



## **THE NEW YORK STATE BLACK, PUERTO RICAN, HISPANIC, AND ASIAN LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS**

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**For Immediate Release: March 28 2013**

# **Caucus Says "Budget Falls Short"**

While there are parts of the budget that are beneficial to the communities we represent, we are greatly disappointed that more was not done to address the needs of the most vulnerable New Yorkers. We were optimistic when many of our top priorities were mentioned as key priorities of the Governor in his State of the State. However, the actual results fell short.

We thank Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for their leadership during budget negotiations for advocating for the poor, low-income and middle class New Yorkers, but their efforts are only part of the process.

This budget fails to address many of the most pressing issues facing the most vulnerable New Yorkers including strong minimum wage legislation, the DREAM Act, and decriminalization of small amounts of marijuana. However, we will continue to fight for these issues until the end of the 2013 session or until they become NY state law.

### **DILUTED MINIMUM WAGE**

Without gradual increases and indexing the minimum wage bill is a “watered down” version of what President Obama, an overwhelming number of New Yorkers, and even Mitt Romney supported. Even more concerning is that the Senate negotiated unnecessary tax subsidies, which benefit major corporations at a time when essential services throughout the state were cut.

### **DREAM DENIED**

The failure to even consider the DREAM Act as priority was a denial of the American Dream to a broad cross section of New York's most precious immigrants. The DREAM Act will allow undocumented young adults who entered the country before the age of 18 and have lived in New York State for a minimum of two years the right to have access to financial aid opportunities while attending college within the state. Their families contribute to the state's economy as workers, consumers, business owners and tax payers. However, they are often left out and unaccounted for in state's higher education programming.

### **STANDARDIZE MARIJUANA OFFENSES**

Standardization of marijuana penalties remains a top priority for the Caucus, as this is an inherent issue of fairness and fiscal responsibility. Most of those arrested are young people who are then saddled with permanent criminal records that follow them for the rest of their lives. As Governor Cuomo has noted, the racial disparities in these arrests is plainly evident: approximately 85% of those arrested are Black and Latino, mostly youth, even though the data shows that young whites are the predominant users of marijuana. These practices waste our criminal justice resources, including police time, for unnecessary criminal proceedings, costing taxpayers at least \$75 million every year. By making marijuana in public view a violation, we can fix the law and standardize the penalties, bringing greater fairness to the law, saving taxpayer money, and preventing unwarranted criminalization and arrests.