



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

Press Release: Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins Releases 2015-16 State Budget Priorities

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS March 18, 2015

| ISSUE: **BUDGET**



PRESS RELEASE

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

*Senate Democratic Leader
New York State Senator, 35th District*

Yonkers, NY - Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and her Senate colleagues have released their 2015-16 State Budget priorities. The priorities include: adding another \$2 billion in funding for education; increasing the minimum wage; creating more affordable housing and job opportunities through capital projects; increasing aid to local municipalities to help reduce property taxes; increased funding for EPIC, the prescription drug plan for seniors, and for kinship care. The list of priorities were included in a budget letter to the

republican Senate Majority Leader. The Conference has also issued requests for use of the \$5.1 billion in settlement funds available for one-time investments this year, including \$275 million in zero interest loans for the Tappan Zee Bridge replacement project.

“The budget priorities outlined by the Senate Democrats reflect our view of our state’s most important needs, including adequately funding our education system and not linking policy reforms to critical funding,” said Senator Stewart-Cousins. “We have two weeks to put together a budget that works for all New Yorkers.”

Priorities that specifically relate to the 35th District include:

A \$2 BILLION INCREASE IN EDUCATION FUNDING:

The Enacted Budget must address adequate funding from universal pre-k to college, with increases first targeting high-needs districts including Yonkers, which the Senator pointed out in her remarks on the Senate floor Thursday, has requested an additional \$89 million to maintain the status quo.

- Increase funding by 4.8% for Special Act School Districts that instruct our most vulnerable students, include tuition indexing for Special Act Schools and 853 schools
- Fund Library Aid at the 2010 Census level and increase construction funds by \$14 million

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE INCLUDING TAX CAP EXEMPTIONS:

The Democratic Conference agrees with the Executive’s proposals to increase AIM funding by 10% for local governments with the greatest needs; and proposes:

- Exempting capital equipment purchases and capital projects from the tax cap, giving local governments more flexibility to invest in local infrastructure;

- Restore VLT Impact Aid (Video Lottery Terminals at Empire City at Yonkers Raceway);
- Provide \$50 million for Body Cameras program that would reimburse local and State law enforcement agencies for their purchase

TAX RELIEF:

- Amend the existing NYS Real Property Tax Law for school districts like Greenburgh Central that are experiencing issues of incongruent property valuations, to establish a special equalization rate for the purpose of determining its State operating and building aid

MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE:

- Including \$900 million from \$5.1 billion settlement funds for Low Wage Worker Stimulus as outlined in Senate Democrats' Fair New York Plan
- Indexing increase to the Consumer Price Index

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

- Provide \$1.5 billion in new capital funding for infrastructure to promote jobs and economic development statewide without competitive strings attached

AFFORDABLE HOUSING:

- Fully fund New York "Mixed Income" Housing Program - \$400 million;

- Fully fund State Low Income Housing Tax Credit, Housing Trust Fund, Affordable Home Ownership Development, and Urban Initiatives Program - \$250 million.

SENIORS:

- Include \$126.5 million for the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) Program.

KINSHIP CARE:

- Increase Kinship Caregiver/ Navigator program funding by \$1 million.

HIGHER EDUCATION:

- Increase the maximum TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) award to \$6,500, raise the income eligibility and reinstate Graduate TAP;
- Approve the DREAM ACT.

TRANSPORTATION:

- Increase funding for the Consolidated Highway Improvement Program by using \$200 million of bank settlement proceeds to make a significant impact on local road and bridge capital needs;
- Provide funding for the construction of the new Tappan Zee Bridge, as well as for the Tappan Zee Bridge's Bus Rapid Transit service to provide the Lower Hudson Valley with affordable, environmentally-friendly transit opportunities.

VETERANS:

- Fund female veterans homelessness prevention, and employment assistance initiatives;
- Increase funding for Veterans' Regional Advocacy centers by \$1 million.

*Links to:

Senator Stewart-Cousins' Budget Remarks:

<http://www.nysenate.gov/video/2015/mar/12/leader-stewart-cousins-remarks-2015-16-senate-budget-resolution>

Senate Democratic Conference Budget Request Letter:

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/258250919/Senate-Democratic-Conference-Budget-Request-Letter>