



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Skoufis Hails Senate Budget Proposal as Progress for Taxpayers and Residents of the 39th District

JAMES SKOUFIS March 13, 2019

| ISSUE: **DISABILITY FUNDING, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY, PUBLIC EDUCATION, TAXPAYER RELIEF**

Senator Skoufis Hails Senate Budget Proposal as Progress for Taxpayers and Residents of the 39th District

Senator Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley), in response to the New York State Senate's one-house budget resolution passage, said, "In helping develop our Senate budget, three key points have been top of mind: tax relief, quality of life, and accountability. This proposal accomplished all three. I look forward to fighting for our values in the final budget negotiations."

The Senate's budget contains dozens of items that benefit the people and communities of the 39th District.

Relief for Taxpayers

Earlier this year, Senator Skoufis successfully championed the effort to pass legislation that makes the property tax cap permanent. The budget implements a permanent property tax cap and rejects the Governor's misguided attempt to make harmful changes to the STAR program.

Additionally, the Senate budget reduced income tax rates for all middle-class New Yorkers to the lowest rates in 70 years. Skoufis continues to fight anyone in any party to deliver relief to his constituent. Countless New Yorkers continue to struggle to make ends meet and there's more work to do.

Standing up for Public Education

The Senate budget increases school aid by \$1.62 billion over this past year's fiscal year. With school districts facing continually rising cost pressures, and local taxpayers unable to bear higher tax burdens, it is critical that the state government increases its support to school districts in order to reduce classroom sizes and shift the onerous burden off local property taxpayers.

Skoufis also secured language in the Senate's budget to provide amnesty to Newburgh and Chester schools who otherwise face penalties totaling millions of dollars. These penalties, a result of paperwork efforts made years ago, are outrageously disproportionate and would have a devastating impact on these two school districts and their taxpayers.

Increasing College Affordability

The budget reforms the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) by increasing the minimum and the maximum awards and raising the income threshold for the program so that more middle-class families can benefit. With college costs continuing to rise, the TAP program continues to provide vital support for middle-class students.

Making Opioid Manufacturers Pay

The opioid epidemic has resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of lives - it has devastated families and communities around the state. Now, the Senate budget proposes a tax on opioid manufacturers that projects to raise \$100 million for much-needed treatment and addiction

recovery programs.

Improving Transparency and Accountability around the State

The budget contains several key measures to shine a spotlight on agencies and companies that have long operated in the shadows. A set of proposals will make unprecedented changes to hold pharmaceutical benefit managers (PBMs) to account amid widespread concerns that some or all of them are engaged in price manipulation that causes significant harm to local pharmacists and customers. Proposals include limiting how much PBMs can charge for certain drugs and require them to disclose any conflicts of interest or financial incentives. These provisions are a direct result of Senator Skoufis' investigation into PBM practices.

The budget also includes an MTA oversight provision that Senator Skoufis championed during negotiations: a forensic audit of the agency. Skoufis notes the widespread mismanagement, waste, and fraud that must be rooted out in the MTA before any additional funding is provided to the system. Skoufis is also leading the fight to ensure his Hudson Valley constituents are protected against any New York City congestion pricing proposal.

The Authorities Budget Office, a small but crucial state agency responsible for monitoring public authorities such as Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) and monitoring their compliance with freedom of information, open meetings, and conflict of interest laws, is getting a \$450,000 increase in funding to help fulfill this important mission. Skoufis pushes for this additional funding in conjunction with his ongoing legislative effort to hold IDAs more accountable.

More Funding for Local Governments

The Senate budget restores \$60 million in cuts to the Aid and Incentives to Municipalities (AIM) Program which the Governor proposed in his budget, and adds additional state

funding to several high-need local governments. Additionally, the Senate budget includes language making the Villages of South Blooming Grove and Woodbury permanently eligible for AIM funding, rather than needing special action each year. These two municipalities started receiving AIM funding when Skoufis arrived in the Assembly six years ago and has secured the funding since.

The budget also adds \$150 million to the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), bringing the total CHIPS funding to \$588 million. This program is a vital source of state support to communities to repair deteriorating roads and bridges. The Senate also added \$65 million to the Extreme Winter Recovery program. Skoufis has long-supported additional infrastructure funding and helped repave many state and local roads throughout the district.

Supporting People with Disabilities

New Yorkers with disabilities should be able to count on the support of state agencies and local non-profits and educational institutions. This budget plan includes \$250,000 in funding to fund a State Office for the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities because there is currently no agency-level office for people with physical disabilities to turn to; this is the first time the Senate has included this new office in their one-house budget proposal. The office will function as an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities to help receive services and support that enable them to make informed choices and decisions.

The budget additionally proposes \$3 million to fund Independent Living Centers and \$100,000 for SUNY Orange BRIDGES, one of the Hudson Valley's leading educational programs for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Promoting a Safe and Healthy Environment

On top of the Governor's proposal for funding in the budget for lead abatement, the Senate is adding \$1 million to further lead levels including water filtration, paint removal, and other measures necessary. This funding will help support communities like Newburgh that have faced issues with lead contamination.

The budget allocates an additional \$2 billion, for a total of \$2.5 billion, to the Clean Water Infrastructure Fund to be used for for clean water infrastructure projects such as improvements to solid waste management facilities, inter-municipal infrastructure projects, projects to address emerging contaminants, water quality improvement projects, concentrated animal feeding operations, and septic system replacement.

Skoufis also successfully fought to restore the draconian healthcare cuts that the Governor was proposing. His slash and burn approach would have a tremendously negative impact on local providers: St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital anticipated multi-year loss that totaled millions of dollars; Valley View Nursing Home stood to lose \$4 million. Skoufis helped reverse these unacceptable cuts in the Senate budget and will continue to fight for patients and would-be patients.

Additional Items

The budget allocates \$250,000 to fund the analysis of the feasibility in restoring passenger service to the West Shore Railroad which traverses all three counties of the 39th District. Reactivating the rail line would help a number of transit deserts in the Hudson Valley, including North Rockland which does not have a single active rail station.

SNUG is an incredibly successful program aimed at reducing gang and gun violence among youth that was funded in many cities around the state in last year's budget. This year, the Senate's budget proposes extending SNUG to the City of Newburgh.

“As Chairman of the Investigations committee, I’m determined to develop a state budget that holds state government accountable to the people it’s supposed to serve. Working in a bipartisan manner, I won’t stop until the Hudson Valley receives the respect and fair share that’s long overdue.”