



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

Amid COVID-19 Crisis, Senator Metzger Seeks to Ensure Continuity in 2020-2021 State Budget in Uncertain Times

JEN METZGER April 2, 2020

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Albany, NY...Facing extraordinary circumstances, including the COVID-19 outbreak and its unfolding economic and fiscal impacts for the coming budget year, the New York State Senate, Assembly, and Governor reached agreement on the 2020-2021 State Budget, passing the necessary bills and resolutions over the course of a 48-hour period ending today. Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42), in her second year representing Sullivan County and parts of Orange, Delaware, and Ulster Counties, successfully fought for a number of programs and initiatives

that are important to the communities in her district.

“In the midst of an unprecedented public health crisis, we worked under emergency conditions to make sure we had a budget that maintains continuity in the operations of government and provides the funding needed for essential programs and services,” **said Senator Metzger**. “As a state, we are required to have a balanced budget—in other words, our spending cannot exceed the revenue collected through taxes and fees. This year, we had significantly less available revenue to work with as a result of the current economic slowdown from the COVID-19 outbreak, and we had to make tough choices, and I worked hard to make sure our Hudson Valley and Catskills communities got their fair share of resources.”

Earlier in the budget process, in March, Metzger hosted a public budget forum for constituents with Senator James Skoufis (SD-39) to get the input of residents, local government officials, and community-based organizations on budgetary priorities, which she took back to Albany to inform Senate proposals in negotiations with the Assembly and Governor.

Some of the important programs and initiatives Senator Metzger advocated for, and that are incorporated in the final budget, include:

- **Preserving School Aid**

Senator Metzger worked with colleagues to make sure that Foundation Aid levels for schools would be maintained in this challenging fiscal environment. Schools will continue to receive the same level of Foundation Aid in 2020-2021 that they received the previous year. In total, Senator Metzger secured over \$836 million in state aid for the school districts she represents. In addition, the budget provides \$10 million in new funding for

student mental health support grants and \$1 million for civics curriculum development.

"Even with the significant reduction in projected revenues due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, my Senate colleagues and I were determined to prevent cuts to Foundation Aid and make sure that schools would have the budgetary certainty they need to adopt their yearly budgets in May. Cuts to education during this moment would have been devastating for our kids and for local taxpayers, and I am glad I was able to work with my colleagues to prevent cuts in the final budget."

- **Protecting New Yorkers Against Unreasonable Healthcare Cuts**

The Senate fought hard against proposed Medicaid cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when healthcare facilities and staff are already stretched to the limits, and succeeded in:

- Restoring more than \$300 million in Medicaid funding that was proposed to be cut

 - Restoring more than \$100 million of hospital funding that was proposed to be cut

 - Expanding access to telehealth in the Medicaid program so more New Yorkers can connect with their physical and mental healthcare providers

 - Establishing a Prescription Drug Pricing and Accountability Board to make sure that New Yorkers aren't overcharged for vital medication

 - Protecting funding for public hospitals and indigent care for the most vulnerable population

- **Rejecting the Governor's Proposal to Shift Costs of Medicaid Growth to Counties**

The Governor's original plan to address the state's Medicaid deficit included a proposal that would have shifted a portion of the costs of Medicaid growth onto counties for the foreseeable future—a proposal that Senator Metzger strongly opposed and was successful in working with her colleagues to block.

“The Governor's proposal to permanently shift responsibility onto the counties for growth in Medicaid spending would have cost local taxpayers millions of dollars in the counties I represent, and I was glad we successfully blocked it.”

- **Preserving Needed Funding for Towns and Villages**

As a former local elected official, Senator Metzger worked hard to make sure that there were no cuts to state funding for municipalities, including Aid to Municipalities (AIM) and capital funding for local highway departments, including Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) and \$65 million in Extreme Winter Recovery funds.

“In this challenging time when local budgets are already stretched, it is important that they receive the funding they rely on from the state to operate, and to fix and maintain our roads and infrastructure. I was glad we were able to protect this funding from cuts in these difficult fiscal times.”

- **Environmental Progress**

As part of the budget, the legislature codified key parts of Senator Metzger’s permanent ban on fracking ([S6906](#)), though her bill went farther in banning fracking with gelled propane as well. This important piece of legislation puts New York on the right path and would effectively head off any industry stampede for permits to use this destructive process. The budget also continued important investments to protect our environment and advance New York’s efforts toward achieving aggressive climate goals.

Protected critical EPF Funding which funds a wide range of local environmental projects, from combating algal blooms in waterways to protecting farmland and supporting smart growth in our communities.

