



Assemblymember Vivian E. COOK



Reports to the People

Winter 2019

Dear Neighbors:

This newsletter is designed to provide you with a brief report on the highlights and accomplishments of the 242nd Legislative Session which concluded on June 20, 2019. I am pleased to have helped pass a \$175.5 billion 2019-20 state budget that builds on the historic progress that has already been made this year and stays true to the Assembly Majority's commitment to putting families first. This budget cares for our most vulnerable and holds true on the Assembly Majority's promise to create a fairer, more just state for all, where opportunity and success are not reserved only for the lucky few. For the student who goes to school hungry, to the commuter who is tired of getting to work late because of unreliable service, to the innocent New Yorker who has unfairly sat in jail for far too long, we heard you and we are looking out for you. Areas of accomplishments include increasing fairness in our criminal justice system; opening up more doors to higher education; helping New York's students reach for the stars by strengthening public and community colleges; ensuring everyone is counted in the 2020 Census; protecting our seniors; and helping our veterans get ahead.

I am also pleased to report that I have been able to secure funding to help support important programs and organizations that provide needed services to the communities of Southeast Queens. Most recently these programs include: Rochdale Senior Center; LP FAM'S Youth Organization; Child Center of NY After School and Summer Program at South Jamaica and After School & Summer Program at PS 223; Thomas White Jr. Foundation Training and Outreach Program; and the Friends of Rochdale Village Learning Center. This funding is vital to these organizations for without these special efforts, these services may have been jeopardized. In addition, during my tenure in the Assembly I have secured millions of dollars in capital funding for the district I represent.

In closing, as we approach the end of 2019, I would like to take this time to thank you, my constituents in the 32nd Assembly District, for supporting my tenure in the New York State Assembly. Please remember that I remain available should you need any assistance. Best wishes for a safe holiday and happy and healthy New Year.

Warmest regards,

Vivian E. Cook
Member of Assembly

A Glimpse at Legislative and NYS Budget Accomplishments for 2019-20

Criminal Justice Reform

The 2019-20 state budget includes sweeping criminal justice reforms to ensure New York treats all defendants fairly and equally.

The final state budget eliminates cash bail for misdemeanors, excluding sex offense misdemeanors, and non-violent felonies, allowing individuals to be released on their own recognizance or under non-monetary conditions. Electronic monitoring will not be available for most misdemeanors, but can be ordered as a condition of release, following a hearing, for felonies, domestic violence misdemeanors, sex offense misdemeanors, or a misdemeanor where the defendant had a violent felony conviction within the past five years.

Under the legislation, a cash bail option will be retained for sex offense misdemeanors and most violent felony offenses, excluding felonies classified as "violent" but which do not actually have a violent component, such as second-degree robbery or burglary.

Reforming the discovery process

The 2019-20 state budget revamps New York's discovery procedures to assure the expeditious, fair, and equitable exchange of information and documents in criminal cases.

Ensuring the right to a speedy trial

To ensure the right to a speedy trial is upheld, the 2019-20 state budget allows the court to inquire as to whether the prosecution is, in fact, ready for trial when the prosecution claims readiness, thereby stopping the speedy trial "clock." The legislation also requires that the prosecution's statement of readiness be accompanied by a good faith certification by the prosecution that it has complied with its discovery requirements.

Advocating for fairness and equality

To ensure everyone is being treated fairly under the law, the 2019-20 state budget provides further protection to vulnerable New Yorkers. Budget legislation extends protections of New York's rape shield law to victims of sex trafficking.



Assemblymember Cook attends a meeting of the Joint Budget Conference Committee. She was appointed by Speaker Carl Heastie to the Assembly and Senate Joint Budget Conference Committee on Education. The Conference Committees are tasked with the budget negotiations that are necessary to progress towards the enactment of an on-time budget.

