



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas F. O'Mara

O'Mara continues to push legislation to end unfunded state mandates: Need for mandate relief still urgent

THOMAS F. O'MARA January 30, 2020



Albany, N.Y., January 28—State Senator Tom O'Mara is again urging Governor Andrew Cuomo and state legislative leaders to get behind legislation to end the practice of unfunded state mandates on local governments and school districts.

O'Mara co-sponsors the legislation ([S.2017](#)) in the Senate that would ban any future state mandates that increase costs on local governments and school districts without providing state funding to pay for delivering the required programs and services.

“The state enacted the local property tax cap in 2011 with a promise to localities and school districts to roll back one of the nation’s heaviest burdens of unfunded state mandates. That promise has not been kept and we still have a lot of work to do to lift the existing burden off the backs of local governments and local property taxpayers,” said O’Mara. “But we should also immediately put an end to any future unfunded state mandates. This legislation proposes a commonsense step that says the state will no longer pass the buck to counties, cities, town, villages, or school districts. If the state mandates a program or a service that increases costs, the state should pay for it.”

O’Mara said the legislation keeps attention focused on the need for New York to provide mandate relief to local governments and school districts. He added that the governor’s 2020-2021 state budget proposal has raised fears that with New York facing a \$6.1-billion budget deficit, the governor and legislative leaders could be eyeing shifting additional costs from the state back to localities.

The legislation to end unfunded state mandates would also mark, if enacted, the beginning of a true transformation of the state-local partnership, O’Mara said. The state has taken some important mandate relief actions over the past several years, including long-term pension reform and the takeover of the growth in local Medicaid costs.

But it hasn’t been enough, according to O’Mara, and state-level actions like New York’s newly enacted “No Bail” law continue to impose additional unfunded mandates on localities.

“Some meaningful steps have been taken to rein in the cost of Medicaid on local governments, for example,” said O’Mara. “But we can’t keep turning our backs on the fact that more needs to be done. Mandate relief has to remain a state priority. Localities and school districts facing tough fiscal challenges still have their hands tied by too many unfunded state mandates.”

According to a Jan. 12 editorial in the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, “Since 2015, the state has capped the local share of Medicaid and absorbed increases above the cap. That cost the state \$4 billion this year. Without the cap, and a previous 3 percent cap enacted in 2006, Onondaga County’s Medicaid bill in 2020 would be double -- from the current \$100 million to over \$200 million. Imagine how much higher your property tax bill would be under that scenario. New York already relies too much on local taxpayers to pay for Medicaid -- more than any other state. It should be looking to reduce that burden, not increase it.”

The legislation O’Mara co-sponsors must be approved by both houses of the Legislature and signed by the governor before becoming law. It is currently in the Senate Local Governments Committee.