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DEVELOPMENT



255 MAIN STREET
GOSHEN, NY 10924
PHONE: 845-916-5427

E-MAIL:
shtobin@orangecountygov.com

Orange County Legislator
Sparrow Tobin
20th Legislative District

Testimony of Sparrow Tobin

Submitted to NYS Senate Finance & Assembly Ways & Means Committee Chairs

For Feb. 11, 2026 Joint Legislative Hearing on Local Government

Dear Senate Finance Chair Krueger, Assembly Ways & Means Chair Pretlow, and Members of the New York State Legislature,

My name is Sparrow Tobin, and I am an Orange County Legislator representing the City of Middletown. I respectfully submit this testimony for the record to highlight the urgent affordability challenges facing my community and to underscore the need for decisive state action in this year's budget.

In my role as a county legislator, I work closely with residents, service providers, and local government leaders who are struggling to keep up with rising costs and shrinking resources. For the people I represent, affordability is not an abstract policy issue—it is the defining challenge of daily life. Across Middletown and throughout Orange County, families are facing increasing costs for housing, childcare, food, transportation, and healthcare, while wages and public supports fail to keep pace. Seniors are forced to make impossible choices between basic necessities, and working families are stretched thin despite doing everything asked of them.

These local challenges reflect a broader statewide crisis. New York remains one of the most expensive states in the nation and has the highest level of income inequality, even as the number of millionaires and billionaires continues to grow. Working-class New Yorkers are increasingly being pushed out of the state because they can no longer afford to stay. A major driver of this exodus is the lack of universal childcare: families with young children are significantly more likely to leave New York than those without. While New York City is often cited as the epicenter of the cost-of-living crisis, these pressures are felt across the state, including in communities like Middletown, where residents are struggling to meet their most basic needs.

This affordability crisis is now being dramatically worsened by federal cuts enacted through the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill Act. These politically motivated reductions threaten essential programs that our

communities rely on and will have severe consequences for cities like Middletown, which lack the local tax base to absorb such losses. Billions of dollars in federal funding are projected to be eliminated in the coming years, with the most devastating impacts falling on Medicaid, the Essential Plan, and nutrition assistance programs. As a result, up to one million New Yorkers could lose healthcare coverage, and hundreds of thousands more could lose access to SNAP benefits, deepening food insecurity across the state.

These federal cuts stand in stark contrast to the substantial tax benefits flowing to the wealthiest New Yorkers, who are poised to receive billions of dollars annually. Without decisive state action, local governments and community-based services will be left to absorb the fallout—resulting in reduced services, increased hardship, and long-term economic instability. I support the *Invest in Our New York* package, which, if passed, would raise tens of billions of dollars to protect essential services, offset federal cuts, and allow the state to make long-term investments that address the affordability crisis facing communities like mine.

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This legislative session, leaders in Albany have a historic chance to protect working-class communities across the state and make lasting investments in their futures. The Senate and Assembly must deliver one-house budgets that include proposals to raise the billions of dollars in revenue necessary to replace lost federal funding and fund what our communities need to thrive.

Thank you for this important opportunity to discuss issues affecting Middletown.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sparrow Tobin