



New York State Senator, 35th District  
Senate Democratic Leader

**ANDREA  
STEWART-COUSINS**  
News



Dear Friend,

We recently passed the 2016-2017 State Budget and this is much more than just a financial document, it is a document that directs the state's policies on a number of important issues. I am proud to announce that this budget included so many important victories on issues that I and my Democratic colleagues have advocated for so many years.

New York must be a beacon on smart and innovative policies and this budget accomplishes that goal. We passed a major middle class tax break, the strongest paid family leave program in the nation, a higher minimum wage with protections for our businesses, an unprecedented increase in aid for our public school districts including closing the GEA and a number of other crucial issues that will help move New York forward.

Making New York State a more affordable place to live, work and raise a family is a top priority for me, and thanks to the work of my Senate Democratic Conference and our colleagues in State government, we have taken a giant step in the right direction. Below are some highlights of this great budget. If you would like more information on any of these topics I encourage you to reach out to my office.

#### **Middle Class Tax Cut:**

- The State Budget continues the progress of the past few years in lowering taxes for struggling working and middle class New York households. Starting in 2018, tax rates will begin dropping for thousands of middle class households throughout New York and will continue decreasing annually for 5 years. When fully phased in, the state's income tax rate will be the lowest in

70 years, at 5.5% for households earning under \$149,000 annually, and 6% for households earning between \$150,000 and \$300,000.



*The Senator speaking at the Victory for New York Families Rally on April 4th celebrating the passage of a minimum wage increase and a meaningful Paid Family Leave policy. [Click here to watch her speak.](#)*

### **Help for Hardworking New Yorkers:**

- Balancing the needs of hardworking New York families and those of our state's business community was a top priority for my Senate Democratic Conference, and I believe the State Budget agreement struck that balance.
- Under the State Budget, the minimum wage will increase incrementally over the next few years for New Yorkers throughout the state, though the increases will differ based on regional requirements. For Westchester County residents, the current minimum wage of \$9 an hour will increase to \$10 at the end of the year, and then rise a dollar an hour annually until 2021 when the rate will be capped at \$15.
- Additionally, the paid family leave program included in the State Budget is the strongest in the nation. Starting in 2018, New Yorkers will be able to take up to 12 weeks of paid family leave to care for loved ones in need after working at least six months at their jobs. Initial benefits will be 50% of an employee's salary, capped at 50% of the state average wage. Those benefits will increase to provide New Yorkers with up to 67% of their salary, capped at 67% of the state average wage, by 2021.

### **Increased Investment in Our Students and Our Schools:**

- The State Budget included a \$1.5 billion increase in education aid, which means our state government now provides \$24.8 billion to public schools throughout New York. Included in this substantial accomplishment is a \$175 million investment to transform failing schools and other high needs schools into community schools. The community schools model has proven itself in states around the nation, and I have helped lead the fight to invest more in this common sense and highly successful approach to improving public education.
- The State Budget also provides relief for local property taxpayers by finally



ending the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) which has been a top priority for the Senate Democrats. With the GEA closed, school districts will receive more state aid and therefore not be as reliant on local taxpayers to make ends meet.

- Especially significant for our local community, schools in our region will receive an average state education aid increase of 7%.
- The State Budget also mandated that there would be no tuition increase at SUNY or CUNY and provided SUNY institutions in the Hudson Valley with \$16.5 million in capital funding. Additionally, community colleges, including our local Westchester Community College, will receive increased state aid per full-time equivalent students, which will help improve education programming and reduce costs for tuition.



*Photo: Senator Stewart-Cousins reading to Yonkers students at the Paideia School Read To Inspire Day in March.*

### **Growing Our Economy and Job Opportunities:**

- The State Budget committed \$950 million for a sixth round of Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) awards. The REDC program has helped drive economic development in our region and throughout New York State, and this Budget helps continue that progress.

### **Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements:**

- Under the State Budget, \$55 billion will be invested in New York's infrastructure. This is a historic infrastructure investment and includes \$27 billion for the Department of Transportation and the NYS Thruway Authority. These funds will be used to make capital improvements, avoid Thruway toll increases and continue progress on replacing the aging Tappan Zee.
- Additionally, \$27 billion will be invested in the MTA Capital Program that includes Metro North's rail service on the Hudson and Harlem lines here in Westchester.

### **My Brother's Keeper:**

- New York State is the first state to implement President Obama's mentoring program, 'My Brother's Keeper' which is intended to help young men of color stay in school and graduate. New Rochelle has taken the lead on this

innovative project, and the State Budget has allocated \$20 million for a pilot program. I am confident that this program will be an example to other regions in New York and to other states across the nation.

### **Addressing Heroin and Opioid Abuse:**

- We are also continuing to fight the scourge of heroin and prescription drug abuse by expanding treatment opportunities and public awareness as part of an overall statewide initiative. The State Budget builds on our financial commitment to the level of \$166 million, an increase of \$25 million over last year.

### **Protecting the Environment:**

- The state is committing an historic amount of money, \$300 million, to the Environmental Protection Fund. These funds will be utilized to continue preservation efforts and investment in more open spaces and natural resource protection. These funds also include \$5 million for the Hudson River Estuary Plan and \$250,000 for the Hudson River Valley Trail Grants Program.

Sincerely,

Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
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Senate Democratic Leader



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