



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

State Senator James Sanders Jr. Pans End of Session Omnibus Bill; Says It Leaves Too Many Important Issues Unresolved

JAMES SANDERS JR. June 26, 2015

(Albany, June 26, 2015) State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village) expressed disappointment over the passage of an end of session multi-legislation or "omnibus" bill that excludes key pieces of legislation, leaves critical reforms incomplete and fails to properly extend necessary programs that are essential to millions of New Yorkers. However, it is not a complete failure, as some minor wins were also included.

"I believe we could have done better," Sanders said. "We have kicked the can down the road on several critical issues that need permanent solutions immediately."

The bill, (S.6012) authored by Senate Leader John Flanagan, extends mayoral control, but only for one year and raises the cap on charter schools. This bill only calls for a review of the Common Core standards and no further action has been taken.

Senator Sanders supports mayoral control and believes it should have been extended by three more years because it is vital to education reform. Mayoral control improves the education system by providing clear and direct answers about who is responsible for what and increases local involvement in the education process through community and citywide educational councils and the Panel for Educational Policy.

“In today’s global economy, a good education is the most important thing we can give our children,” Sanders said. “Mayoral control creates transparency and accountability and gives the mayor the power to implement new and innovative programs, which is all a part of a successful education system.

Also in the area of education, it was a mixed bag when it came to the education tax credit. While the Republican majority was able to push the bill through the senate, the assembly stopped it in its tracks. However, the state is still giving \$250 million in mandated service aid to non-public schools.

Another critical issue for residents is rent regulation reform, the Rent Control Act included in the omnibus bill provides a four-year extension of rent laws overlapping the state’s two percent property tax cap, but it does not create comprehensive reform nor does it address the series of issues that have been brought up in the past several months, especially vacancy decontrol.

The bill immediately increases the monthly legal rent threshold for vacancy deregulation from \$2,500 to \$2,700. Increasing and not eliminating vacancy decontrol is not a benefit for tenants.

The burden of capital improvements still remains on the tenants shoulders depending on the type of unit where one resides. Additionally, vacancy bonuses have increased profits for landlords by 20 percent.

“Rent regulations protect tenants from excessive rent increases and harassment by landlords, while still allowing property owners a reasonable return on their investments,” Sanders said. “In New York City, where the cost of living is particularly high, rent regulations

give tenants security and peace of mind that they won't unfairly be pushed out of their homes."

The city's 421-a tax abatement program, which gives tax breaks to real estate developers in exchange for meeting a 20 percent affordable housing requirement as part of their projects, has been extended, but only for only six months. During that time, developers and unions must agree on a prevailing wage in order stay in the program. It's long enough to hold the state over until the next senate session, but once again it leaves people to worry about an uncertain future.

"We missed an opportunity to create more affordable housing," Sanders said. "We could have taken that law and used it to help solve some of the homelessness that we have in New York City and New York State. Instead, we have managed to ensure that those who have, will get more, but we did very little to ensure that working people, who don't make enough to survive would have affordable housing."

In the area of criminal justice, the bill excludes "Raise the Age" legislation, however, Governor Cuomo is expected to use his executive powers to remove 16- and 17-year-olds from state prisons and put them in separate facilities managed by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision and the Office of Children and Family Services.

"While we ultimately achieved our goal of keeping juvenile offenders away from hardened adult criminals," Sanders said, "a law, not an executive order, is what was needed here."

Another incomplete action in the area of criminal justice was the failure to assign a permanent special prosecutor to handle police-related civilian deaths. Instead, Governor Cuomo will appoint state Attorney General Eric Schneiderman to this position for one year and further negotiations on a special prosecutor law will continue next year.

The omnibus bill does not complete or resolve the loose ends left over from the senate budget bill that was passed at the end of March. That bill had numerous shortfalls including failing to raise the minimum wage, providing tax breaks to the wealthy, closing the door on the DREAM Act, failing to end workplace discrimination based on religious garb, not implementing paid family leave, the inability to close the LLC loophole and weak ethics reform.

“This does not work well for the people of New York State,” Sanders said. “We need to find a way to work together because the people have sent us here to do exactly that. You would have to work hard to get a worse budget for the people of New York.”