



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Press Release: Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins Announces Passage of the 2015-16 New York State Budget

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

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ISSUE:

- [Finance](#)
- [Budget](#)



Yonkers, NY - New York State's new fiscal year began April 1st with the 2015-2016 State budget in place. The \$142 billion spending plan increases state spending by 2% over last year and includes \$23.5 billion in education aid--an increase of \$1.3 billion. The state also continues to make strides in reducing the Gap Elimination Adjustment. There are new initiatives, including \$1.6 billion to provide basic health coverage for low-income New Yorkers, and important funding (detailed below) that will have a positive impact on constituents and municipalities in the 35th District.

Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins voted for a majority of the budget bills but articulated her concerns about the education bill that also included legislative ethics reforms. In particular, Senator Stewart-Cousins questioned the rushed implementation of a new teacher evaluation policy that will increasingly rely on student test scores and will not include important factors such as overcrowded and underfunded classrooms in high-needs school districts like Yonkers.

"We failed to address the inequality in how schools are funded; instead of using comprehensive, bottom-up approaches, the enacted state budget once again relies on the State Education Department and a quick testing fix," said Senator Stewart-Cousins during remarks on the Senate floor. [Click here to watch the Senator speak.](#)

In regard to legislative ethics reforms, the Senator said the final deal fell short. The Senate Democratic Conference put forth several proposals that would, among other things, restrict legislators' outside income, end taxpayer-funded reimbursements for

legal defense expenses, and close campaign finance loopholes and enact campaign finance reform. The final budget agreement left those provisions out.

On a positive note, the enacted budget does include funding to help municipalities with infrastructure improvements, as well as \$900 million for the new Tappan Zee Bridge project in Tarrytown and \$400 million to keep the tolls on the Thruway and the new bridge as low as possible. There is money for affordable housing, economic development, nonprofits, and student loan relief. However, other items that were glaringly absent from the final budget include property tax relief, paid family leave, raising the age of criminal responsibility, the Dream Act and increasing the minimum wage indexed to inflation.

“Hard working New Yorkers should not be forced to struggle to support themselves and their families if they work one or more full-time jobs,” the Senator said.

“Unfortunately, the state minimum wage remains too low to effectively lift the over one million struggling New Yorkers out of poverty,” she continued.

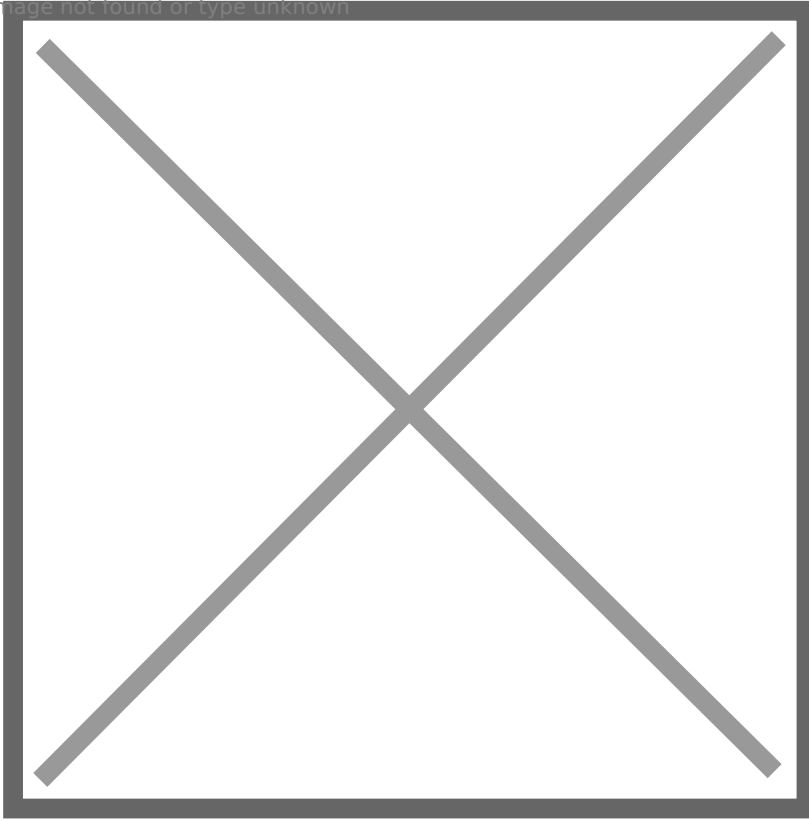
This year, Senator Stewart-Cousins called for more voices to be included in the budget negotiations-- beyond the traditional ‘three men in room’. The Senate Democratic Conference consists of 25 members, including Leader Stewart-Cousins (the first female legislative conference leader in the state) and represents 8 million New Yorkers. In addition to opening up the process, she called for more transparency around the budget in general.

