



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Ritchie: Senate Budget Makes Key Investments in Education, Agriculture, Job Creation and Infrastructure

PATTY RITCHIE March 15, 2017



State Senator Patty Ritchie is announcing the Senate today approved its 2017-18 one-house budget that includes key funding for agriculture, libraries, infrastructure, record investments in school aid and more that will help strengthen communities in Jefferson, Oswego and St. Lawrence Counties, as well as create new opportunities for those who live there.

“This spending plan reflects the priorities of our communities in Central and Northern New York,” said State Senator Patty Ritchie. “I will continue to fight strongly in the coming weeks

to see that the needs of our region are met and that these smart investments in things like education, agriculture and infrastructure remain in the state budget that's currently being negotiated.”

Among the highlights of the Senate's one-house budget is a restoration of \$12 million in support for agriculture, a key industry in Central and Northern New York. Senator Ritchie, who chairs the Senate Agriculture Committee, has advocated in recent weeks for committing resources to over 30 programs that were cut in the Executive Budget. Also included in the spending plan is \$3 million to assist farmers impacted by last summer's severe drought. In the last six years, the Senate has restored more than \$55 million in funding cuts and investments for agriculture.

“As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, I'm thrilled the Senate's one-house budget makes critical investments in our state's leading industry,” said Senator Ritchie. “From helping farmers recover from last year's crippling drought to assisting the next generation of agriculture professionals, I'll be working to see these key investments that bolster agriculture are included in the final enacted state budget.”

The Senate's education budget includes a five percent increase in school aid funding over the last year, for a total of \$1.2 billion, bringing the total investment in schools to a record level of \$25.4 billion. Their spending plan more than doubles the Governor's Foundation Aid proposal, with \$478 million in additional funding, for a total increase of more than \$906 million since 2016-17. The plan also improves upon the higher education proposals in the Executive Budget by making more middle-class families eligible for more financial aid through a new TAP initiative—known as the Enhanced Tuition Assistance Program (ETAP)—that helps students by increasing the minimum TAP award from \$500 to \$3,000 and the maximum to \$5,500.

In addition, it also advances several measures to protect the significant savings provided by the School Tax Relief program, as well as advances a proposal to revert the program back to an exemption, effective for the 2018-19 school year.

Investments in transportation and clean water infrastructure are also focuses of the Senate's one-house budget, which includes \$513 million in Consolidated Local Street and Highway Program (CHIPS) funding—which is \$75 million over what was originally proposed in the Executive Budget—as well as \$8 billion for clean water projects.

Other highlights of the Senate's one-house budget include:

Extra help for expanding educational opportunities

- Senator Ritchie's proposal to increase the salaries for staff providing career and technical education services through BOCES;
- \$8 million dollars in support for libraries over what was originally proposed in the Executive Budget; and
- \$15 million over what was originally proposed in the Executive Budget for library construction grants.

Protecting Fort Drum

- \$3 million in “base retention funds” to protect New York State military bases, including Fort Drum; and
- \$3.2 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Veteran Peer-to Peer program, which provides services to troops and veterans coping with PTSD and other combat-related illnesses.

Boosting the region’s economy

- Support for Senator Ritchie’s proposal to create a seasonal trail pass program for Canadian citizens, which would help make it quicker—and more convenient—for Canadian snowmobilers to ride in New York State and in turn, help boost the economy; and
- Support for Senator Ritchie’s plan to raise the weight limit on ATVs, which would allow for the registration of side-by-side models increasingly popular among sportsmen, seniors and families—and at the same time, generate revenue for the state, as well as help to support local businesses.

Help for hardworking families

- An additional \$95 million on top of the Executive budget’s child care proposals to help more low- and middle-income families qualify for the state’s child care tax credits