholarship award of \$6,000.

The budget also includes \$100 million for SUNY in capital funding for maintenance and expansion purposes. Further, the state budget allocates \$450 million for SUNY for critical maintenance. To help students and their families meet the rising, non-tuition costs of college, the budget includes \$8 million to help SUNY develop online educational resources to help alleviate the high cost of textbooks for students.

“The SUNY program receives much-needed funding in the state budget so they can continue to do great work educating and nurturing the leaders of tomorrow,” said Assemblyman Thiele.

To ensure community colleges can continue helping its students get ahead, the budget allocates \$6.2 million to SUNY community colleges for an increase of \$50 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, for a total of \$2,747 per FTE student. The budget also includes \$3.1 million for a new scholarship program for part-time students attending SUNY community colleges so students with family or other responsibilities can finish school on their own schedules.

The budget restores \$1.5 million for SUNY GAP to help provide remediation to community college students. The budget also restores \$1.1 million to SUNY child care centers.

In addition, the final state budget funds a host of other SUNY-led programs, including:

- \$87.9 million for SUNY Health Science Centers to help support top-notch teaching hospitals across the state;
- \$60 million for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), a restoration of \$5 million; and
- \$6.5 million for Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) labs, a restoration of \$2 million.

The budget also requires the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) to complete a college affordability study examining student loan debt relief and student loan refinancing options as well as affordability initiatives to help find ways to reduce the cost of student textbooks, transportation and housing.

### **Supporting college opportunity programs**

The 2017-18 state budget restores \$23.8 million for opportunity programs:

- Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP): \$35.5 million, a restoration of \$5.9 million;
- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP): \$32.2 million, a restoration of \$5.3 million;
- Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge program (SEEK): \$28.1 million, a restoration of \$4.6 million;
- Liberty Partnerships: \$18.4 million, a restoration of \$3 million;
- Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP): \$15.8 million, a restoration of \$2.6 million;
- Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP): \$11.9 million, a restoration of \$1.9 million; and
- College Discovery Program: \$1.3 million, a restoration of \$225,000.

The Foster Youth College Success Initiative is funded at \$4.5 million, a \$1.5 million restoration and a \$1.5 million increase to help foster youth attend and succeed in college.

### **Ensuring the wealthy pay their fair share**

To ensure New York’s wealthiest continue to pay their fair share, the 2017-18 budget extends the state millionaires’ tax for two years. It was set to expire at the end of this year. Revenue from the tax is crucial to funding important services and programs throughout the state, including public education and infrastructure improvements. Although arguments have been made that the millionaires’ tax encourages the wealthy to pack up and move out of state, just the opposite has been true. The number of New York millionaires has increased by 63 percent since 2009, when the tax was first implemented.<sup>1</sup>

“I fought to extend the millionaires’ tax, because with income inequality continuing to rise, we need to make the wealthy pay their fair share and do their part to help better fund our schools and vital programs,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “We’re all New Yorkers and we all want to see our state as strong as possible – this tax helps make that happen. That’s why I’ll continue the fight to also expand the tax.”

### **Tax policies to help the middle class**

The budget implements previously approved middle-class income tax cuts. It also enhances **the Child and Dependent Care Credit for taxpayers earning between \$50,000 and \$150,000. The credit is based on a sliding income scale for working parents who pay for child care or those who live with a spouse or dependent who is physically or mentally incapable of self-care.**

### **Combating the heroin epidemic**

Despite increased media attention and legislative action, the heroin and opioid epidemic continues to rage in communities across New York State. Between 2010 and 2014, the number of heroin- and opioid-related deaths increased by 47 percent.<sup>2</sup>

The 2017-18 state budget increases funding by \$43 million over last year – for a total of \$213 million – to fight the heroin epidemic and increase access to treatment for New Yorkers struggling with a substance abuse disorder. This funding supports a variety of treatment and prevention programs, including family support navigators, peer supports, recovery clubhouses and community coalitions, and \$10 million in additional capital support to increase the number of beds in in-patient treatment facilities.

