



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose M. Serrano

Legislators Propose Nationally Ground-Breaking Performance Standards for New York's Stimulus Investments

JOSÉ M. SERRANO June 17, 2009

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Joined by NYS Stimulus Oversight Working Group, Legislators Argue New York Should Look Where "Foresight Meets Oversight"

(Albany, NY) - Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx) and Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Queens) drafted a bill to make New York State the national leader in stimulus accountability and effectiveness, with the creation of a dedicated federal Stimulus Ombudsman's office. The proposal (S5879/A8941) is supported by the NYS Stimulus Oversight Working Group, the state's leading network pushing for fair and equitable distribution of stimulus investments.

"The leadership battle in the Senate has garnered attention that must be rechanneled in a more positive and productive direction. We must not lose focus, and we must continue to do the work of the people," said Senator José M. Serrano (D-Manhattan/Bronx). "With the country's current unemployment rate at 9.4 percent, it is incumbent upon us to move the economy forward and to create jobs. This bill gives New York the fantastic opportunity to be the most reliable recipient of federal stimulus funds in the country, and to set the example for other states to follow."

"It is critical that we ensure billions of dollars in federal stimulus funds are spent wisely and hasten our path to economic recovery," said Assemblyman Michael Gianaris (D-Queens). "An independent ombudsman would bring much-needed transparency and accountability to the allocation of these funds and decrease the likelihood of wasting critical resources at a difficult time."

"We need to consider how New York projects and programs supported with current stimulus funds positively impact our communities and households, which funding has created quality jobs. We need to know which programs and projects should be models for the future and which need overhaul or to be 'put to bed' entirely," said Chris Keeley, associate director of Common Cause/New York, which convenes the NYS Stimulus Oversight Working Group. "By providing this sort of 'quality assurance' for federal funds invested in our state, New York will be well-positioned to receive additional federal investments in the future."

"With billions of taxpayer dollars in play, New Yorkers need to know that there's an independent watchdog making sure our tax dollars are spent as intended, to jump start the state's economy and reduce the harsh consequences of the recession," said Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG). "An independent stimulus monitor will help ensure stimulus monies are honestly and well spent, and build public trust for this unprecedented undertaking."

"Increasing transparency and accountability are essential to ensure that federal stimulus dollars are used effectively and efficiently. Each and every stimulus dollar should be spent as intended, and that includes critical investments in clean energy generation, energy efficient building retrofits, mass transit and our water infrastructure," said Alison Jenkins, fiscal policy program director of the state government watchdog group Environmental Advocates of New York.

The Ombudsman will establish performance standards, foster a more participatory decision-making process, and have powers to subpoena and investigate. The state is expected to receive a total of \$27 billion to invigorate its economy under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. With the possibility of billions more in the federal pipeline, the legislators and advocates argue that now is the time for New York to distinguish itself as the gold standard in stimulus funding.