



TESTIMONY OF
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DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
NEW YORK LEAGUE OF CONSERVATION VOTERS
BEFORE THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE 2015-16 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL
ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
JANUARY 28, 2015

The New York League of Conservation Voters is encouraged by the proposed Executive Budget for 2015-16. New York continues to move in the right direction when it comes to protecting the environment, preserving open space, adopting clean energy and increasing the state's resiliency in the face of a changing climate. We are particularly pleased to see the Governor increase funding for the Environmental Protection Fund, Parks, and preservation of open space and farms. In other areas, however, we think New York can do better—infrastructure for clean water, for example.

Environmental Protection Fund

The increase in the Environmental Protection Fund to \$172M continues the progress toward our goal of reaching a \$200M in the near future. After suffering through sweeps of EPF funding during the economic crisis, the Governor's continued restoration has created jobs, protected clean water and improved communities in every county in New York State. Now that the state's Real Estate Transfer Tax has significantly rebounded, we should be looking to that source of funds instead of the state's RGGI carbon pollution auctions to increase the EPF. We will work with the Legislature and Governor throughout the remainder of the budget process to ensure at least \$172M for the EPF.

Parks

This year's proposed Executive Budget continues the investment in the state's Parks, with a proposed \$110M for capital projects through the New York Works Program. This is \$20M more than in previous years and reflects a continued commitment to provide \$900M in total through 2020.

Clean Energy

As the Governor furthers his *Reforming the Energy Vision* proceeding to make the state's electric system more resilient and use more renewable sources of energy, we will continue to support these efforts. Likewise, we applaud the proposed \$20M for clean energy in the Southern Tier and the Governor's call for enactment of a law that would allow New Yorkers to share ownership of renewable energy installations.

Invasive Species

We strongly support the Governor's proposal for an additional \$1M to deal with invasive species in the Adirondacks and the creation of a park-wide invasive species program.

Open Space, Farms and Food Sheds

NYLCV is pleased to see \$50M in funding for farmland conservation, which strengthens regional farm and food systems and grows local economies. The proposed new Climate Resistant Farms Programs will help farmers mitigate climate change and enhance resiliency to extreme weather events. At the same time, the \$30M in Southern Tier farmland conservation funding would be most effective for permanent land easements and not temporary term easements. NYLCV will continue to discuss this issue with both the Governor's office and the Legislature.

Cleaning Up Contaminated Land

The Governor has proposed much-needed reforms to the state's Brownfields Cleanup Program and an extension of the state Superfund program. These critical programs help ensure that the state's most toxic properties are cleaned of hazards and redeveloped into projects that strengthen communities and the economy. NYLCV applauds the Governor for taking on this important environmental issue and we look forward to working with the Governor and Legislature to make sure that the final enacted budget contains a reformed Brownfields Cleanup Program and a reliably funded Superfund program. As part of this, NYLCV supports funding for continued funding for the state Environmental Restoration Program and the continuation of the Brownfields Opportunities Area program.

Crude Oil Trains

The Governor plans to increase the state's oil spill fund from \$25M to \$40M, and to pay for this increase through an increase in the taxes paid by the companies transporting their product in the state. NYLCV strongly supports these steps, as the current oil spill fund is dangerously underfunded.

DEC Staff

As NYLCV states in its 2015 NYS Policy Agenda, "[t]he best environmental legislation in the county is meaningless without the ability to pay for its implementation and enforcement." While this year's Budget proposes an increase of 36 staff, the NYS Department of Environmental



Protection remains shorthanded, limiting its ability to enforce and carry out the state's environmental laws.

Mass Transportation

While there are several new capital projects for the downstate region such as \$250M for new Metro-North stations in the Bronx and \$450M for a new "Air Train" to LaGuardia airport, the proposed Budget leaves a \$14.45B gap in the MTA's five year capital plan. The Governor proposed to take \$121.5M from dedicated operating programs and move it to a new capital account. In addition, the Budget proposes another sweep of \$20M in MTA funding to pay for the state's debt. NYLCV strongly supports a fully-funded capital plan and believes that newly proposed projects should not be funded until that goal is achieved. Further, dedicated funds should not be diverted for other purposes, and NYLCV opposes the proposed capital and debt sweeps.

For non-MTA transit systems, the outlook is equally bleak. The Executive Budget provides \$5 million from the NY Works program for capital needs, leaving suburban and upstate systems with a \$95 million annual gap in their five year capital plans. Operating funds for upstate transit are proposed to be flat—not even a bump for inflation. NYLCV will work with the Legislature to increase funding for these vital systems.

Clean Water Infrastructure

NYLCV is most concerned about the lack of dedicated money for wastewater infrastructure. The only funding that could potentially be used for this purpose is an upstate regional competition, where clean water money would be in competition with other economic development projects. This is a missed opportunity, especially given the \$5B windfall in bank settlement money. NYLCV will work with the Governor and Legislature to address this oversight in the coming months.

NYLCV thanks Chairs for this opportunity to provide our perspective on the proposed 2015-16 Executive Budget and looks forward to working with you in the coming months.

NYLCV is the only statewide, nonpartisan statewide environmental organization that fights for clean water, clean air, renewable energy and open space through political action. With over 100,000 members across the state, NYLCV engages the public to be effective advocates for the environment.