“The heroin epidemic has affected families in every corner of the state,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “By increasing funding and targeting it to the right programs, we can ensure more people get the help they need to conquer their addiction.”

<sup>1</sup> democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/albany/2017/03/17/number-ny-millionaires-rose-63-since-2009/99311558

<sup>2</sup> lohud.com/story/news/politics/politics-on-the-hudson/2016/05/23/database-opioid-deaths-county/84786034

## **Protecting Medicaid and affordable care**

The final budget restores funding for Medicaid and other public health programs and addresses rising drug and health insurance costs so that more New Yorkers have access to the health care they need.

“An investment in public health makes New York stronger,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “I fought for these programs so families on Long Island’s East End are able to get the care they need without breaking the bank.”

The budget restores \$78.8 million in proposed reductions to Medicaid and restores \$37.6 million to public health programs. The measures:

- restore \$20.2 million to existing prescriber prevails provisions, which ensure patients and their doctors have the final say in choosing medication in managed care and fee-for-service plans;
- allocate \$14.6 million to restore the Essential Plan and reject proposed co-payment and premium increases;
- provide \$6.3 million to reject the executive proposal to limit coverage for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and increase OTC co-payments; and
- provide Medicaid coverage for donor breast milk for hospitalized, high-risk preterm infants who can’t receive breast milk from their mothers.

Further, the budget restores \$10 million in cuts to emergency rooms across New York State. It also provides \$10 million to support safety-net hospitals, which care for low-income and uninsured patients, \$10 million for critical access hospitals, which provide services in rural communities, and \$20 million for mental health facilities.

“The Assembly fought to ensure the hospitals that provide care to the most at-risk New Yorkers can continue serving their communities,” said Assemblyman Thiele.

The state budget also provides funding for a variety of public health priorities, including:

- \$1 million for Community Health Advocates, which helps New Yorkers understand their health insurance and access the health care services they need;
- over \$1 million for HIV/AIDS Community Service Programs (CSPs) and Multi Service Agencies (MSA);
- \$750,000 for Family Planning Services;
- \$500,000 for New Alternatives for Children;
- \$500,000 for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP);
- \$500,000 for the Diversity in Medicine Program;
- \$400,000 for the Primary Care Development Corporation (PCDC);
- \$300,000 for the LGBT Health and Human Services Network; and
- \$250,000 for the Nurse Family Partnership.

Additionally, the final budget provides \$150 million for a life sciences laboratory public health initiative to help construct new laboratory facilities or update existing ones to support life science research and innovation. It earmarks \$20 million for bioscience and neuroscience programs.

## **Supporting seniors’ health and well-being**

The 2017-18 state budget provides \$13.5 million to support long-term care, including restoring \$10 million to preserve spousal refusal, ensuring couples do not lose their life savings in the event a spouse becomes ill and needs nursing home care.

“A spouse who has to face the already devastating experience of moving a loved one out of their home and into a long-term care facility shouldn’t also have to give up their financial security,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “This program helps them keep their hard-earned savings to live on.”

Additionally, the budget includes:

- \$2.7 million to prevent limiting Managed Long Term Care eligibility to only those eligible for nursing homes; and
- \$750,000 to restore nursing home bed hold payments for therapeutic leave.

To protect seniors’ hard-earned and well-deserved property tax relief, the budget rejects the executive proposal to change the Enhanced STAR program by requiring all seniors eligible for the Enhanced STAR program to register with the state and participate in the Income Verification Program. Currently, though, seniors are able to register with their local assessor or register when they file their income tax returns – a process that is far easier and causes fewer headaches.

Further, the budget extends consumer protections, including access to a pre-foreclosure settlement conference, to homeowners with reverse mortgages to help more New Yorkers stay in their homes and protect their investments.

### **Investing in affordable, supportive housing statewide**

The state budget releases the long-awaited and hard-fought \$2.5 billion to combat homelessness across the state and fund programs for the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

“A secure, affordable place to live is vital to every family’s health and stability – particularly for children,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “The Assembly is committed to funding services and programs that help ensure all New Yorkers have a place to call home.”

