

Dear Neighbor:

This year marked the 236th Legislative Session, which convened on January 9, 2013. I am pleased to report the passage of the 2013-14 state budget, which closes a \$1.4 billion budget gap and increases the state's minimum wage, bolsters education funding, invests in critical job creation programs, and cuts taxes for middle-class families and small businesses. The spending plan totals \$141.3 billion, which includes federal funds for Superstorm Sandy cleanup and the adoption of the Affordable Care Act. Absent the federal funding, the budget totals \$135.1 billion, an increase of \$1 billion, which is below 1 percent spending growth.

This was another early adoption of the state budget, which provides a balanced spending plan that delivers for hardworking New Yorkers. The budget addresses fundamental issues facing our families, including the Assembly Majority's longtime commitment to increasing the state's minimum wage and providing our schools the necessary funding for our children to receive a quality education. Also, by stimulating job creation and bringing tax relief to middle-class families and small businesses, we are ushering in a stronger, more successful economic recovery throughout New York. I am also pleased to report that the Legislature passed a bill to restore cuts made to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. Restoring the funding was vital to helping non-profit organizations deliver desperately needed services to some of New York's most vulnerable citizens.

I hope that by reading this newsletter you acquire relevant and timely information regarding the New York State Budget and the many programs and services for which it provides. As always, you are welcome to call or stop by my office should you need any assistance or further information. Best wishes for a safe and enjoyable summer.

Sincerely,



Vivian E. Cook

## Lobby Day in Albany



Assemblymember Cook is pleased to meet with York College students and faculty on their annual social work advocacy day in Albany. Assemblymember Cook is a long-time supporter of York College and is pleased to help provide funding for many of its projects and educational programs.



Assemblymember Cook meets annually with representatives of the United Federation of Teachers to discuss their Legislative agenda and issues of importance.



Marcia V. Keizs, President of York College, and York College administrators make a presentation to the Queens Delegation on the proposed Academic Village and Conference Center at York College. In photo, seated L-R, Dr. Marcia Keizs, President of York College, Assemblymember Cook and Earl Simons, standing L-R: Assemblymember Michele Titus, Assemblyman Michael Miller, Assemblymember Catherine Nolan, Assemblymember Barbara Clark, Assemblymember Nily Rozic, Ronald Thomas, Ashley Torres, Assemblymember Aravella Simotas, Assemblyman Ron Kim, and Assemblyman Jeffrion Aubry.



Assemblymember Cook was pleased to meet with representatives of the Flushing YMCA Youth Build program. Youth Build is a program that is designed to help at-risk youth earn their high school diplomas or GEDs, and provides counseling and job skills training.

# Assemblymember Cook Shares Highlights of the 2013-14 New York State Budget

This year's spending plan totals \$141.3 billion, including federal funds for Superstorm Sandy cleanup and the adoption of the Affordable Care Act. Without the federal funding spending totals \$135.1 billion. This is an increase of \$1 billion over last year's budget, and less than a one percent growth in spending.

## Investing in our children's educational future

The 2013-14 state budget increases school aid by \$436 million over the executive's budget proposal, or a \$936.6 million increase over last year. The spending plan also increases community college base aid by \$150 per-FTE student for the second year in a row.

"A community is only as strong as its schools. By increasing school aid we will be able to provide our children and young adults with a quality education, hold property taxes in check, and keep the dream of a college degree alive for more working families," stated Assemblymember Cook.

The budget provides \$20.8 billion in total Formula Base Aids for the 2013-14 school year, a \$936.6 million increase over the 2012-13 school year.

The budget also includes \$25 million for full-day and half-day pre-kindergarten grants. This new investment will allow for more full-day pre-K programs across the state and additional half-day pre-K slots.

Expressing her support for these programs, Assemblymember Cook stated, "Giving our children an earlier start to education better prepares them for the future. The Assembly Majority has been a major supporter of pre-K funding because studies show it helps children get ahead."

## Higher Education

The budget increases support to \$2,422 per-Full Time Equivalent (FTE) student at SUNY and CUNY community colleges. The base aid increase is \$150 per-FTE student, which is the second consecutive increase in community college base aid. The budget provides a total increase of \$9.3 million in base aid for CUNY community colleges.

"New York has one of the finest higher education systems in the nation. It is vital that we continue to grow our higher education system and improve infrastructure so students have quality places to learn," commented Assemblymember Cook.

The budget provides a 3 percent increase in funding for college opportunity programs, including:

- \$25 million to the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), an increase of \$728,040;
- \$21.7 million to the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), an increase of \$632,430;
- \$12.9 million to the Liberty Partnerships Program, an increase of \$376,250;
- \$11.1 million to the Science and Technology Entrance Program (STEP), an increase of \$324,030; and
- \$8.4 million to the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), an increase of \$245,520.