A Glimpse at Legislative and NYS Budget

Helping New York’s Students Reach for the Stars

The 2019-20 state budget continues the Assembly’s commitment to expanding opportunity for our youngest New Yorkers by increasing funding for public schools by \$1 billion over last year and putting a college degree within reach for more students.

The state budget provides a total of \$27.8 billion in education funding, an increase of \$1 billion – or 3.7 percent – over last year. This includes a \$618 million increase in Foundation Aid for a total of \$18.4 billion. Further, \$30 million of uncollected lottery winnings is earmarked for public schools, and districts are authorized to create a reserve fund to finance contributions to the New York State Teachers’ Retirement System. And to help more kids get started on the right foot, the spending plan also includes a \$15 million increase in funding for grants for prekindergarten, for a total of \$822 million.

The plan also rejects the executive proposal to consolidate 11 expense-based aids, including BOCES aid, special services aid and transportation aid, and allows them to be reimbursed at their present levels.

To ensure local school districts can adopt teacher and principal evaluation systems best suited to their students’ needs, the budget includes legislation removing the mandate that state-created or administered assessments be used for evaluations. The Assembly has led the way on this issue, spearheading the measure last year and passing it again earlier this year. Assemblymember Cook noted that this will help allow teachers to craft lesson plans effective for their students rather than following a cookie-cutter approach that could leave some of our young learners behind.



Assemblymember Cook meets with Friends of Rochdale Village Learning Center on the Annual Library Lobby Day in Albany. As a lifelong advocate of libraries, Assemblymember Cook is pleased to have secured grants and funding to help support Friends of Rochdale Village Learning Center and the Queens Public Library.

Opening up more doors to higher education

The budget continues the Excelsior Scholarship, which was established in 2017, and makes SUNY and CUNY schools tuition-free for eligible New Yorkers. The income eligibility threshold increases this year to \$125,000. Students who attend a private college in New York and have a family income of less than \$125,000 this year would also be eligible for a scholarship award of \$6,000.

Earlier this year, both the Assembly and Senate passed the Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act to help the children of immigrants achieve their college dreams. The budget includes \$27 million to implement the law and fund TAP awards for eligible “Dreamers.”



Assemblymember Cook is a member of the prestigious Ways and Means Committee. The Ways and Means Committee, where members vote on all NYS Budget Bills and all bills that have fiscal impact, meets regularly.



Assemblymember Cook meets with the members of the Boy Scouts of America Greater New York Council on their annual lobby day. Assemblymember Cook is happy to meet with Scouts representing the Queens Council.

Strengthening public and community colleges

The 2019-20 state budget also invests in SUNY and CUNY schools, as well as community colleges across the state. The plan:

- allocates \$12.1 million to SUNY, and \$6.1 million to CUNY, to increase community college base aid by \$100 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, bringing the total rate to \$2,947;
- provides \$6 million more for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs), for a total of \$61 million;
- restores \$2.5 million in funding for the CUNY Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP);
- provides \$1.1 million to SUNY and \$902,000 for CUNY for Child Care Centers; and
- restores \$1 million to Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) labs for a total of \$5.5 million.

The budget also allows SUNY and CUNY schools to reduce or waive tuition for high school students enrolled in college courses, supporting those who want to get a head start on the journey to a college degree.

Additionally, the budget:

- restores \$4.5 million for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative to support foster students on their path to higher education;
- restores \$1.5 million for the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, formerly known as the Joseph S. Murphy Institute;
- restores \$700,000 for Small Business Development Centers, which offer business counseling and entrepreneurial training;
- restores \$600,000 for Graduate Diversity Fellowships;
- restores \$500,000 for mental health services and telecounseling at SUNY;
- provides \$200,000 for the SUNY Institute for Leadership and Diversity and Inclusion;
- provides \$150,000 for the Hispanic Leadership Institute at SUNY; and
- allocates \$100,000 to the Center for Women in Government.

