



TESTIMONY OF  
 CHRISTOPHER S. GOEKEN  
 DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC POLICY  
 BEFORE THE  
 JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON THE  
 2016-2017 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

January 28, 2016

The New York League of Conservation Voters [“NYLCV”] is encouraged by the proposed Executive Budget for 2016-17 [“Proposed Budget”]. New York continues to move in the right direction when it comes to fighting climate change, protecting public health, and preserving the environment. We are particularly pleased to see the Governor increase funding for the Environmental Protection Fund to historic levels, dedicate money to underserved and urban communities for playgrounds and parks, protect farms and promote local food, preserve open space and dedicate more funds for clean water.

First, I would like to thank you for supporting environmental funding last year and in previous years—especially the Environmental Protection Fund. Your partnership with the Governor set the stage for some of the significant increases outlined in the Governor’s Budget Proposal. In particular, I note that the creation of a dedicated fund for clean water infrastructure was a legislative initiative in 2015 and is now widely seen as a critical funding stream to address failing wastewater and drinking water systems.

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND**

NYLCV is thrilled to see a \$300 million Environmental Protection Fund [“EPF”] as outlined in the Proposed Budget. The EPF has a broad impact on the state—from capital projects for parks and recreation, to invasive species prevention, support for zoos, farmland protection, and more. After suffering through sweeps of EPF funding during the economic crisis, the Governor and legislature increased EPF spending in each of the past three years. This funding has improved communities in every county in New York State.

*Inner City/Underserved dedicated funds.* Within a \$300 million EPF, NYLCV strongly supports the Governor’s proposed appropriation of \$20 million earmarked for Inner City/Underserved communities within the Municipal Parks Grants Program (\$10M of \$20M) and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program (\$10M of \$15M). These programs revitalize waterfronts and



NYLCV  
TESTIMONY ON THE 2016-17 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL  
PAGE 2

downtowns, expand public access, renovate municipal parks, improve natural resources and boost tourism and recreational opportunities. Projects put on hold during the financial crisis could be jumpstarted with additional funding in this program.

The Inner City/Underserved program receives five applications for every one it is able to fund. Vibrant parks, playgrounds, and recreation areas make communities more livable and provide opportunities for children to play sports and exercise. A revitalized park or playground is essential in addressing a growing obesity problem—particularly in urban areas.

Census tract data indicating economically distressed communities is used to determine where this Inner City/Underserved funding goes. In the past, this has typically meant both urban and rural areas. I note that the Municipal Parks Grants Program and the Local Waterfront Revitalization Program have funded projects from Big Flats to Wellsfield, from Alfred to Watertown, from Elmira to Potsdam, from Manhattan to Morehouse, and many places in between.

*Climate change mitigation and adaptation.* The Proposed Budget contains a new account for Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, funded at \$32.5M. NYLCV applauds this major dedication of funds to address the causes and effects of climate change. Coupled with existing clean energy efforts and goals, the Proposed Budget's climate change funding represents a major step forward in addressing what is clearly one of the most important issues facing the state, nation and indeed the planet.

Importantly, the Governor has proposed \$20M for Climate Smart Communities within this new climate change account. This new line item in the EPF will help finance implementation of climate smart plans developed over the past few years by communities throughout the state. These plans will decrease energy use, increase the use of renewable energy, implement smarter solid waste management programs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance community resilience and the effects of climate change.

*Farmland protection and help for farmers.* NYLCV supports the Proposed Budget's \$20M for protection of New York's farmland within the EPF. Since healthy farms produce healthy foods that make healthy kids, NYLCV also supports the "Farm-to-Schools" program in our public schools, which brings local crops direct to school cafeterias, especially in communities facing childhood hunger.

A changing climate also presents a unique set of challenges to New York's farmers. A changing climate means changing growing seasons, different pest management techniques, and more. That's why NYLCV supports the proposed \$2.5M Climate Resilient Farms Program which develops and implements best management practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration. This program also helps farmers better prepare for and recover from severe weather like droughts, floods and heavy rain.

NYLCV  
TESTIMONY ON THE 2016-17 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL  
PAGE 3

NYLCV also supports the Proposed Budget's dedication of \$1M for an Integrated Pest Management Program. Integrated Pest Management Programs work collaboratively with farmers to promote the least-toxic solutions to pests and pesticides. These Programs reduce health and environmental risks, save farmers money, and result in fewer pesticide applications.

### **CLEAN AIR FOR HEALTHY LUNGS: ELECTRIFICATION OF TRANSPORTATION**

NYLCV strongly supports the Budget Proposal's \$9M for electric vehicle charging stations in nine regions throughout the state. Emissions from cars, trucks and other vehicles with internal combustion engines reduce air quality, can trigger asthma in children, and contribute 30% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions. To address this, a top priority of NYLCV is the electrification of the transportation sector.

There is a bit of a chicken and egg problem in getting this process started. New Yorkers do not want to buy electric vehicles ["EVs"] for their personal or business use because they do not see the charging infrastructure at their workplace, grocery store, and elsewhere. On the other side, policy makers are reluctant to install charging stations since there does not appear to be a great demand for them. In this situation, someone has to go first. NYLCV is therefore calling for the development of robust regional charging networks to provide the power to the next generation of vehicles in New York State.

More EV charging stations will help spur the electrification of the transportation sector--lowering emissions from delivery trucks and cars. This will help clear the air, especially for kids with asthma.

### **CLEAN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE**

As mentioned earlier, in the SFY 2015-16 budget, the Legislature created the 2015 Water Infrastructure Improvement Act, which allocated \$200M in grants for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure over three years. (\$50M in 2015-6, \$75M in 2016-17, \$75M in 2017-18). So far, this Act leveraged more than \$440 million in clean water projects across the state. The Governor's Proposed Budget Increases the grants to \$125M for SFY 2016-17. NYLCV applauds this increase as a step toward reaching the goal of leveraging \$800M per year in clean water infrastructure spending—the annual amount needed to address the \$74B need to repair and upgrade sewage and drinking water infrastructure in the state.

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

