



# THE NEW YORK STATE PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FEDERATION TESTIMONY

Education Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
2025-2026 Executive Budget Proposal

January 29, 2025

Testimony by Wayne Spence

Good afternoon Chairpersons Krueger, Weinstein, Mayer, Benadetto and other honorable members of the Legislature. My name is Wayne Spence and I am the president of the 54,000-member strong New York State Public Employees Federation (PEF). I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you about Governor Hochul's 2025-26 Executive Budget. Our union is composed of professional, scientific and technical experts who provide critical services to the residents and taxpayers of New York State, including the staff at the State Department of Education, the School for the Deaf in Rome and the School for the Blind in Batavia, as well as the entities overseen by the Cultural Education Center – the State Museum, the State Archives and the State Library. PEF members take a great deal of pride in their work and the care they provide to New Yorkers.

PEF is pleased with many of the proposals advanced by Governor Hochul in her Executive Budget. However, PEF urges the Executive and the Legislature to take action on increasing operating aid for the state museum to hire additional staff, to expand the scope of the Governor's proposal to study the state museum's operation and function, to revitalize the state museum facility and to increase operating support for the State-operated Schools for the Deaf and the Blind to ensure these students have the same resources available as surrounding districts.

#### **2024-25 Executive Budget Proposals:**

##### **A. Capital and Operating Support for the Cultural Education Center – (New York State Museum, State Archives and State Library and Study of State Museum)**

Governor Hochul announced a long-overdue and significant capital improvement plan for the NYS Museum of \$150 million (Capital Plan – S.3004/A.3004, pp. 117). The Governor also included a modest operating increase for the Cultural Education Center of approximately \$3.2 million (State Operations Budget – S.3000/A.3000).

While PEF supports the capital plan and appreciates the modest operating aid increase from the 2024-25 enacted budget and the proposed marginal increase in the 2025-26 Executive Budget Proposal, the Cultural Education Center (CEC) requires additional operating support primarily for adequate staffing. The CEC has seen only modest

increases in state support over the past decade. These funding constraints have persisted despite an increase in inflation exceeding 60% over that timeframe, as well as increases in compensation based on successive collective bargaining agreements with the organized staff.

The State Education Department has requested an infusion of \$12 million to support the operating needs of the Cultural Education Center, including the NYS Museum. PEF supports this request.

Additionally, the Cultural Education Programs are funded mainly through the Office of Cultural Education Program Revenue Stabilization Account. While the Office of Cultural Education also currently receives federal funding, which is intended to provide for the support of public libraries around the state, operational funding for the State Museum, State Library and the State Archives comes primarily through the Cultural Education (CE) Revenue Account and Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF). These program funds generate revenues from a fee charged for the recording of deeds in counties across the state. These accounts supply most of the operational funding for the State Museum, a substantial portion of funding for the State Archives and the State Library, all funding for the Office of Public Broadcasting and Educational Television, and, until recently, all funding for the New York State Summer School for the Arts.

The dollar amount of the recording fee has not changed in over 20 years and the revenues fluctuate depending on the macro-economic conditions and the number and amount of real estate transactions across the state. Since inflation continues to eat away at the value of the standard statutory fee, the CEC has been working with fewer and fewer resources each year.

Understanding the concerns with increasing this fee, policymakers need to work collectively to identify a new and reliable stream of recurring funding to supplement

these revenues. It is necessary to allow the museum to attract more visitors and to deliver an experience that will keep visitors coming back.

As a destination location for students and visitors from across the globe that attracts more than 750,000 visitors a year, and as a world class research facility that serves the entire state and beyond, the NYS Museum should be a showcase facility along with the NYS Capitol and the Empire State Plaza.

**PEF BUDGET REQUEST:**

**Capital Plan:** *SUPPORT* the Governor’s Capital Plan but expand the process to engage professional stakeholders employed by the museum to enhance the design and exhibit identification and implementation processes;

**Operating Aid:** *INCREASE* additional operating aid to SED budget of \$12 million in recurring funds to support additional staffing;

**Museum Study:** *EXPAND* the State Museum Study (Education, Labor and Family Assistance Budget S.3006/A.3006 – PART AA) to incorporate the collection of additional data on the ancillary services the museum provides to the educational community, researchers and other stakeholders and the need for expanded staffing to meet those needs.

**B. State School for the Deaf in Rome and the School for the Blind in Batavia**

PEF represents the amazing educators at the state-operated School for the Deaf in Rome and the State School for the Blind in Batavia. These schools provide unique and critical education and other services to students with disabilities in an immersive and nurturing atmosphere. Unlike traditional public school districts which operate on a 10-month basis, these schools operate on a 12-month basis. In addition to the longer school year and higher minimum qualifications for staff, these schools are under-resourced when compared to the foundation formula available to other schools in the region. As such, these schools can be at a competitive disadvantage with other districts when attracting and retaining educators and support staff.

The Governor has proposed holding aid to the State School for the Blind in Batavia flat at \$11,738,000 and aid for the State School for the Deaf in Rome at \$10,497,000, respectively.

**PEF BUDGET REQUEST:**

**Capital Plan:** *SUPPORT* the Governor's proposed \$4.5 million in capital for the School for the Blind in Batavia and \$3 million in capital for the State School for the Deaf in Rome.

**Operating Aid:** *INCREASE* operating aid to equalize the foundation aid formula-driven resources provided to surrounding school districts and direct a portion of these resources into hiring and retaining staff. Priority should be placed on hiring Special Education Assistants, who are underpaid compared to similar State titles. In addition, an increase in operating aid should be used to compensate staff who are proficient in ASL or Braille, and to support educational programming, extracurricular activities and field trip administration.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns with you. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the educational and cultural opportunities of this great State.

Respectfully Submitted,

Wayne Spence

President, New York State Public Employees Federation