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MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN

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CITY OF BUFFALO, NEW YORK

TESTIMONY BEFORE  
NEW YORK STATE JOINT  
LEGISLATIVE FISCAL COMMITTEES  
REGARDING  
GOVERNOR'S 2018/19 RECOMMENDED STATE BUDGET

SUBMITTED  
FEBRUARY 11, 2019  
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## 2019 STATE BUDGET TESTIMONY

Thank you Senate Finance Chair Liz Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Chair Helene Weinstein, Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Seward, Assembly Ways and Means Ranking Member Barclay, Senate Cities Chair Jackson and Assembly Cities Chair Braunstein; as well as the other members participating in the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing.

First, I would like to thank the State for the support it has extended to Buffalo over the course of the last several years. By working together, the members of the Western New York delegation, other members of the legislature, and my administration in partnership with Governor Cuomo's office, have all helped revitalize Buffalo.

The success of Buffalo's revitalization efforts were bolstered by several critical investments from the State which have been used to leverage additional resources or complemented local development activities.

The Western New York Regional Economic Development Council has identified workforce training as one of the most significant needs in Buffalo and the surrounding Upstate area for many years. Thanks to Governor Cuomo's commitment to Buffalo's renaissance, the Northland Workforce Training Center has started training students for careers in advanced manufacturing and energy fields.

As development of the Northland Campus has continued, neighborhood groups have continually asked for us to create an entrepreneurial center where local entrepreneurs, artisans, and

“makers” could pursue the creation of their own businesses; while being supported by some common amenities. With the support of the Buffalo Common Council, we have established and began to plan the Delmar Mitchell Entrepreneurial Center (named after an influential former City Councilmember). A historically significant building on the Northland Campus has been chosen for the Entrepreneurial Center, but an additional \$1 million is needed to complete the design documents and build-out the space.

As part of my community outreach efforts for the Northland Corridor, the issues of health, wellness and access to fresh food have repeatedly been mentioned as major community development concerns that need to be addressed in the Delavan-Grider area. To address these concerns, my administration has been working for several years with a not-for-profit social enterprise, Neewater & Associates, to develop a Food & Wellness Project called Project Rainfall. Project Rainfall is intended to be a catalyst to engage the surrounding community and city-wide stakeholders and provide access to healthy food and employment opportunities. A business model that sells product on-site, but also creates revenue streams through restaurant, institutional and wholesale opportunities.

Project Rainfall is proposed to be housed in a vacant, 45,000 square foot industrial building located in the Northland Corridor. The building was part of the former Houdaille Industrial Complex and is part of the larger Northland Corridor Campus. The building is in an historic structure and requires extensive rehabilitation in order to house Project Rainfall, and other potential re-uses. Funding from the Restore NY Program is being used for initial repairs and improvements, but an additional \$4 million is needed to complete those renovations.

The \$65 million for commercial development on Buffalo’s East Side included in the Governor’s proposed Executive Budget is another example of this type of investment. These funds will complement the significant capital investments the City has already made along Jefferson Avenue and in other neighborhoods in this historically underserved community. Because of the East Side’s critical need, I would ask that the Legislature support this initiative and fund it at the Governor’s requested amount.

I am also aware of the fiscal stresses New York State is under as a result of national policies coming from elected leaders in Washington and how these pressures are making it more difficult for New York to make these kinds of investments. As Mayor of the State’s second largest City, I can assure you that we are also feeling similar pressures and are being forced to make difficult decisions.

In light of these difficult fiscal times, and with the concerns that aid to municipalities funding will again remain flat in this year’s budget, I am asking that the Legislature consider alternative ways to support City government and provide the funds needed to address the diverse set of challenges cities face.

I propose that the State gradually increase the amount of Seneca Gaming revenue the City receives from the State by 1% a year over the course of the next 5 years. This will increase the

City of Buffalo's share from 6.25% to 7.5% of the total gaming revenue by 2024. This increase will help support City operations, the cost of which has gradually been increasing.

As the Legislature debates the legalization of recreational cannabis usage, it is important to acknowledge the impact of drug arrests in urban areas. People of color have consistently been arrested at a higher rate for cannabis related crimes. I strongly urge that any legislation that legalizes cannabis includes provisions that ensure that part of the revenue goes directly to communities that have been disproportionately affected by the old drug laws.

Governor Cuomo's 2019-2020 budget estimates that a tax on cannabis could bring in around \$300 million in revenue annually. We request that urban areas like the City of Buffalo receive a portion of the revenue generated from the sale, cultivation and production of cannabis.

In addition to finding other means of supporting City services, the State can also invest in projects and initiatives that will make operations more efficient, cost-effective and less reliant on long-term State funded support in the future.

