



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

## State Budget Promises Significant Tax Relief, Historic School Funding, Fair Funding For Upstate Roads

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO April 1, 2016

| ISSUE: **STATE BUDGET, TAX CUTS, EDUCATION, MINIMUM WAGE, INFRASTRUCTURE**

ALBANY – State Senator Joseph Griffo announced today that the \$155.6 billion 2016-2017 State Budget approved this week promises billions of dollars in tax relief for the middle class, while providing record funding for schools and mitigating the economic impact of a rising minimum wage in Upstate New York.

“There is a lot to be proud of in this budget that I believe helps workers and families make ends meet, sends more funds upstate to repair roads and bridges and guarantees even more aid to struggling schools,” **said Senator Griffo, R-Rome.** “And while there was much debate and concern over the Governor’s proposal to raise the minimum wage, I believe the Senate Republicans did the best we could to mitigate the potential negative impact that such a dramatic increase could impose upon small businesses and nonprofits in Upstate New York.”

By voting to approve the State Budget in a timely manner, Senate Griffo believes many items included in the budget allow New York State to move forward in a positive direction:

**TAX RELIEF FOR MIDDLE CLASS:** Billions of dollars in tax relief will help many middle class families keep more of their hard-earned money to support their households and plan for their futures. This new tax cut will save \$6.6 billion over the first four years while

bringing middle class income taxes down to the lowest rates in more than 70 years. Once this tax cut is fully phased in, annual savings of \$4.2 billion will make New York a more affordable place to live, work and raise a family.

**MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE:** While workers will have the potential to earn more money to better support their families, the Senate Republicans recognized the serious challenges that such a jump in wages would create Upstate for small businesses, schools, hospitals, farmers and not-for-profits. Instead of the \$15 minimum wage that will be phased in by 2018 for New York City, Upstate will see a smaller increase to \$12.50 by the year 2020 in recognition of the regional economic differences that exist across the state. Then before raising the minimum wage any further at that time, an economic analysis will first be conducted to assess the impact of this increase on employers, jobs and the economy to determine if the minimum wage should be paused or suspended for any period of time.

**RECORD INCREASE IN SCHOOL FUNDING:** Schools will receive an historic \$24.8 billion in overall funding, with a 6.5 percent increase of nearly \$1.5 billion over last year. This includes a substantial 4 percent increase of \$627 million in Foundation Aid for the most high-need schools – more than the \$266 million Governor Cuomo had proposed. The budget will also finally and fully restore all of the outstanding \$434 million in funds that had been unfairly diverted from schools through the recession-era Gap Elimination Adjustment.

Griffo said: “The Senate Republicans made it their mission to totally eliminate the GEA this year so that schools could finally receive the funds they had been owed for years. But, we also recognized that many schools desperately need more funding on top of that, so I am proud that we were able to provide the most funding New York’s schools have ever received so that our hard-working teachers can offer the best education our children deserve.”

**PAID FAMILY LEAVE:** This program will allow working New Yorkers to spend time with a newborn infant and take care of sick family members or elderly parents. It will be phased in over the next four years, with employees first eligible for up to eight weeks of paid leave a year, followed by up to 10 weeks and then ultimately up to 12 weeks starting in 2021. Because it will be funded entirely by the employees through a small payroll deduction, businesses will not have to bear any additional costs.

**INFRASTRUCTURE PARITY FOR UPSTATE:** This budget achieves a major Senate priority of ensuring that Upstate New York receives its fair share of transportation funding to improve highways, roads and bridges. The budget includes a record \$27 billion in transportation investments statewide, finally balancing the infrastructure funding between Upstate and Downstate. Local communities will also receive \$438 million through the state's Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Programs (CHIPS) to help local governments repair crumbling roads and bridges.

**Senator Griffo said:** "Our Upstate communities rely on stable roadways and bridges to connect each other and to sustain their economies with safe back and forth travel, but it's challenging for local highway superintendents to maintain and repair these roadways if they don't receive enough funding to do the job. With this budget, no longer will Upstate cities, villages and towns be treated as if their infrastructure concerns are any less urgent than those Downstate."

**MAKING COLLEGE MORE AFFORDABLE:** There will be a tuition freeze at SUNY and CUNY schools this year, along with more than \$1 billion budgeted for the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to help students pay for college. This budget also boosts funding for SUNY and CUNY community colleges with an additional \$20 million.

**MEETING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF FAMILIES:**

**Confronting heroin abuse:** As communities all across the state are confronting a tragic epidemic of heroin and opioid abuse, the budget includes \$166 million in funding to help address this challenging public health crisis. This is an increase of \$25 million more than what the Governor had proposed, and it was strongly supported by the members of the Senate's Joint Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction to help strengthen abuse prevention, treatment, recovery, and education services.

**Family health initiatives:** The final budget restores millions of dollars in funding cut in the Governor's budget proposal for women's and family health initiatives, among other programs. It includes \$25.3 million for Cancer Services Programs; \$26.3 million for Nutritional Information for Women, Infants, and Children; \$9.7 million for chronic disease prevention (including diabetes, asthma, and hypertension); \$5.5 million for Rape Crisis Centers; \$2.3 million for the Prenatal Care Program; \$9.65 million – a \$1 million increase – for the Doctors Across New York Program and restores \$25 million in Excess Medical Malpractice Coverage to recruit and attract physicians to underserved communities; and \$1 million to support organ donation, among other programs.

**Support for seniors:** The budget will fully fund the state's elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program at \$131.5 million to help seniors with their prescription drug costs. To help protect vulnerable senior citizens, the budget also includes \$700,000 to support elder abuse prevention initiatives. Other highlights include \$28.9 million for Community Services for the Elderly Program; \$26.6 million for Alzheimer's programs; \$172,000 for the New York Foundation for Seniors Home Sharing and Respite; and \$63,000 for the Senior Action Council Hotline.

**PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT:** A 70 percent increase in funding will provide a record \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) to protect natural resources and ensure clean water and clean air. The Senate also successfully advocated for more funding to

support critical water and environmental infrastructure improvements in the final budget. Through the Water Quality Improvement Act, municipalities will now be eligible to receive a total of \$350 million in grants in 2016-17 and 2017-18 to repair and replace existing wastewater and drinking water infrastructure.

**GROWING NEW YORK'S FARMS:** The Senate succeeded in restoring more than \$9 million for 30 important agriculture programs that were cut in the Governor's budget proposal. These measures are necessary to support the growth of New York's agriculture industry and helping family farms succeed. The budget also includes \$115,000 in new funding for an innovative proposal by Cornell's Small Farms Program to help establish up to five veteran-owned small farms through a first-in-the-nation pilot program. Returning veterans and those seeking a career change could be encouraged to try agriculture, utilizing benefits they've earned under the GI Bill to gain training and expertise to begin their own successful small business. In turn, these sites would be available to train additional veteran-farmers in future years.

**SUPPORTING OUR VETERANS:** Finally, the new budget continues the Senate's support for the heroic service men and women who have sacrificed so much to serve our nation by committing funding for programs including: \$2.8 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to-Peer Program; \$500,000 for the NYS Defenders Association Veteran's Defense Program; \$450,000 for the Veteran's Mental Health Training Initiative; and \$200,000 for Warrior Salute, among other initiatives.

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