



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Skoufis

## Skoufis Lauds Early Wins for Orange County in Senate's Budget Plan

JAMES SKOUFIS March 12, 2024

| ISSUE: **2024-2025 STATE BUDGET, 42ND SENATE DISTRICT, FOUNDATION AID, CONGESTION PRICING, UNIVERSAL PRE-K**

Senator James Skoufis (D-Orange County) touted numerous provisions set forth in the State Senate's budget proposal (R.1952), advanced this week, which would directly support Orange County residents and communities. From Orange County's inclusion in the Tappan Zee Bridge resident driver discount program, to a boost of \$100 million in local infrastructure funding to make up for historic shortchanging by DOT, to a wholesale rejection of the Governor's disastrous plan to cut education funding, Skoufis secured a number of his priorities in this Senate blueprint.

The Senate's proposal establishes the chamber's priorities as they embark on negotiations for a final state budget with the Assembly and the Governor, which will be finalized in the coming weeks.

"My focus is always on delivering for the residents of Orange County," said Skoufis, "and the release of my chamber's budget proposal is a testament to how hard I'm fighting to make communities safer, schools better, and life easier and more affordable for hard-working

families in my district. This proposed budget is where legislators communicate their priorities, and I've been clear from the start where those lie for me—getting the resources our district needs. As we negotiate a final budget, I'm going to keep my foot on the gas.”

Key highlights from the Senate's budget proposal include:

**Rejection of Governor Hochul's disastrous proposal to slash school aid and eliminate the “hold harmless” provision.** Taken together, the Governor's plan would have resulted in million-dollar losses for some Orange County school districts, hurting our students, our educators, and our communities writ large.

**Toll discounts for Orange County drivers on the Tappan Zee Bridge.** For the thousands of drivers who use the bridge to get to work or run errands in New York City, tolls on the bridge will be reduced as Orange County is added to the existing resident discount program that applies exclusively to Rockland and Westchester program – a 20% discount can be accessed by local EZPass holders who apply.

**Unemployment Insurance (UI) debt repayment.** When unemployment claims hit an all-time high during the COVID-19 pandemic, New York State borrowed money from the federal government to help pay out the claims, and still has an outstanding balance. This has resulted in UI cost hikes for our small business community, and repayment of the debt by the state would ease the burden on our Main Streets.

**\$150 million to complete the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK),** making this life-changing program truly universal state-wide. Senator Skoufis was the driving force in the effort for UPK expansion in communities outside of New York City, and has championed its full implementation, ensuring Orange County families don't have to choose between early childhood education and paying all of their other bills.

**\$125 million to build off last year's expansion and provide universal school meals** to all students, regardless of income. Research demonstrates that free school meals have positive impacts on

academic performance and discipline for all kids, regardless of income. Expanding access is a critical investment in Orange County learners, and would allow every single school district to meet the nutritional needs of their students.

**Standing up for public safety in our communities with funding to crack down on retail thefts.**

Skoufis also advanced anti-gun violence programming for the cities of Middletown and Port Jervis in the Senate District as well as domestic violence prevention funding for Fearless! at a time when rates of domestic violence are on the rise.

**Creation of a Work Opportunity Tax Credit** to encourage the hiring of workers who have traditionally faced barriers to employment, such as veterans. New York's credit would mirror the existing federal credit and act as a targeted hiring incentive, encouraging re-entry of workers into the state's workforce while helping employers fill their open ranks.

**Critical protections for Washingtonville taxpayers who find themselves victims of the previous administration's fiscal mismanagement.** Local taxpayers are facing property tax increases of 21%, and water and sewer rate increases of 21% and 19%, respectively as the village works to get their finances back on track. Senator Skoufis secured over \$300,000 in the Senate's budget proposal, which would cover the entire interest payment on the municipal bond the village was forced to take out.

With the successful inclusion of Skoufis' priorities in the Senate's budget proposal, negotiations will now begin with the Assembly and the Governor toward a final, balanced state budget. The final budget is due April 1.