



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew J. Lanza

New York & New Jersey Lawmakers Unite for Port Authority Reform

ANDREW J LANZA March 16, 2012

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NEW YORK & NEW JERSEY LAWMAKERS UNITE FOR PORT AUTHORITY REFORM

Senator Andrew Lanza (R – Staten Island) and Assemblyman Michael Cusick (D – Staten Island) were joined today by New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle and the Staten Island Albany

Delegation on Staten Island today to push their Port Authority Transparency and Accountability Act (New York Senate bill S.5878) and call for a roll back on bridge tolls.

A scathing preliminary audit report issued by the Port Authority's consulting firm last month found the Authority to be a 'challenged and dysfunctional organization suffering from poorly coordinated capital planning, insufficient cost controls, and a lack of transparent and effective oversight.' The audit confirmed what the lawmakers have been saying for years -- the agency is in need of a complete top to bottom organizational redesign which is precisely what the legislation that Senator Lanza and Assemblyman Cusick, together with their New Jersey counterparts, have put forth in their respective Legislatures.

Laws governing the bi-state agency do not take effect until New Jersey and New York have enacted substantively identical legislation. The bill, (S.5878), is named the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey Transparency and Accountability Act and is sponsored by Senator Andrew Lanza and Assemblyman Michael Cusick in New York and by Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle and Senator Bob Gordan in New Jersey. The legislation will ensure the proper functioning of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey as an open, transparent and accountable interstate authority. The bill passed in the New Jersey Senate yesterday and unanimously in the New York State Senate. The Act is part of a bipartisan, bi-state effort designed to create a new system of accountability at the Port Authority.

"With passage of this legislation in the New York Senate, we are one step close to bringing urgently needed reforms to the Port Authority requiring more open, transparent and accountable operations," said Senator Andrew Lanza (R – Staten Island). "Our message to the Port Authority is, "You can run but you can't hide."

Assemblyman Michael Cusick (D – Staten Island) said, "It is of paramount importance that we ensure that public dollars are being spent in a wise and prudent manner," said Assemblyman Michael Cusick (D – Staten Island). I am encouraged that both New York and New Jersey are taking action in the right direction. The hard earned money of our commuters and residents need to be handled with care and dedicated to projects that improve their lives and strengthen our economy."

This legislation is a bipartisan, bi-state effort to bring oversight to the multi-billion dollar agency recently called "challenged and dysfunctional" by an independent audit," said New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle. "The Port Authority plays a major role in the safety of our region and we cannot afford mismanagement when the security of millions of people and major regional infrastructure are at risk."

"The Port Authority is in need of a complete top to bottom organizational redesign which is precisely what the legislation that myself and Assemblyman Cusick, together with our New Jersey counterparts, have put forth in our respective Legislatures," said Lanza. "This measure is necessary in order to rein in the waste and abuse that have gone unchecked for far too long. Toll payers shouldn't be forced to suffer for the Port Authority's lack of oversight, insufficient cost controls and poor capital planning."

The bi-state legislation would:

- €€€ Require an independent auditing of the Port Authority;
- €€€ Lay out specific requirements for open public meetings and publication of minutes of meetings of the Board of Commissioners;
- €€€ Establish specific requirements for public hearings to be held in the port district of New York and New Jersey to discuss any proposed fee, toll, charge, or fare increase;

- €€€ Establish Audit, Finance and Governance Committees;
- €€€ Require financial disclosures and training for Commissioners and certification of those disclosures by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of the Port Authority and the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, and the Chief Financial Officer of the Port Authority; and
- €€€ Create a fiduciary responsibility for Commissioners.

Senator Diane Savino noted, "This is about accountability, with this legislation we will add real teeth to the way oversight is conducted at the Port Authority. For too long the PA has not been held accountable for its skyrocketing tolls, delayed construction projects and its failed real estate ventures. The residents of Staten Island demand more value for their hard earned money and this is one way we can help to ensure that happens"

“Today I stand with my colleagues from New York and New Jersey to urge our respective legislatures to pass long overdue legislation needed to reform and restructure the Port Authority,” said Assemblyman Lou Tobacco (R,I,C-Staten Island). “In addition to reforming the Port Authority, we must also work at providing real and lasting toll relief to Staten Island residents who have for too long shouldered growing costs at the hands of a fiscally bankrupt authority.”

Assemblyman Matthew Titone said, “This bill will enact critical procedures essential to ensuring accountability at the Port Authority. Hard working New Yorkers paying budget busting tolls deserve a chance to be heard, have the right to know where their dollars are going and should have some assurances of efficiency and responsibility. This bill is a great step in that direction and I am urging Staten Islanders to be vocal in their support of this comprehensive legislation."

The Port Authority's mismanagement has bankrupted both New Yorkers and New Jerseyans alike, and these communities cannot be forced to shoulder the financial burden any longer. The utmost transparency is necessary for a public authority of such magnitude to operate justly and efficiently," said Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis. "We need commitments from both of our state governments to compel these necessary reforms and deliver crucial toll relief for our constituents."

“The Port Authority has spent the months since it drastically raised toll prices and PATH fares defending its actions,” said New Jersey Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle. We have spent that time moving bipartisan legislation in New Jersey and New York that will reform the Port Authority for now and the future. The Port Authority must get its house in order and we will make sure of that by passing historic accountability and transparency legislation."

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