



Assemblywoman
**Vivian E.
Cook**

Reports to the People

Spring 2012

Dear Neighbors:

I am pleased to report that the New York State Legislature passed its on-time 2012-2013 New York State Budget on March 30, 2012. The \$132.6 billion budget closes the state's \$3.5 billion deficit and continues the lowest middle class tax rate in 58 years, which cut taxes for 99 percent of New Yorkers in December. Keeping this money in the hands of those who earned it will help to ease the burden that the downturn in our economy has placed on so many in our communities over the past few years. In addition, the new budget restores critical funding for education and health care and funds important job creation and infrastructure programs. Critical funding was restored to EPIC and Community Based Services for the Elderly. The budget provides \$30.6 million to support the restoration of EPIC co-payment assistance that was eliminated on January 1, 2012. EPIC enrollees will be required to pay no more than a \$20 co-pay when filling a prescription, regardless of the cost of the medication. Currently, seniors may have to make co-payments as high as 25 percent of the cost of the drug, which can be a huge burden to many of our seniors with fixed incomes and expensive prescriptions. Seniors should not have to worry about being able to afford the medication they need to survive. Starting in 2013, EPIC enrollees will once again pay between \$3 and \$20 for each prescription. The budget also restores \$458,000 in funding to the NORC and Neighborhood NORC programs. NORCs and NNORCs are communities that were not originally built for seniors, but have evolved to have a significant proportion of residents 60 years and older. These communities provide a broad range of social and health care services to support their residents.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the groups and organizations that take the time to come to Albany to meet with me on legislative and budgetary issues of importance to the residents of the 32nd A.D. Each year, I am pleased to visit with students and faculty of York College, Friends of Rochdale Village Learning Center, Baisley Park Community Library, Dunton Community Gardens, AARP, Public Employees Federation, United Federation of Teachers, District Council 37, District Council 1707, Communication Workers of America, and the Transport Workers Union. Having this dynamic and open communication with community members is vital to my role as your representative in state government. Hearing your thoughts and concerns directly helps me to focus my efforts on your behalf, and I greatly appreciate your dedicated activism on behalf of our community. By carrying on our work together in a constructive and industrious way, we will continue to progress positively in our efforts to improve the lives of all of the residents of the 32nd A.D.

Sincerely,

Vivian E. Cook

Assemblymember Cook enjoys a visit with York College



Assemblymember Cook meets with President Marcia V. Keizs, Mr. Earl Simons, Professor Selena Rodgers, Professor Rebecca Rivera-Maestre, and students on their annual lobby day in Albany. The group thanked Assemblymember Cook for securing funding to help build the Academic Village and Conference Center now in design phase and for her continued support of York College. The students had an opportunity for a one on one dialogue with Assemblymember Cook discussing budget priorities and other important issues.

2012-2013 NYS BUDGET

Assemblymember Cook recently announced details of the 2012-13 final state budget. The \$132.6 billion budget closes the state's \$3.5 billion deficit while restoring critical funding for education and health care and funding important job-creation and infrastructure programs. The budget also continues the lowest middle-class tax rate in 58 years, which cut taxes for 99 percent of New Yorkers in December.

In addition, effective April 1, New York State has again exempted the state's 4 percent sales tax on clothing, footwear, and related items sold for less than \$110 each so working families can save more of their hard-earned dollars.

"This year's on-time state budget brings much-needed relief to hardworking families, with no new taxes, fees or gimmicks," Assemblymember Cook said. "By investing in job creation and increasing aid to our schools and health care system, this year's budget addresses the needs of New Yorkers, while holding spending under 2 percent growth and strengthening our state's economic recovery."

Keeping the promise: Investing in education

The final budget increases school aid 4 percent – or \$805 million. That includes a \$111.5 million increase in Foundation Aid, a \$400 million increase in the Gap Elimination Adjustment restoration and a full restoration of \$239 million for expense-based aids. In addition, \$125 million will be available through a competitive grant process.

"The key to a successful future for our children starts in the classroom," Assemblymember Cook said. "That's why I fought to increase school aid, making sure our children have access to the quality education they deserve."

Delivering higher education funding

Recognizing the critical role that community colleges play in job training and retraining, the Assembly Majority promised to increase state support to the state's public community colleges. The final budget increases support to \$2,272 per-FTE student for a total of \$22.1 million for SUNY community colleges and \$9.1 million for CUNY community colleges. The base aid increase is \$150 per-FTE student, the first community college base aid increase in five years.