Authorized the “Restore Mother Nature” Bond Act allowing for it to go before voters on

Election Day. The Bond Act enables the State to leverage resources to reduce the impact of climate change as well as preserve and restore our natural resources and will provide: \$700 million to provide for climate change mitigation; \$1 billion for flood risk reduction and restoration; \$550 million for additional water quality improvement and resilient infrastructure; and \$550 million for open space land conservation and recreation.

Provided an additional \$500 million in clean water funding to help communities upgrade aging sewer infrastructure, reduce stormwater runoff, and address non-point sources of pollution.

Banned polystyrene food packaging and packing peanuts, beginning January 1, 2022.

- **Farm Labor Amendments**

Senator Metzger's bill (S. 7975) correcting two major oversights to the Farm Laborer Fair Labor Protections Act (FLFLPA) that passed last year was adopted as part of the budget. Senator Metzger expanded the definition of family to include consanguinity and affinity, meaning that certain relatives through blood and marriage, such as parents and spouses, would be excluded from the Farm Laborer Fair Labor Protections Act employee provisions. This was an important amendment, given that 98 percent of New York farms are family-owned. The FLFLPA also now allows for salaried employees, and carves them out from the overtime and day-of-rest provisions of the law, consistent with existing labor law. Both corrections are enacted as the growing season begins.

- **Rejected Governor's Proposal to Eliminate VLT Aid**

VLT Aid is a vital revenue source to Sullivan County as the Town of Thompson and the Village of Monticello both rely on it to balance their budgets each year. Senator Metzger successfully advocated against this removal to ensure this funding source remains a core part of their budgets.

- **Amendments to Criminal Justice Reforms**

The budget included important amendments to the bail reform law passed last year, adding a number of offenses previously excluded from eligibility for remand or bail, and addressing concerns about repeat offenders. Regarding discovery reform, Senator Metzger successfully advocated for a number of changes that would maintain the goals of the reforms while reducing the administrative and resource burden on counties, towns, and villages. A number of key issues were addressed, including extending the discovery deadline, protecting the identity of 911 callers, strengthening protective orders, and clarifying provisions on submission of video footage, the timing of forensic reports, and other provisions. The amendments also address discovery for non-criminal vehicle and traffic offenses and municipal infractions, which will greatly reduce the administrative challenges of the discovery reforms.

Additionally, Metzger successfully helped secure \$40 million for a Criminal Justice Discovery Compensation Fund to assist localities with the costs of meeting discovery requirements. The Governor had originally proposed \$2 million, and the increase in funding is a major win for counties and localities as they implement reforms that will ensure a fair and speedy trial.

“In the Legislature, I have been pressing for sensible amendments to the criminal justice reforms passed last year, and served on the Senate working group to recommend changes. While not all of our recommendations made it into the final budget, many of them did, and go a long way to addressing concerns that have been raised. I believe the amendments are fair, just, and protective of all New Yorkers. Building on last year’s reforms, they fix a system that practically everyone agreed was fundamentally flawed.”

- **Agriculture Budget Overview**

As Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Senator Metzger was able to secure over \$28 million in funding for important programs that provide valuable research, marketing, financial, and mental health assistance to directly support local farmers. The final budget expands the Housing Development Fund Program to provide for improved housing for farmworkers and incorporates Senator Metzger's bill (S6433) to double the loan caps to \$200 thousand for the Farmworker Housing Project. Senator Metzger also fought to protect critical funding through the Environmental Protection Fund that is important to our farmers and farming communities including: \$18 million in funding for Farmland Protection, \$100 million through Mother Nature Bond Act, and \$18 million in funding for Agricultural Non-point Source Abatement and Control Projects that support efforts to address harmful algal blooms as well as Integrated Pest Management efforts.

- **Secured \$250,000 for Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Education and Funding**

“Lyme disease is a terrible fact of life for anyone who spends time outdoors, and the geographic spread and incidence of tick-borne illnesses is only growing worse with climate change. Addressing this important public health issue has been a top priority of mine, and I successfully advocated for preserving \$250,000 in funding for prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of Lyme and tick-borne diseases. This funding is unquestionably needed to help our communities better understand how to protect themselves, their animals, and their loved ones from potentially debilitating health issues.”

- **Rejected Governor’s Proposed State Bridge Authority and Thruway Authority Merger**

“Hudson Valley representatives in both houses of the state legislature held fast in our opposition to this ill-conceived proposal, and its defeat is a major victory for our communities on both sides of the river. The New York State Bridge Authority is an efficient, well-run organization, and the Hudson Valley had nothing to gain from the proposed merger but higher tolls and a shift of revenue away from our bridges and our region.”