The budget provides \$2.5 billion for affordable housing and anti-homelessness initiatives, much of which was appropriated last year but could only be released once a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was agreed to. The budget releases this money and provides:

- \$1 billion for supportive housing to construct 6,000 or more units statewide, including \$50 million in operating aid;
- \$472 million for the Multifamily New Construction Program;
- \$150 million for the Middle-Income Housing Program;
- \$146 million for the Multifamily Preservation Program;
- \$125 million for public housing authorities outside New York City;
- \$125 million for senior housing;
- \$45 million for the Rural and Urban Community Investment Fund Program;
- \$41 million for home ownership programs;
- \$13 million for the Manufactured Homes Program; and
- \$10 million for the Main Street Program, which helps fund preservation efforts in historic neighborhoods.

The budget increases funds for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NNORCs) for a total of \$2 million, which help keep seniors in the homes and neighborhoods where they have built friendships and support networks. For the second year in a row, the Assembly has led the way, including these programs in our one-house budget and ensuring it was enacted in the final budget, noted Assemblyman Thiele.

“Seniors who stay in their own homes, with adequate support, are less likely to need expensive nursing home care,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “They also bring stability and vitality to our neighborhoods.”

## **Being Fair to Direct Care**

“From giving a voice to those who cannot speak, to lending a helping hand so that individuals with developmental disabilities can complete daily tasks with as much independence as possible, direct care workers devote themselves to others,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “They are selfless, hardworking and kind, and they serve as a lifeline to the families who depend on them. Unfortunately, many are forced to leave the field and the people they so nobly care for due to low wages.”

Low wages have left direct care workers struggling to get by and care for their own families, forcing them to leave the field, creating a staffing crisis. After the executive budget was released without any funding for a direct care worker wage increase, the Assembly fought to ensure that the final state budget dedicated \$14 million in 2017-18 and \$146 million in 2018-19 to fund a two-year, living wage initiative for direct care workers with the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

Direct care workers and direct support staff will receive a 3.25 percent raise on Jan. 1, 2018. Additionally, direct care workers, direct support staff and clinical staff will receive a 3.25 percent increase on April 1, 2018.

“They have the training, patience, and dedication to help our most vulnerable succeed, bring them happiness and lead better lives every day,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “Their assistance is vital to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities are integrated in the community. Now, we can start paying them the fair, living wage they deserve.”

## **Supporting human service programs**

In addition, the budget funds several mental health programs, including:

- \$10 million in capital support for children’s behavioral health;
- \$1.3 million to reject jail-based competency restoration, which would allow a defendant to be restored to mental competence in a jail facility rather than a hospital; and
- \$1 million restoration for crisis intervention teams.

The budget also provides \$20 million for nonprofit infrastructure improvements to help human services organizations make capital repairs to facilities and update technology.

## **Protecting communities from environmental contamination**

The final budget’s \$300 million investment in the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) reflects the Assembly’s continued commitment to protecting our environment, with increased attention on environmental justice by addressing inequities caused by environmental damage to poor and disadvantaged communities.

“We can’t turn a blind eye to the damage that’s been inflicted on our most vulnerable communities,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “We’re just beginning to understand the long-term effects unfair project siting has on low-income communities and the effect it has on the future of our children.”

To that end, the final budget includes:

- \$8 million for environmental justice programs – an increase of \$1 million over the executive budget; and
- \$500,000 for green jobs and renewable energy training in environmental justice communities.

It also increases the state match for local waterfront revitalization programs from 50 percent to 85 percent for environmental justice communities.

The EPF investment also includes:

- \$36.3 million for land acquisition – an increase of \$3.3 million over the executive budget; and
- \$13 million for invasive species – an increase of \$1 million over the executive budget.

### **Investing in clean energy**

The budget provides \$23 million for clean energy tax credits to encourage progress toward our energy goals. To further support the green economy, 21<sup>st</sup>-century technology and help protect the environment, the budget extends the Alternative Fuels and Electric Vehicle Recharging Property credit for an additional five years to encourage the use of more environmentally friendly cars.