In addition, the budget provides \$1.6 million to SUNY child-care centers, a \$653,000 restoration, and \$1.3 million to CUNY child-care centers, a \$544,000 restoration. The spending plan also restores \$27.8 million to be distributed equally among the three SUNY teaching hospitals.

"As many families are still struggling to make ends meet, we cannot let our children miss out on a college education simply because they can't afford it," Assemblymember Cook said. "By protecting the valuable role community colleges play in our area, we can provide affordable education to families and better prepare our children for their future careers."

Lending a helping hand to our most vulnerable

The final state budget includes \$16 million for full implementation of the 10 percent public-assistance grant increase. It will increase 5 percent on July 1, 2012, and an additional 5 percent on Oct. 1, 2012.

Additionally, \$16.7 million is allocated to the following Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs:

- ATTAIN Technology Training (\$3 million);
- Child Care subsidies (\$2 million);
- Nurse Family Partnership (\$2 million);
- Child Care Facilitated Enrollment (\$1.3 million);
- Non-Residential Domestic Violence Services (\$1.2 million);
- Settlement Houses (\$1 million);
- Wage Subsidy Program (\$950,000);
- ACCESS – Welfare to Careers (\$800,000);
- Career Pathways (\$750,000);
- Preventive Services (\$610,000);

- Displaced Homemakers (\$546,000);
- Advantage Schools (\$500,000);
- Emergency Homeless Needs (\$500,000);
- Child Care SUNY/CUNY (\$334,000);
- Educational Resources (\$250,000);
- Food Pantry Initiative (\$250,000);
- Strengthening Families through Stronger Fathers (\$200,000);
- Bridge (\$102,000); and
- Caretaker Relative/Kinship (\$51,000).

"This tough economy has wreaked havoc on our state's poorest residents," Assemblymember Cook said. "By increasing the public-assistance grant, we can help ensure that hardworking families who are struggling get the financial assistance they need to put food on the table, pay their bills, and clothe their children."

EPIC restorations for co-payment assistance

The 2012-13 state budget restores \$30.6 million to the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program – helping reinstate co-payment assistance for approximately 300,000 EPIC enrollees. Currently, seniors enrolled in the EPIC program are required to pay 25 percent of the cost of each prescription drug. With the co-payment assistance restored, enrollees will return to paying no more than \$20 co-payment for each prescription.

"As the cost of living continues to rise, many seniors on fixed incomes can hardly afford to put food on the table, let alone pay for the staggering cost of medication," Assemblymember Cook said. "By restoring this vital funding to EPIC, we can help our most vulnerable residents afford life-saving prescription drugs, protecting their health and well-being during this tough economic time."

Helping the unemployed

The state budget appropriates \$6.5 billion for unemployment insurance benefits. This amount reflects an increase of \$2.25 billion over the executive budget proposal due to federal extensions passed in February.

"We must make sure that unemployed New Yorkers still have access to essential insurance benefits in the case of an emergency," Assemblymember Cook said. "It's imperative that we continue to invest in programs that prevent our most vulnerable residents from slipping through the cracks."

Increasing health care spending, reducing unfunded mandates

The final budget increases health care spending by 4 percent, making our state a healthier, more secure place to live. The plan also includes a provision for the state to take over the local share of the costs of Medicaid growth, to be phased in over three years, saving local governments \$1.2 billion over the next five years. Currently, all growth over 3 percent is paid by the state. Additionally, the budget provides for the state to relieve local governments from Medicaid administrative burdens. These measures provide mandate relief to local governments and municipalities – providing them the opportunity to cut property taxes.

The budget also includes \$34.3 million to maintain the right for spousal refusal, ensuring that seniors with ailing spouses who are in need of long-term care services are protected against losing assets that are critical to their well-being.

In addition, the final budget includes funding for the following:

- Home and Personal Care Worker Benefits (\$10 million);
- Tobacco Prevention and Control Program (\$5 million);
- Public health and wellness programs at SUNY teaching hospitals (\$2 million);
- Additional funding for infertility programs (\$2 million);
- Family Planning Services (\$750,000);



Special Thanks to Assemblymember Cook . . .

BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

- School Based Health Centers (\$557,000);
- HIV/AIDS Community Service Programs (CSP) (\$525,000);
- HIV/AIDS Multi Service Agencies (MSA) (\$525,000);
- NORC and Neighborhood NORC programs (\$458,000); and
- Breast Cancer Network (\$50,000).

"In an effort to relieve some of the financial burden on local governments, this year's budget provides municipalities mandate relief from heavy Medicaid costs," Assemblymember Cook said. "This measure gives local governments the chance to provide property tax relief for hardworking families."

