



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

## State Senator Gustavo Rivera Speaks on the Senate's Passing of the 2015-2016 Budgets

GUSTAVO RIVERA April 1, 2015

| ISSUE: **BUDGET**

(Albany, NY) - Senator Gustavo Rivera (D-Bronx) joined his colleagues in the State Senate to vote on the 13 bills of the 2015-2016 Budget. Senator Rivera voted against three of the budget bills, specifically the Transportation, Economic Development and Environmental Conservation bill (S.2008-B), the Public Protection and General Government bill (S.2005-B), and the Education, Labor and Family Assistance bill (S.2006)

### 2014-2015 BUDGET

I am pleased that the 2015-2016 Budget includes and expands funding for many important policies and programs, including the Raise the Age of criminal responsibility initiative and the construction of four Metro North Stations in the Bronx. However, in many areas this year's budget falls short and does not adequately address a number of issues that are important to working New Yorkers. The bills I voted against either contained unacceptable policies, such as a seriously flawed teacher evaluation system, or left out key priorities New York desperately needs, such as a real living wage and genuine ethics and campaign finance reform.

Many of the shortfalls of this budget would have been avoided if the voices of the 8 million New Yorkers the Senate Democratic Conference represents had been heard in this process. The fact that our Leader, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, the first woman to lead a conference in the state's history, was not included in budget negotiations is shameful. The days of "three or four men in a room" must end. New Yorkers deserve a budget process that is transparent, inclusive and as diverse as the public officials they elect to represent them."

#### THE BRONX:

"My top priority during the budget process remains the Bronx - finding ways to enact policies and deliver resources for the communities I represent that will help them thrive.

This year we were successful in repealing a law passed just last year which placed unnecessary requirements for new health facilities in our borough. This law would have held up or even prevented much-needed health facilities from being built. As the county that continuously ranks last in health in New York State, Bronx residents could not afford to have yet another obstacle standing in the way of the healthcare they need.

I am also very pleased to announce that we were able to secure funding that will directly impact two major projects that are taking place in the 33rd Senate District - The Kingsbridge National Ice Center and the Fulton Re-entry Center.

We were able to secure \$1 million to help evaluate the capacity of Kingsbridge subway station in an effort to help us prepare for the development of the Kingsbridge Armory and determine the cost of making the station compliant with the Americans with Disability Act. The Kingsbridge National Ice Center will be an important economic engine in our community and this study will give us the knowledge we need to work towards alleviating any strain that may be caused by the increased traffic that will be brought to the station because of the development.

Just a few short months ago, I was elated to celebrate the official transfer of the former Fulton Correctional Facility so it can be converted into a comprehensive reentry center. In this year's budget, we allocated \$3 million for its transformation. The restructuring of the Fulton facility will provide countless New Yorkers transitioning back into society with the necessary resources and skills to be productive members of their communities, while simultaneously helping reduce our rates of recidivism in the Bronx."

## HEALTH

"As the ranker of the Senate Health Committee, I am very pleased that this year's budget took various steps towards ensuring that a greater number of New Yorkers have access to quality and affordable healthcare. Not only does this budget continue to fund our State's Health Exchange, but it also provides \$1.64 billion to create the Basic Health Plan, which will make health insurance coverage affordable for almost half a million New Yorkers, including non-citizens and those newly covered under President Obama's recent immigration order. Additionally, we allocated \$8 million in funding for the Doctors Across New York Program to help train and place doctors in underserved communities in the Bronx and across the state, ensuring New York's diverse population has access to quality care close to home.

I am very pleased that the budget invests in reducing unnecessary emergency room visits and shifting resources to primary care by providing \$200 million for the Public Hospital Transformation Fund under DSRIP. It also provides \$19.5 million as a revolving loan fund to be used by the Primary Care Development Center, a nonprofit that promotes primary care, in the running of community health centers. We also increased funding by \$1 million for health care for first time mothers in the Bronx and elsewhere through the Nurse Family Partnership Program, \$1.4 million for women's health services, and \$1 million for Rape Crisis Centers.

Lastly, as a vocal advocate for ending AIDS as an epidemic by 2020, I am especially delighted that the budget included over \$1 million in funding for community organizations and services related to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. While this budget also makes progress in preventing the prosecution of individuals for using harm reduction measures, such as condoms, it does not fully decriminalize syringe possession. In order to successfully eradicate AIDS in New York State, we still need to work towards getting rid of outdated laws that stand in the way of many getting access to the harm reduction services they need to avoid contracting HIV."

#### EDUCATION:

"Unfortunately, the portion of the budget that dealt with education was filled with missed opportunities and deep disappointments. Not only did the state fall short in providing an adequate increase in funding for public schools, but the budget - once again - failed to include any of the Campaign For Fiscal Equity funding owed to our students. The most challenged schools in my district alone would have received more than \$126 million had we made good on that promise. Furthermore, the budget doubles down on the use of standardized testing, which will neither improve the educational outcomes of students nor provide teachers with the resources they need in order to succeed. This is the fourth time in five years we have changed the teacher evaluation system. This year's budget is more proof that we're going in the wrong direction. We also missed another opportunity to lift up our youth and our state by once again omitting the Dream Act.

While I am truly disappointed in a number of the education measures we passed today, I will not waiver from my commitment to secure appropriate funding for our public schools. I will not rest until we make good on our promise to improve outcomes for students and give teachers the respect and support they deserve."