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NYS Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2022 Executive Budget Proposal: Local Government

Testimony submitted by:

Daniel C. Levler, President, Suffolk County Association of Municipal Employees

Within the Aid to Localities portion of the FY2023 New York State Budget, we are encouraged to find significant and continued funding for Local Government programs across the state and in particular, here in Suffolk County.

The Suffolk County workforce represented by the Suffolk Association of Municipal Employees (Suffolk AME) includes over 900 different titles and 6,000+ active members. In order to successfully implement programs intended to protect Suffolk County residents, some of which are the most vulnerable populations, our members rely on funding from New York State and the support of our elected representatives at the state level.

For the purpose of testimony for the joint public hearing on Local Government, we would like to address the following topics within the Aid to Localities budget and how these proposals will impact the Suffolk County Workforce:

- Permanent Local Sales Tax Rate authorizations
- Investment in Worker Protections
- Cannabis Sales Tax
- Shared Services Initiative
- State and Local Cyber Defense and Response

Permanent Local Sales Tax Rate Authorizations:

Local Sales Tax has a significant impact on the county's bottom line, therefore any increase or decrease to the allowable rate can have a rippling effect not only on the services our workforce provides, but on our ability to provide a living wage, benefits and appropriate staffing levels. Based on the 2022 Suffolk County Budget, 38% (\$1.8B) of the county's budget comes from Sales Tax revenue. The ability to address sales tax authority locally through majority vote of the county's legislature would allow us the flexibility based on

the needs of the region. We support this initiative within the budget and encourage its passage to assist local municipalities and address local sales tax rates.

Investment in Worker Protections:

Any budget that includes added protections for the county workforce and workers as a whole is one that Suffolk AME will continually support. Including \$12.4M to enforce protections through the Department of Labor is a major step towards workplace equality and the understanding that all employees deserve to work in a safe, clean and protected environment. The county, along with its partners at the State level, are committed to working hand in hand to ensure these protections are enforced.

Cannabis Sales Tax:

As the state finalizes details related to the legalization of recreational cannabis, we are encouraged to see that a portion of sales tax will be directed to the county and town governments. Of course any additional revenue streams that the county can procure will help to benefit our workforce.

We would like to note that a significant portion of the work related to the legalization of recreational cannabis including its regulation, enforcement and program implementation as well as potentially adverse effects connected to treatment and social services are all expenses incurred by the county. Consideration of a larger percentage of tax going to the county would help offset these expenses and support the municipal workforce.

Shared Services Initiative:

In recent months county and state legislators have introduced legislation related to shared services. The FY23 State Budget as written would help to codify this legislation and further encourage all municipalities and jurisdictions to promote shared services. With significant overlap in the need for services through public works, health, social services, and many other necessary county-provided services, shared services presents a necessary cost savings to all involved. As the regional level of government, the County of Suffolk has taken a leadership role in coordinating and executing local shared services initiatives. The \$200M in appropriations to support State matching grants for county-wide shared services initiatives is a critical piece of the budget that will not only support our workforce as employees, but also as tax-paying citizens.

State and Local Cyber Defense and Response:

The ongoing threat of a cyber-attack is a threat that all levels of government must carefully monitor and expend significant resources on. The additional \$44M within the budget to address this problem is an important step to ensuring that the county workforce and the residents of Suffolk County are protected from unsuspected attacks that could threaten their safety and personal information.

Recently, Suffolk County's new payroll system was the subject of a ransomware attack that affected many municipalities, businesses and non-profits across the country. While the extent of the attack is still being investigated, it has disrupted payroll in a multitude of ways. As leaders of the largest independent municipal employee union in New York State, the protection of our members and their information is one of our primary objectives. Attacks like these that occur across international lines must be prevented. We are glad to see that the state budget takes aim at these concerns and Suffolk AME will stand fully behind any funding that can be dispersed to the county to prevent future cyber-attacks.

Suffolk AME would like to thank Governor Hochul, Senate Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, and all members of the Joint Committee on Local Government for their work on the 2023 budget. The programs outlined within the budget will continue to provide extensive financial support to the County and the County's municipal workforce, which we are proud to represent.