Helping businesses create and retain jobs

The 2012-13 final budget provides \$794.6 million to various Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC) projects to help promote business growth, leading to job creation and revitalized communities throughout the state.

"Now more than ever, we need to invest in programs that create good-paying jobs for New Yorkers," Assemblymember Cook said. "By getting more people back into the workforce, we can grow and strengthen our economy, making New York State a better place to live and do business."

Funding for capital projects

The final budget includes funding for capital projects, helping to rebuild our state's crumbling infrastructure and putting people back to work:

- repairing and rebuilding parks, roads and bridges through New York Works (\$1.6 billion);
- SUNY College of Nanoscale and Science Engineering (\$250 million);
- a second round of Regional Economic Development Council grants (\$220 million);
- New York Works Economic Development Fund, as part of the New York Works Initiative (\$75 million); and
- Empire State Economic Development Fund (\$20 million).

"Infrastructure projects to rebuild our roadways and bridges play a vital role in rebuilding New York's economy," Assemblymember Cook said. "Through this funding, we can help spur job creation and revitalize our communities hit hardest during this economic downturn."

Supporting minority- and women-owned businesses

The final budget also allocates \$1.6 million in the area of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE). In addition, support for the Minority- and Women-owned Business Development and Lending Program was increased by \$365,000 to a total appropriation of \$1 million.

Assemblymember Cook said the funding will be used to develop a new computerized system to better monitor MWBE access to state contracting opportunities and to expand the Department of Economic Development's MWBE workforce by 15 full-time equivalent positions. These budget provisions further the goal of 20 percent participation by MWBEs.

"Minority- and women-owned businesses are often small businesses and have had trouble breaking into the job of supplying state government," Assemblymember Cook said. "This funding will provide those businesses with a helping hand so they are in the best position possible to compete, and to hold the state accountable in how it does business."

Funding vital transportation projects, rebuilding roads and bridges

The budget appropriates \$5.1 billion to the Department of Transportation (DOT) – a 27.9 percent increase from last fiscal year.

This appropriation includes \$1.16 billion for the New York Works program in order to accelerate bridge and road construction and repair. The budget also maintains that all DOT regional offices will be kept open through the 2012-13 fiscal year.

"Our state's roads, highways and bridges are vital links in our communities and to our economy, so providing enough funding to ensure their efficiency and safety is vital," Assemblymember Cook said. "This crucial funding also invests in important transportation projects that will provide jobs and new opportunities to hardworking families."

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)

The 2012-13 state budget provides \$4 billion to the MTA – a 5 percent increase from last year. Under this year's budget, \$25 million is provided for the School Fare program and a \$250 million transfer from the General Fund goes to the MTA Mobility Tax Account to fully offset revenue reductions resulting from the Dec. 2011 legislative special session. The budget provides an appropriation of \$770 million to assist in financing the final three years of the MTA 2010-14 Capital Plan. This funding allows for the Second Avenue Subway East Side access (LIRR into Grand Central) and the Fulton Street Transit Center projects to proceed.

"So many New Yorkers depend on the MTA regularly to travel in and around New York City," Assemblymember Cook said. "That's why it's crucial that we provide the MTA with the funding necessary to replace train cars and tracks, provide jobs, and upgrade the MTA's infrastructure, the economic lifeblood of the New York MTA region."

Bolstering housing programs

The 2012-13 budget increases funding for essential preservation programs by \$2.2 million. A total of \$14.3 million will be dedicated to the construction and rehabilitation of quality, affordable housing. More than \$10 million is earmarked for the Neighborhood Preservation Program and \$4.2 million for the Rural Preservation Program. Last year, the programs were funded at \$8.48 million and \$3.54 million, respectively.

"These restorations help us make progress in the areas of affordable housing, economic development and community renewal, as well as aim to keep more hardworking families from losing their homes," Assemblymember Cook said.

Foreclosure Prevention Program

The Foreclosure Prevention Program, which provides legal assistance, counseling and other support services to homeowners, will be funded over a three-year period with a first-year investment of \$25 million. As part of this funding, existing program contracts will be extended for at least six months.

"For many hardworking families, it's a constant struggle to try and keep up with the rising cost of living," Assemblymember Cook said. "That's why it's so important that we invest in programs that provide our families with affordable housing and assistance to make sure they don't end up forced out of their homes and on the streets."