“We simply rushed bills to print and then to floor with little or no real public debate or input,” said Senator Stewart-Cousins. “In spite of all of the self-congratulations in this legislative chamber for passage of an on-time budget--which I know is important to accomplish--we also need to recognize there is still a lot of work to do.”

HERE ARE SOME OF THE 2015-16 ENACTED BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS:

2015-16 SCHOOL AID

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- In Greenburgh, there are eight school districts, with a combined school aid amount of \$40,885,287 for Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Edgemont, Elmsford, Greenburgh Central, Hastings-on-Hudson, Irvington, and Tarrytown.

HIGHER EDUCATION

- Student loan support for New York state residents with the “Get On Your Feet” program to help supplement federal Pay as You Earn (PAYE).

SPECIAL ACT SCHOOLS

- \$25 million in a Capital Facilities Financing Reserve Fund for the State Dormitory Authority.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- \$150 million for the Regional Economic Development Councils for regional priority projects and \$70 million in State tax credits for a fifth round of awards; and
- \$1 million for the MWBE Development and Lending Program.

URBAN YOUTH JOBS PROGRAM (previously Youth Works)

- \$10 million addition, for total program support of \$20 million statewide in tax credits for participating communities--including Yonkers, White Plains, New Rochelle--to support the hiring of at-risk youths in targeted areas of high youth unemployment.

TAPPAN ZEE BRIDGE/THRUWAY TOLLS FUNDING

- \$900 million in capital funds for the construction project on the new New York Bridge;
- \$400 million to the Thruway Authority to stabilize tolls and prevent increase.

EXTREME WEATHER RECOVERY

- \$50 million to help localities repair bridges and roads following the past extreme winter weather.

ENVIRONMENT

- \$177 million to the Environmental Protection Fund; and
- \$200 million to Water Resources.

HEALTH CARE

- Basic Health Plan: \$1.6 billion. This new initiative allows the state to offer public health insurance to people whose income is too high to qualify for Medicaid but below 200% of the federal poverty level;

- 2-1-1 New York: \$1.25 million, including funding to qualified regional collaborators;
- New York State Alliance of YMCAs: \$500,000;
- Jawonio, Inc.: \$350,000 (includes a Yonkers location) for people with developmental disabilities;
- ALS Association--Greater New York Chapter: \$250,000 for services and expenses;
- Legal Services of the Hudson Valley Veterans and Military Families Advocacy Project;
- \$200,000 under the Division of Veterans' Affairs Aid to Localities

SPECIAL INFRASTRUCTURE ACCOUNT

- \$150 million for municipal restructuring to consolidate services, with payments to local governments and school districts;
- \$355 million for essential health care providers for debt retirement, capital projects and non-capital projects that facilitate transformation including mergers, consolidation, and restructuring

TRANSPORTATION

- \$1 billion for significant repairs of the state's roads and bridges;
- Metropolitan Transportation Authority: \$750 million for the 2015-19 Capital Program. The Democratic Conference encourages the State to provide a mechanism to eliminate the MTA's deficit, whether through increased aid or other means, in order to ensure the State's prosperity.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- \$477 million, includes the investment of \$439 million in bank settlement funds to support various programs, including \$50 million for new middle-income housing and renovation of existing Mitchell-Lama housing developments, and to support mortgage assistance and other programs targeted to the disabled, seniors, and veterans.

NEW NONPROFIT CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROGRAM

- This \$50 million program will make targeted investments with nonprofit, human service organizations across the state on a competitive grant basis. These agencies provide direct services through state contracts, state authorized payments and/or state payment rates.

KINSHIP CARE

- \$1 million.

HEROIN ADDICTION & TREATMENT

- \$1 million in Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services funding for heroin abuse treatment and prevention programs.