## Increased education funding to NYC schools

The 2013-14 state budget allocates \$8.28 billion to New York City Schools, an increase of \$363.9 million over last year and \$184.3 million more than the executive's budget proposal. The budget also restores \$240 million to New York City schools' base funding levels for the 2013-14 school year and ensures that a teacher evaluation system will be in place in subsequent school years, which will prevent students from being penalized in the future.

The budget also:

- restores \$183.2 million for NYC Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA);
- increases expense-based aids in NYC by over \$46 million;
- continues the phase-in of Foundation Aid and increases it in NYC by \$134.7 million over the executive budget; and
- provides \$15 million for Community Schools grants, which are designated schools that integrate the community into its curriculum such as health and mental health services.

## Increasing the state's minimum wage

The 2013-14 state budget increases the state's minimum wage to \$9.00 per hour by 2016. The wage will gradually increase over the next three years from \$7.25 to \$8.00 per hour on Dec. 31, 2013; to \$8.75 on Dec. 31, 2014; and then to \$9.00 per hour on Dec. 31, 2015.

Assemblymember Cook commented that, "New Yorkers overwhelmingly support raising the minimum wage because it is the right thing to do morally, and it will help jumpstart consumer spending and spur the economy. The Assembly Majority has led the fight to raise the wage, and soon, the thousands of hardworking families who depend on it will have a little more money in their pockets. This is a huge victory for not only minimum-wage employees, but also for workers across the state."

The increase to the minimum wage will directly benefit 925,000 New Yorkers currently earning below \$9.00 an hour, which is over 10 percent of the state's employed population.

"The Assembly Majority has led a strong fight to increase the minimum wage, voting last year to increase it to \$8.50 per hour and voting twice again this year to raise it to \$9.00 per hour. The issue has become a hot-button topic nationally, and with over 80 percent of New Yorkers showing their support for an increased minimum wage, the Assembly delivered the results that hardworking families expect and deserve," Assemblymember Cook noted.

## Keeping NY affordable for millions of hardworking families

To continue providing a fairer tax system in New York, the 2013-14 state budget extends the current tax rate first implemented in 2012, locking in the lowest tax rate for middle-class families in 60 years. "Approximately 4.4 million taxpayers, more than 99 percent of those filing statewide, benefited from \$690 million in tax relief stemming from the tax restructuring, which is why this multi-year extension is so critical for hardworking families," Assemblymember Cook noted.

The budget extends this middle-class tax cut for three additional years and pays for it by requiring those making over \$2 million per year – less than 1 percent of all New York residents – pay their fair share.

"By implementing a more progressive tax structure, we can continue to keep New York affordable for millions of families statewide," Assemblymember Cook said. "Asking the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share goes a long way to ensuring low- and middle-income New Yorkers a more secure future for years to come. Quite simply, it's the right thing to do."

## Tax credits signal NY means business

In a continued effort to make New York a friendlier place to do business and create jobs, the budget provides tax relief measures to the business community that will:

- phase out the 18-A utility assessment surcharge; by fiscal year 2017-18, the savings for utility customers will reach \$500 million; and
- provide a veterans' tax credit for businesses that hire veterans. For taxable years 2015 and 2016, this credit would be worth 10 percent of the wages paid to a qualified veteran during the first full year of employment or 15 percent of the wages if the veteran is disabled.

"By providing small businesses throughout the state with much-needed tax credits, we've sent a clear message: New York means business. This state budget puts money where it's needed, giving small businesses already operating in New York more breathing room, and giving new businesses a reason to call New York home," noted Assemblymember Cook.

## Renewing the promise to inner-city youth

The 2013-14 budget renews the inner-city youth employment program, providing a \$24 million tax credit over four years for employers who hire unemployed youth 16 to 24 years of age who reside in a city of more than 55,000 or a town of more than 480,000.

Assemblymember Cook noted, "The benefits of this tax credit are twofold, giving at-risk youth a chance to gain valuable work experience and helping the businesses that hire them with much-needed tax relief. For many, this could be a first job where they learn the value of working."

The program and credit will be available to employers in the clean energy, health care, advanced manufacturing and conservation industries. Eligible employers would receive up to \$4,000 per employee if they retain the worker for an entire year. The program will be extended through 2017.

## Boosting MWBEs and small businesses

The budget includes a \$365,000 increase to the Minority and Women-owned Business Development and Lending Program, for a total appropriation of \$1 million, and opens certain state programs to more small businesses.

"Over the past few years, New York State has secured its spot as a great place to do business, and the 2013-14 budget takes another step in the right direction," Assemblymember Cook said. "Our minority- and women-owned small businesses (MWBEs) are vital assets to Southeast Queens economy. The Assembly Majority is committed to keeping them up and running and encouraging more businesses to open their doors right here in New York."