Additionally, the Legislature plans to hold a joint hearing on the issue of charging subsidies to save nuclear power plants. The Public Service Commission (PSC) and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) have been asked to speak at a hearing to discuss the purpose of the fee and how it might impact poor and fixed-income ratepayers. The executive has agreed to have the PSC appear at a hearing on the Clean Energy Standard by April 30.

The executive and Legislature also agreed to establish an Indian Point Closure Task Force to assess the various impacts of the plant's closure, to evaluate programs to mitigate adverse consequences and conduct a reutilization study.

### **Helping New Yorkers get where they're going quickly, safely**

“Our infrastructure is at the heart of our community and economy,” Assemblyman Thiele said. “This budget makes significant investments to protect the safety and reliability of our roadways and bridges so people have peace of mind when they're traveling on them.”

The budget provides \$65 million for the Extreme Weather Recovery Program, distributed through the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Program (CHIPs) formula, to help local governments pay for road and bridge improvements without burdening local taxpayers. When combined with CHIPs, the Marchiselli program and Pave NY, total funding for the state's local highway system is \$643 million. The budget also increases the state Department of Transportation (DOT) Road and Bridge Capital Plan by \$130 million. This will help ensure the safety and reliability of our infrastructure, as well as create good-paying jobs on Long Island's East End.

In addition, millions of New Yorkers rely on mass transportation, and the ridership is only growing. The budget provides \$20 million for non-MTA transit system capital projects and \$10 million in non-MTA transit system operating assistance.

### **Creating jobs, investing in economic development**

The Excelsior Jobs Program offers incentives for businesses to expand in and relocate to New York State by providing tax credits to firms making a substantial commitment to growth through either increased employment or through capital investment in a New York facility. However, the program is highly underutilized due to impractical thresholds for job creation and capital investment that firms must meet in order to qualify for the tax credits. The budget makes more businesses eligible for the incentives to relocate and invest in New York by making the thresholds more realistic and attainable.

Additionally, under current law, participants in the Excelsior Jobs Program are eligible for a research and development tax credit for eligible expenditures. The budget doubles the cap, allowing businesses to further take advantage of the program as well as expand their ability to grow and create jobs.



And to help ensure workers have the skills needed for good, available jobs, the budget expands the Employee Training Incentive Credit Program to make it easier for companies to include worker training as part of their expansion projects. It also extends the Youth Works Job Program for five years with \$50 million in funding, with \$10 million dedicated to an apprenticeship program.

“These are exactly the type of actions we need to make to show that New York is open for business,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “We’re investing in the booming industries that will define the future and making it a priority to train workers for the jobs that will pay well and help our economy grow.”

Further, the budget provides \$70 million for the Restore New York Communities Initiative, which helps municipalities revitalize commercial and residential properties and transform neighborhoods. It also provides \$385 million for the State and Municipal Facilities Program to improve infrastructure, enhance neighborhoods and make vital improvements to our communities.

### **Supporting agriculture**

The final state budget restores and increases funding for an array of programs to support the agriculture industry and lessen the burden of rising costs and other issues farmers and food producers face. The budget also provides a 25 percent tax credit on qualified food donations that farms make to food banks, up to \$5,000 per year.

“When hardworking farmers and their families succeed, it is good for our economy and it is good for our communities,” said Assemblyman Thiele.

### **Keeping New Yorkers safe**

With the rise in hate crimes in recent months, the state budget establishes a Hate Crimes Task Force in New York to prevent, investigate and detect hate crimes, as well as issue reports to combat these crimes and other forms of discrimination.

The budget also restores \$600,000 for the Edward Byrne Memorial/Justice Assistance Grants.

Further, the budget restores a total of \$4.3 million in Legal Services Assistance Fund support, including \$2.8 million for civil and criminal legal services grants, and almost \$3.2 million in domestic violence-related civil and criminal legal services support.

“In order for our justice system to work for any, it must work for all,” said Assemblyman Thiele. “Equality and fairness are the bedrocks of our society.”