My Administration has allocated \$2.5 million in funding in our 2019 Capital Budget to open a new Public Works Campus. This project will allow the City to consolidate the operations of several divisions, reduce the existing footprint of City properties and manage our vehicle fleet, equipment and operations more effectively. I am requesting that the Legislature include \$5.6 million in this year's State budget, which will allow the City to accelerate the project timeline and realize the savings this project will produce sooner than anticipated.

The major weather events that happened this January, highlights our need for a new and improved Public Works Campus. While our Public Works Department successfully operated in extreme weather conditions and ensured public safety, our new campus will help streamline and improve our services.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Governor Cuomo and the Legislature for the incredible assistance New York State provided during the blizzard of 2019. The resources and personnel NY State sent to Western NY made a series of very challenging weather events manageable.

Once the project is complete, the City will have the ability to sell some of our current facilities for private redevelopment. Due to the financial realities of the State budget, we have simplified and restructured this project.

While there are some challenges the City can address through more equitable revenue sharing or cost-saving projects, there are still systemic needs which only the State can assist us in meeting. The challenges of an aging infrastructure and older water service lines pose a significant challenge to the City's limited resources.

The City of Buffalo has been focused on re-aligning the Metro Rail infrastructure on Main

Street. As a result, the City has reopened several blocks to vehicular traffic, stimulating retail, housing, and various mixed-use development, and millions of dollars of economic activity and job growth, breathing new life into our downtown. Since 2009, we have opened the 700, 600, and 500 blocks to traffic, with Lower Main Street currently underway. We request State assistance to complete the One Seneca Tower (Swan Street to Church Street) phase of Cars on Main Street, at a cost of \$20 million.

The age of Buffalo's housing and infrastructure makes homeowners susceptible to exposure to lead when events like water line breaks occur. The proactive way to reduce lead exposure is to completely replace water lines after they break rather than just repairing the old lines.

The Governor's proposed Executive Budget contains funding for lead abatement activities, green infrastructure investment and energy efficiency projects. I am asking the Legislature to fully fund these initiatives at the amount requested by the Governor and ensure that cities like Buffalo, which has the oldest housing stock in the nation and some of the oldest infrastructure in the State, be eligible to receive a share of that funding consistent with our need.

Buffalo has received over \$800,000 from New York State to launch a water service line replacement program that will significantly reduce exposure to lead from older water lines. The Replacing Old Lead Lines program, or ROLL, is modeled after a successful program developed in Pittsburgh and will cover the cost of replacing water service lines when they experience a break. Replacing those lines, instead of repairing them, will eliminate the lead particulates that residents would have been exposed to and maintain the quality of our City's drinking water.

The City of Buffalo's electric vehicle charging station program is designed to give EV drivers an opportunity to charge their vehicles while parking in Buffalo's public parking ramps. Sixteen EV charging stations have been placed in 8 of the Buffalo Civic Auto Ramps' parking facilities. Since their installation, EV parking usage has increased over 25%. Recently, this initiative was highlighted by former Vice President Joe Biden as an example of innovative ways cities can incentivize environmentally responsible behaviors.

Raincheck 2.0 is the second phase of the City's rainwater capturing and diversion program. This phase will increase the green infrastructure area used to capture rainwater by 500 additional acres. Through the use of green infrastructure, the City is able to capture rainwater that would otherwise flood the sewer system, causing damage to our infrastructure and posing a risk to residents. Green infrastructure, like trees, shrubbery and other natural rainwater "catchers" also allow the City to promote environmental conservation, healthier neighborhoods and reduce strains on its sewer and water systems.

The legacy of Buffalo's heavy industry is a significant number of brownfields. The crumbling of heavy industry in Buffalo, in particular the closing of many steel plants, led to several square miles of abandoned property. A significant number of these properties are located along Buffalo's waterfront, an area that has great potential for development. Linger on

many of these sites are environmental contaminants. The City of Buffalo has 56 brownfield sites that are over 5 acres in size. These 56 sites range in size, up to 160 acres, and encompass almost 1,500 acres of the City's land.

I commend Governor Cuomo for including \$5 billion for clean water infrastructure over five years, doubling the State's current investment. An additional \$400 million would be designated for State's municipal clean water infrastructure grant program, first established in 2015. Also, an additional \$1 billion has been proposed to cleaning up hazardous waste at Superfund sites across the state. I urge the legislature to support Governor Cuomo's proposal.

I would like to thank you for the time you have taken today to carefully listen to and consider my thoughts on the proposed Executive Budget and the needs of Buffalo's residents. I am confident that we can find the creative solutions needed to adequately address the challenges urban communities are facing across the State.