Specifically, the budget authorizes MWBEs and other small businesses to access "bridge loans" for procurement purposes from the Small Business Revolving Loan Fund. Bridge loans are short-term loans that allow businesses more time to work out a long-term financing plan.

## Protecting unemployed workers and reducing costs for businesses

The 2013-14 budget gradually increases the weekly unemployment benefit from \$405 per week to 50 percent of the state's average weekly wage by Oct. 1, 2026.

"With our economy still making its way out of the worst recession since the Great Depression, protecting workers and those who can't find work is incredibly important," stated Assemblymember Cook.

Additionally, the budget adopts the federal expansion of the Shared Work Program, which helps prevent employees from losing their jobs by providing employers with an alternative to laying off workers.

To save businesses money and further jumpstart our economy, the budget reforms the Unemployment Insurance (UI) system to make it solvent in

2016. Employers will immediately save \$446.5 million annually and once the UI fund is solvent, there will be three additional benefits to businesses:

- UI Interest Assessment – businesses will no longer pay interest on the federal UI loan once the fund is solvent;
- Contribution Schedule – businesses will pay contribution rates that are up to 25 percent lower than they pay now; and
- Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) Reduction – businesses will see the federal unemployment tax rate cut in half.

"The Assembly Majority is continuing its commitment to lower costs for businesses and spur job growth," Assemblymember Cook said. "We'll continue looking for ways to free up money so businesses can hire."

## Creating jobs through NYSUNY 2020/NYCUNY 2020

The 2013-14 state budget contains \$55 million in capital funding for a third round of NYSUNY 2020 Challenge Grants. An additional \$55 million will be allocated to create a corresponding NYCUNY 2020 program to improve infrastructure and create jobs at CUNY campuses.

"Through the collaboration of our colleges and local businesses, the NYSUNY 2020 program has been successful in spurring innovation and creating jobs," Assemblymember Cook said. "A third round of grants and the creation of NYCUNY 2020 will build on the success we've already established."

## Offering tax credits that spur hiring of veterans

The 2013-14 state budget includes tax credits to boost employment among veterans, many of whom are suffering from joblessness. A newly established veterans' tax credit would be offered to businesses that hire veterans. For taxable years 2015 and 2016, this credit would be worth 10 percent of the wages paid to a qualified veteran during the first full year of employment or 15 percent of the wages if the veteran is disabled.

"We have an obligation to help take care of the veterans who honorably served our country," Assemblymember Cook continued. "Veterans are among the groups hardest hit by unemployment. These tax credits will help them get back to work."

## Investing in our community, protecting programs for at-risk youth

The 2013-14 budget combines the Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention (YDDP) program and the Special Delinquency Prevention Program (SDPP) into a single Youth Development Program, streamlining access to these funds for community service providers. The budget also restores \$1.3 million in funding for the Youth Development Program. Additionally, the budget reinstates funding for the following community-based initiatives:

- Community Reinvestment (\$1.75 million);
- Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children program (nearly \$1.65 million);
- Child Care Subsidies (\$1 million);
- Caseload Reduction (\$757,200);
- Runaway and Homeless Youth (\$254,456); and
- Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (\$200,000).

"These programs are fundamental to protecting our at-risk youth and investing in the improvement of our communities," Assemblymember Cook said. "This year's budget will provide thousands of at-risk youth safer alternatives than the streets and give them an opportunity to be successful."

## Strengthening housing programs

The 2013-14 budget provides \$10.07 million for the Neighborhood Preservation Program and \$4.2 million for the Rural Preservation Program, restoring funding to the 2012-13 state budget levels. The executive budget proposal provided combined funding for a merged preservation program at \$12.02 million.

The budget also allocates \$5.35 million for the Urban and Rural Community Investment Fund Program, providing funds for affordable housing and community revitalization efforts, Assemblymember Cook added.

Additionally, the budget restores \$742,000 in funding to the New York City Housing Authority Tenant Watch Program, continuing this program's commitment to help reduce crime in public-housing developments.

"As many working families are struggling to manage the rising cost of living on low wages, it's critical that we continue our longstanding commitment to provide options for affordable housing. With this vital funding, we are working to help keep a roof over more families' heads and stopping some from losing their homes completely," said Assemblymember Cook.

## Investing in vital health care programs

The 2013-14 state budget restores \$18 million across 89 critical public health programs, including tobacco prevention programs, family planning services, and school-based health centers. Further, the budget restores funding for other critical health care programs, including:

- \$2 million for spinal-cord injury research;
- \$1.1 million for HIV/AIDS-related programs;
- \$1 million for infertility programs;
- \$557,000 for school-based health centers; and
- \$550,000 for women's health initiatives.

"Additionally, the budget includes \$34.3 million to protect the right of spousal refusal, ensuring that seniors with ailing spouses who are in

need of long-term care services are protected against losing assets that are critical to their well-being," Assemblymember Cook noted. "It's imperative that we continue to fund these essential health care services so many families depend on."

