



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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When Budgets Are Written in the Dark, Democracy Suffers — and Progress Gets Lost

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New York's record-breaking \$254 billion budget was drafted in secrecy, delayed for the fourth year in a row under Governor Hochul, and rushed through with no real chance for public or legislative review.

This year's state budget process was deeply flawed from the start. The **\$254 billion spending plan** was passed more than five weeks late, marking the fourth consecutive year under Governor Hochul that the budget has blown past its April 1st deadline. To make matters worse, it was crafted entirely behind closed doors by leaders of a single political party, without appropriate input from the full legislature. Worse still, it was rushed through using "messages of necessity," bypassing the required three-day review period and effectively shutting out transparency, public input, and meaningful oversight by elected representatives.

One of the most egregious inclusions in the budget is the move by the State to seize control of Nassau University Medical Center (NUMC). This is nothing short of a hostile takeover by the Governor, stripping away local control of Nassau County's only safety net hospital. I'm deeply disappointed this budget silenced local voices and undermined our community's ability to govern its own healthcare. While stabilizing its finances and expanding care in the community, NUMC has turned a corner despite state agencies withholding funding. Albany's suggestion that it can do better than NUMC's current board—despite its mismanagement of SUNY Downstate and the botched Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP) overhaul—is not just misguided, it's troubling.

I have spoken out frequently regarding the legislature repeatedly tilting the scales of justice in favor of criminals at the expense of victims and public safety. Cases involving real harm to individuals and communities have been thrown out over minor technicalities due to changes to the discovery laws. While any improvements to the law are welcome, the modest changes included in this budget do little to support prosecutors in their work. It's unacceptable that the legislative majorities continue to prioritize offenders instead of public safety for the rest of us.

This budget also failed to address the ongoing chaos surrounding CDPAP, including the deeply flawed transition and the state's mishandling of fiscal intermediary redesignation—leaving patients and caretakers in limbo. Even my colleagues on the other side of the aisle acknowledged that this program is a mess and needs reform. Further, it only includes a modest 2.6% Cost of Living Adjustment for Direct Support Professionals, which falls far short of the full 7.8% increase that they deserve, and even below the 2.9% year over year inflation rate. These essential workers provide critical care and support every day, yet continue to be underpaid and undervalued—putting the stability of the workforce our most vulnerable residents depend on at serious risk.

Additionally, businesses across the suburbs are facing tight margins—and now, the MTA payroll tax will make it even harder for them to keep their doors open. Rather than instituting desperately needed reforms and accountability, Albany simply committed more funds to the MTA, while relying more heavily on Long Islanders and other suburban residents. Albany continues to treat Long Islanders like an ATM, forcing us to subsidize the MTA's refusal to accept necessary reforms. They've chosen to squeeze our businesses and commuters even more with a tax hike that is unjustified, unsustainable, and driving people out of New York.

Although the budget misses the mark in most areas, the nearly 4,500 pages across 10 bills that comprise the State Budget do include several commendable measures for which I have advocated. The inclusion of universal school meals for students is a long-overdue step to ensure no student goes hungry and will enable them to focus on their education. It also includes the long-awaited payoff of the state's unemployment insurance debt to the federal government for COVID-era borrowing, an obligation that originally was placed on the backs of employers through unemployment insurance fees rather than federal COVID aid. Further, the budget expanded eligibility for Gold Star Annuity payments to better support the families of veterans, included funding for clean water infrastructure, and established a child

care substitute worker pool program.

Amidst the chaos of this year's budget, one provision stands out for its sheer absurdity. A hidden measure now allows New York taxpayer dollars to be used to pay for the criminal defense of elected officials accused of federal crimes, even if such crimes are UNRELATED to their official duties. This means taxpayers could be forced to fund the defense of someone accused of committing crimes like bank robbery or tax fraud. This appears to be intended to benefit one particular elected official, our attorney general, and is a flagrant misuse of taxpayer dollars.

This budget process was so flawed that it obscured its few merits, leaving even worthwhile provisions buried beneath layers of reckless spending, misplaced priorities, and policies that hurt Long Islanders and residents across the state.

-Patricia Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick, State Senator, District 9