Cutting taxes for 99 percent of New Yorkers

The 2012-13 state budget continues new tax brackets first established last December in which rates for 4.4 million people were reduced, resulting in a tax cut of \$690 million for middle class and working families. This middle-class tax cut is paid for with a higher tax bracket for those making over \$2 million per year – which is less than 1 percent of all New York residents.

"By asking the wealthiest New Yorkers to pay a little more, we were able to ease the heavy financial burden on so many hardworking families across the state," Assemblymember Cook said. "This tax cut helps middle-class families struggling to make ends meet, while allowing them to experience a better quality of life."

MTA payroll tax cut

The 2012-13 state budget fulfills the promise made in December to permanently eliminate the MTA payroll tax for qualifying small businesses with annual payrolls of \$1.25 million or less and for those who are self-employed and earn less than \$50,000 per year. In addition, it exempts schools, both public and private, from having to pay the tax. Additionally, many small businesses will see a considerable decrease in the tax, including those companies with payrolls up to \$1.75 million.

"For too long, the burden of the MTA payroll tax has weighed on small businesses and schools," Assemblymember Cook said. "By relieving this tax on small businesses and eliminating it completely from our schools, we can focus on creating a more business-friendly environment in our communities and provide our children with the best education possible."



Assemblymember Cook Secures Funding for Library Projects

Assemblymember Cook has played a key role in securing funding for two important Queens Library projects. The Rochdale Village Adult Learning Center will expand to more than double its size and the Baisley Park Community Library will be renovated and updated with a new computer laboratory and cyber center as the result of state funds provided by the efforts of Assemblymember Cook.

Ground was broken in early March on the \$4.1 million Rochdale Village Adult Learning Center project. Assemblymember Cook worked diligently to provide vital state funding for this project, which will more than double the existing Learning Center space. The Center, one of seven that are part of the Queens Library system, serves hundreds of adult students every year. They are adults who are learning to read, or who are learning to write and converse in English, as well as students who are taking pre-GED classes. The expansion/renovation will include expanded classroom space, additional computers and listening stations, more study/conversation group space, and a new handicapped-accessible restroom.

"I am pleased to support and help secure funding for the Rochdale Village Adult Learning Center. The Center is vital to the adults in our community who want to learn how to read, write, use the computer, and so much more. This expansion is a wonderful project for the residents of Southeast Queens, and I look forward to the project's completion in the fall of 2013," stated Assemblymember Cook.

Assemblymember Cook also secured funding for the \$250,000

renovation project at the Baisley Park Community Library. A new computer laboratory and cyber center will be established at the site, and extensive renovations will be made to the library building which will include installing a new fire detector system, interior painting and design, and updating interior lighting and wiring.

"Securing the funding to move this project forward has been very important to me in this fiscal year," Assemblymember Cook commented. "This project will allow us to make great strides in modernizing the Baisley Park Community Library, which in turn will allow our community members to take advantage of the vital modern learning tools that the new cyber center will provide. In this age of technology it is so important that residents have the opportunity to utilize these computers and facilities to expand their knowledge and facilitate life-long learning."

Queens Library is an independent, not-for-profit corporation and is not affiliated with any other library system. The library serves a population of 2.3 million from its 62 locations, seven Adult Learning Centers, and two Family Literacy Centers. It has among the highest circulations of any public library system in the world and serves one of the most ethnically diverse counties in the United States. "The Queens Library is such an important part of our community," stated Assemblymember Cook. "I am extremely pleased to have been able to secure funding for these projects which will play such an important part in the continuing improvement of the Library's programs and services well into the future."



Assemblymember Cook attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Friends of Rochdale Village Learning Center Project. In photo from left to right: Christine Hughes, Friends of Rochdale Village; Councilman Ruben Wills; Assemblymember Cook; Queens Borough President, Helen Marshall; William Jefferson, Trustee; Sarah Payne, VP Friends of Rochdale Village; Jacqueline Aarington, Chair, Bd of Trustees; Thomas Galante, President of Queens Library; Emily Banks, President, Friends of Rochdale Village; and Michael Semple, Manager, Adult Learning Center.



Friends of Rochdale Village Library and Baisley Park Community Library came to Albany to meet with Assemblymember Cook and thank her for her support and for securing funding to renovate and expand the library.

Assemblymember Cook's Office Information

Albany Office: LOB Room 939, Albany, NY 12248 • **Phone:** 518-455-4203 • **Fax:** 518-455-3606

District Office: 142-15 Rockaway Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11436 • **Phone:** 718-322-3975 • **Fax:** 718-322-4085

Monday – Friday: 9:00 a.m.– 5:00 p.m. **E-mail:** cookv@assembly.state.ny.us