## Much-needed funding for family planning services

In an effort to protect essential family planning and women's health care services for all New Yorkers, regardless of income, the 2013-14 budget provides \$750,000 to support family planning services.

"With women's reproductive rights under attack across the nation, this funding for family planning services is a reminder that New York is a leader in protecting a woman's right to choose. Securing this vital funding helps ensure that women can gain access to the critical health services they need," stated Assemblymember Cook.

## Improving the state's criminal justice system

The 2013-14 budget restores \$1.3 million in supplemental support for Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) programs. Further, the budget provides:

- \$2.65 million in civil and criminal legal services grants;
- \$1.1 million in additional support for Prisoners' Legal Services;
- \$600,000 for the Indigent Parolee program;
- \$500,000 for the purchase of safety equipment for correctional officers; and
- \$450,000 for immigrant legal services for students and families.

The budget restores \$1 million to the New York State Defenders Association, \$1 million for Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) and \$1.2 million to domestic violence-related civil and criminal legal-service providers. It also provides \$2.7 million for law enforcement, drug, violence and crime control and prevention programs, along with \$3 million for Operation SNUG to help combat gang violence and improve public safety for young adults.

Assemblymember Cook said, "Gun and gang violence rips families and communities apart. By continuing these critical services, we can provide at-risk young adults with alternatives to gang violence and incarceration, giving them a chance at a brighter future, rather than one behind bars."

## Stabilizing pension costs for local governments and schools

In an effort to combat ballooning pension costs, the budget allows local governments and school districts to opt into a pension stabilization program that benefits taxpayers.

Assemblymember Cook stated, "Under this plan, local governments could pay a stable rate of 12 percent for civilian employees or a stable rate of 20 percent for uniformed employees for the first two years. This plan allows that rate to be adjusted by up to a half a percentage point the following year and allows for repayment over twelve years, instead of ten."

For school districts, the budget allows districts to defer payment of a portion of pension costs for up to seven years. The rate for the first two years would start at 14 percent and could gradually increase to a maximum of 18 percent for the following years. Repayment will begin in FY 2018-19 and span a five-year period. If the overall funded ratio of the pension system drops below 80 percent, the stable rate plan for school districts will end.

"By affording our local governments and school districts the option to stabilize their pension costs, they will be able to better plan for these costs in the future. This will allow municipalities and school districts to free up funds for other important services that our families depend on," noted Assemblymember Cook.

## Implementing the NY SAFE Act

The budget provides \$27.7 million to the Office of Information Technology Services for an electronic gun permit database, as called for in the New York Secure Ammunition and Firearms Enforcement (NY SAFE) Act.

The funding will support the creation of a statewide database of all handgun licenses in New York. The database will enable the State Police to crosscheck the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) to determine if any current licensees have been legally disqualified from possessing firearms under federal law, including those with criminal convictions, involuntary commitments and those subject to orders of protection.

"We were able to provide funding in the budget to implement the NY SAFE Act. By establishing this critical database, we are providing law enforcement with the tools they need to help safeguard our communities against gun violence and save lives," stated Assemblymember Cook.

# Assemblymember Cook Works to Restore Cuts Made to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities

*Issue is crucial to our most vulnerable New Yorkers and their families*

Assemblymember Cook announced that she helped pass a bill that would restore up to \$90 million to the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to help nonprofits who work with some of New York's most vulnerable people (A.6692-C).

"OPWDD-funded not-for-profits provide life-changing services for those with developmental disabilities, helping them get the care and compassion they need to live a quality life. Restoring the funding for these OPWDD services is vital and it's something I won't stop fighting for," stated Assemblymember Cook.

Due to a dispute with the federal government earlier this year, New York State was ordered to pay back \$1.1 billion in "overpayments" for services to individuals with developmental disabilities. Fortunately, through negotiations with the federal government, the state was able to reduce that "claw back" by more than half to \$500 million and was allowed to spread

out the burden so that OPWDD providers didn't carry that financial burden alone.

This year's state budget restored \$30 million of \$120 million in proposed cuts to OPWDD funding. However, this restoration is still shy of what is needed to provide services to this vulnerable population, leaving a 4.5 percent cut totaling \$90 million.

"The need for OPWDD services is enormous; it's simply not an area where cuts can be absorbed. The state has acknowledged and is working to correct the mistakes that have

been made in the past, but that's no reason to penalize the developmentally disabled community, their families and their caretakers," said Assemblymember Cook. "We're approaching this problem head on," she continued, "because no one wants to see cuts in services. Individuals with developmental disabilities and their families need these services – their quality of life literally depends on it."

***"The need for OPWDD services is enormous."***

**– Assemblymember Cook**



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