

July 7, 2020

State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie  
Deputy State Senate Majority Leader Michael Gianaris  
State Assembly Majority Leader Crystal Peoples-Stokes

Dear Senators Stewart-Cousins & Gianaris:  
Dear Assembly Members Heastie & Peoples-Stokes:

As you contemplate a return to session to oppose devastating budget cuts under the austerity budget adopted earlier this year, it is crucial that you not overlook an important structural change.

The undersigned organizations urge you to pass S8198/A9100, the Budget Equity Act. This legislation amends Article VII of the New York State Constitution to give the legislature equal powers to the governor in the annual budget process. If adopted by the voters in the November 2021 general election, this amendment would (among other positive changes) give the legislature the power to modify or substitute items of appropriation, and the power to add, delete, modify or substitute any new legislation, actions that are now forbidden.

Separation of powers and checks and balances are fundamental to our democracy. For too long, the budget process in New York State has been lopsided, giving the executive branch virtually unlimited power to dictate appropriations, as well as to force enactment of legislation it favors through the state budget. This constitutional amendment would bring balance to the budget process.

But in order for this amendment to go on the state ballot in November 2021, both houses must pass S8198/A9100 three months before this year's November 3 election, and again in 2021. That means that there is basically one month, until c. August 1-2, for the senate and assembly to pass this legislation.

If the legislature does not pass this bill by the end of July, the earliest that the amendment could go on a statewide ballot would be November 2023. In other words, we have a choice of one more year (2021) of an unfair budget process, or another three years (2021, 2022 & 2023) of the current system.

The shock to life in New York State from the current pandemic has been unprecedented, and recovery will be long and difficult in terms of public health, economic health and the welfare of New Yorkers. The adoption of an austerity budget three months ago was

exactly the wrong prescription for recovery, and already we are facing new budget cuts to state and local programs that we all rely on to maintain a civilized society.

We can no longer pretend that there is some solution that does not involve asking the richest among us to pay their fair share. Failing to do so means more cuts to schools, cuts to hospitals, cuts to transit, cuts to infrastructure, cuts to our safety net, cuts to senior programs, and on and on. And the impact of these cuts will mean a stop to any recovery, so that more people will suffer longer and longer, while we wait for a farcical trickle-down rebirth that will never arrive.

The Legislature must restore our system of checks and balances. Your recent passage of a package of long-delayed police reform bills is an excellent start. Legislation to increase revenues by requiring high-income New Yorkers to pay their fair share is a necessary next step.

Allowing the voters to level the future playing field in the budget process will lead to a more equitable New York State. Please pass the Budget Equity Act.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Quality Education  
Association of Tenants of Lincoln Towers  
Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition  
Chinese-American Planning Council  
Citizen Action  
City-wide Tenant Union of Rochester  
Coalition for the Homeless  
Community Voices Heard  
Crown Heights Tenant Union  
CUNY University Student Senate  
Empire State Indivisible  
Fifth Avenue Committee  
Greater NYC for Change  
Housing for Albany  
Housing Justice for All  
Indivisible Harlem  
London Terrace Tenants Association  
Long Beach Tenants Coalition  
Long Island Progressive Coalition  
Long Term Care Community Coalition

Make the Road New York  
Metropolitan Council on Housing  
Metro New York Health Care for All  
Morningside Heights Resistance  
Mount Vernon United Tenants  
Neighbors Helping Neighbors  
Neighbors Together  
New York City Loft Tenants  
New York Communities for Change  
New York State Council of Churches  
New York State Tenants & Neighbors Coalition  
New York Taxi Workers Alliance  
NY Working Families Party  
New York Youth Climate Leaders  
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition  
Riders Alliance  
Rise and Resist  
Strong Economy for All Coalition  
Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village Tenants Association  
Tenants Political Action Committee  
True Blue NY  
United Tenants of Albany  
Upper West Side Action  
Urban Homesteading Assistance Board  
Village Independent Democrats  
VOCAL-NY  
We Are One Sullivan  
Woodside On The Move  
Young Invincibles  
Zara Tenant Coalition  
101 Lincoln Road Tenants' Association

(List in formation)