



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Skoufis

Skoufis Announces Passage of Challenging State Budget that Prioritizes Hudson Valley Communities

JESSICA GULOTTA April 2, 2020

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Senator Skoufis (D-Hudson Valley), in response to the passage of the 2020-2021 New York State Budget said, “There’s no sugarcoating the fact that the state not only continues to face a public health emergency, but is amidst a financial crisis. That’s why I worked around the clock to negotiate a budget that responds to our needs and protects our priorities amidst unprecedented fiscal constraints. We needed to swiftly act and focus our efforts on our Coronavirus response before all else; even amidst this crisis, we were successful in implementing much-needed fixes to bail reform, protecting against cuts to our local hospitals and schools, blocking any new taxes, and preventing the Bridge Authority from dissolving into the Thruway Authority. There is no doubt that we have a long road ahead of us following this pandemic, and I’m committed as ever to protecting public health as well as Hudson Valley taxpayers.”

The state budget contains dozens of items that benefit the people and communities of the 39th Senate District:

Protecting School Aid

Even with an extraordinary budget deficit due to Coronavirus, Senator Skoufis held the line to ensure the record funding he brought back last year wasn't stripped from our local schools. Funding for every district he represents was fully protected from any cuts.

Additionally, Skoufis helped successfully block the Governor's attempts to cut transportation aid to schools as well as cut building aid for school construction.

"Protecting education aid for our local schools has always been paramount," **said Senator Skoufis**. "When the virus struck at the heart of New York, the Governor was advancing hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts to our schools that would have affected every student and every taxpayer. Working with like-minded colleagues, we were able to avoid this catastrophic situation and keep funding levels in place."

Fixes to Bail Reform

Senator Skoufis was one of the first Senate Democrats to call for much-needed fixes to the bail reform and discovery laws that passed last year. Make no mistake: a system that discriminates based on whether one has personal wealth or not is an unjust system. That said, Skoufis explained there also needs to be reasonable guardrails on any reforms in order to ensure the public's safety, particularly in cases that involve repeat offenders and harm to another person.

With Skoufis' advocacy on the issue, this year's budget expands existing measures of what constitutes a bail-eligible offense. Specifically, any repeat offenders will now be subject to bail, any crimes that result in the death of a person will now be subject to bail, and dozens of additional crimes - including domestic violence misdemeanors, burglary, hate crimes, high level drug crimes, and sex trafficking - will now be subject to bail. These are added to the violent crimes that were already bail-eligible following last year's reforms.

The budget also established the new crime of Domestic Act of Terrorism Motivated by Hate. This new standard carries either 25 years to life or mandatory life sentence for situations in which five or more people are targeted based on a projected characteristic such as race, religion, or sex.

“These changes are common-sense and balance a fairer justice system with necessary public safety,” **said Skoufis**. “While these changes should have been put in place last year, I’m glad enough of us were able to cut through the political crap and get this done and done right. Repeat offenders need to be subject to pre-trial detention as do defendants who are accused of dangerous crimes.”

Rebuilding our Infrastructure

Led by Senator Skoufis, the Hudson Valley Delegation successfully blocked the Governor's proposal to dissolve the Bridge Authority into the Thruway Authority. Since the Governor released his proposed budget back in January, Senator Skoufis voiced strong opposition to his proposal and led the fight to do everything possible to protect our regional bridges from a takeover and, likely, toll increases to subsidize the Thruway's operations. The prevention of this merger is a huge win for drivers and residents in the Mid-Hudson region.

Later this year, a number of state roads in our communities will see resurfacing: large parts of Route 52, Route 55, Route 94, and Route 202 will all be repaved. Additionally, bridges will be repaired or replaced throughout our Senate District, including a number of overpasses along Route 9W in Eastern Orange County.

Healthcare

In January, the Governor impaneled a group of healthcare stakeholders and directed them to recommend \$2.5 billion dollars of cuts within the state's hospitals and Medicaid program

as part of budget negotiations. Additionally, the Governor proposed shifting a portion of existing state Medicaid costs to counties, putting more of the burden on local taxpayers.

Since then, the Coronavirus has hit New York and the country. With that in mind, Senator Skoufis helped successfully block the Medicaid shift to counties, protecting local taxpayers in the process; combined with this action, counties will actually net significant funding thanks to the federal stimulus bill that passed last week. Skoufis also fought back against massive hospital cuts that would have had a detrimental effect on our local communities. Specifically, the Legislature created a \$250 million funding pool to assist financially distressed providers, including direct, significant funding to Montefiore St. Luke's Cornwall.

Promoting a Safe and Healthy Environment

The \$3 billion "Restore Mother Nature" Bond Act was included to help combat climate change in New York State. This initiative will now be subject to voter approval in November.

Like all bond acts, this one would be paid over 30 years. This much-needed funding would help repair our ailing water and sewer infrastructure, make our shorelines and flood-prone communities more resilient, and move towards a more sustainable economy which will be even more critical post-Coronavirus.

Additional Key takeaways:

Prior to the budget passing, the Legislature took swift action to combat the Coronavirus pandemic that devastated our economy in New York. It was our top priority to ensure that we responded as quickly as possible.

That's why we passed:

- \$40 million emergency relief package to help our state prepare for the challenges we're facing today and potential future public health crises
- Emergency Paid Quarantine Leave for New Yorkers given quarantine or isolation orders due to exposure to the coronavirus
- Immediate Unemployment Insurance with no waiting period for New Yorkers who lost their job during the crisis

While more still needs to be done, we took additional steps to combat the ongoing health crisis in New York and established additional COVID-19 related measures in the state budget:

- \$4 billion in State emergency appropriations to directly address the ongoing crisis
- Expanded access to telehealth in the Medicaid program
- Established a Prescription Drug Pricing and Accountability Board to ensure New Yorkers aren't overcharged for their medication
- Guaranteed Sick Leave of at least 5-7 days for all employees
- Increased Unemployment Insurance funding by \$1.05 billion and workers compensation by 9.8 million in anticipation of increased claims due to COVID-19.
- Provided more than \$22.65 million for Needy Families and human service programs
- Provided \$200 million for the Child Care Development Block Grant to assist families affected by the public health emergency

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