Supporting college opportunity programs

The Assembly Majority has long recognized how invaluable college opportunity programs are to ensuring disadvantaged New Yorkers are given a fair chance to pursue higher education. This year’s state budget restores \$23.8 million to these programs, providing:

- \$35.5 million for the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP);
- \$32.2 million for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP);
- \$28.1 million for Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK);
- \$18.4 million for Liberty Partnerships;
- \$15.8 million for the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP);
- \$11.9 million for the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (C-STEP); and
- \$1.3 million for College Discovery.

Protecting Tenants and Ensuring Safe, Affordable Housing

The budget includes \$402.14 million for housing, including restoring \$12.83 million for Neighborhood Preservation Programs and \$5.36 million for Rural Preservation Programs, which help community-based not-for-profits provide safe, healthy and affordable housing throughout the state.

To improve the administration of the STAR tax exemption/credit and make data collection more efficient in manufactured homes parks, the budget will allow park owners to report to the Commissioner of Tax and Finance instead of to Homes and Community Renewal (HCR). Tax and Finance must send the report to HCR within 30 days, and HCR must report annually to the public on data to increase transparency and maintain proper oversight of the parks, as well as determine the best steps to protect tenants.

The budget also includes an \$8 million increase for HCR's Office of Rent Administration – which helps enforce rent regulations and protect tenants from landlord harassment – as well as \$5.5 million for its Tenant Protection Unit.

Supporting Homeowners and Seniors

To help more New Yorkers remain in their homes, the state budget provides \$20 million for the Communities First program to fund foreclosure prevention assistance. It also requires lenders to provide 90 days' notice to homeowners facing foreclosure and makes settlement conferences mandatory.

The budget includes a \$15 million increase for Expanded In-home Services Program (EISEP), which offers non-medical in-home services such as personal care and housekeeping, for a total of \$65.1 million. To help more seniors remain in the communities they helped build, the budget increases the maximum amount the state can provide a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC) from \$200,000 to \$300,000.

"Seniors helped make New York the vibrant and diverse state that it is today, and it's our responsibility to support them as they age," said Assemblymember Cook. "The budget expands access to critical services to ensure seniors can remain in their homes, surrounded by family and friends, for as long as possible."

Combating Addiction

To help address the ongoing opioid crisis that continues to devastate communities across the state, the budget allocates an additional \$1 million to expand jail-based substance use disorder services in county jails for a total of \$4.75 million. It also restores \$2 million for New York City's Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS) program, which provides a host of support services for school-aged children.

Supporting Working New Yorkers

The budget restores funding to several labor programs, including:

- \$1.62 million to the Displaced Homemakers Program, which provides career and job search assistance to unemployed and underemployed New Yorkers who previously provided unpaid services for their families;
- \$350,000 for the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH), a coalition of labor groups and safety professionals dedicated to reducing workplace injury;
- \$150,000 for the Sexual Harassment Prevention Program at the Cornell School of Industrial Labor Relations; and
- \$50,000 for the Criminal Records Discrimination Program at Cornell University.

To provide more workers with on-the-job experience and training, the budget expands the Employee Training Incentive Program (ETIP) Credit for New York businesses by including in-house training, software development, and renewable or clean energy internships as part of eligible training activities. The budget also extends the Workers with Disabilities Tax Credit until 2023 for those employing individuals with developmental disabilities.

The Historic Rehabilitation Credit, which encourages job creation in the trades, is also expanded to qualified rehabilitation projects within state parks and historic sites and other state-owned land.

Lifting Up Our Most Vulnerable

The budget restores nearly \$24 million – for a total of over \$99 million – in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding for programs that expand educational opportunities for people with disabilities, help low-income New Yorkers with employment and strengthen families, including:

- nearly \$8.5 million for Facilitated Enrollment to expand eligibility for child care assistance, allowing parents to stay employed while their children are cared for;
- \$4 million for Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) labs, which provide technology and access to education and workforce development training;
- \$3 million for non-residential domestic violence services to support the safety and self-sufficiency of domestic violence survivors and families beyond residential services;
- \$2.85 million for Career Pathways, which helps train low-income young adults for jobs in high-growth sectors;
- nearly \$1.6 million for Preventative Services to keep families together and children safe;
- \$800,000 for ACCESS, which links educational opportunities to internships and job placements;
- \$475,000 for the wage subsidy program, which helps develop job opportunities for recipients of public assistance and low-income individuals;
- \$440,000 for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), which offers up to six weeks of paid work experience for New Yorkers between the ages of 14 and 24;
- \$200,000 for the Fatherhood Initiative, which helps fathers reconnect with their children and develop essential parenting skills; and
- \$144,000 for Wheels for Work, which helps low-income individuals secure reliable transportation to and from work.

In addition, the Assembly plan restores \$1.5 million for the Disability Advocacy Program (DAP), which provides legal representation to individuals with disabilities when their federal disability benefits have been denied or may be discontinued.

The budget also continues the federal cost of living adjustment (COLA) in 2020 for individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which provides additional support for seniors and people with visual impairments or disabilities who have little or no income, who reside in residential care, family care or enhanced residential care settings.

Further, the budget invests \$69 million in Pay For Success (PFS), a program that shifts the way that social services providers measure results and receive funding. PFS aims to ensure that high-quality, effective services deliver measurable results for individuals and communities. The budget also provides \$4.5 million for the Empire State Anti-Poverty Initiative.

Strengthening Public Health Programs

In order to ensure state residents have access to public health resources, the 2019-20 state budget restores \$550 million in Medicaid cuts from the executive proposal. This includes \$137.8 million to restore cuts to the Indigent Care Pool, \$222 million to restore the 2 percent rate increase for hospitals and the 1.5 percent rate increase for nursing homes, as well as \$190.2 million to restore the 0.8 percent Medicaid claim cuts across the board.

The budget restores \$31 million in pharmacy reductions, including \$18.7 million to restore existing prescriber prevails provisions and \$12.3 million to reject the executive budget proposal to limit coverage for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and to increase OTC co-payments.

Additionally, the spending plan restores:

- \$23.6 million in transportation needs;
- \$5.9 million to preserve the right of spousal refusal;
- \$5 million in managed care reductions; and
- \$25.25 million in other reductions.

The budget also provides a \$16 million increase for enhanced safety net providers, for a total of \$66 million, and establishes a loan program to help financially distressed safety net hospitals. It provides \$3.82 million to restore funding for school-based health centers.

NYS Budget Highlights *(continued)*

Investing in Job Creation Across the State

The budget provides over \$900 million for economic development programs and approximately \$750 million for the ninth round of REDC awards to fuel economic growth across the state. To better spur technological advancement and foster collaboration between institutions of higher learning and the private sector, the budget allocates \$11 million for Centers of Excellence, an increase of \$1.4 million over the executive budget proposal. It also provides \$609,000 in additional support to Technology Development Organization Matching grants, for a total of \$2 million.

Small businesses are the foundation of the state’s economy, to help these critical economic engines thrive, the budget allocates an additional \$150,000 for Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), for a total of \$1.65 million. It also provides an additional \$365,000 for the Minority- and Women-Owned Business (MWBE) Development and Lending Program, for a total of \$1 million.

Funding Early Voting

To help ensure every New Yorker has an opportunity to participate in our democracy, the Assembly passed a law establishing early voting during a nine-day period before any general, primary, run-off primary or special election to make voting more accessible (Ch. 6 of 2019). To offset the costs of additional poll hours for financially strained local governments, the final state budget earmarks \$10 million for localities. The budget also makes primary voting hours consistent across the state, requiring all counties to have polling sites open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. This measure addresses a discrepancy that saw most upstate counties provide six fewer hours to vote on primary day than downstate. The budget also includes legislation ensuring that workers receive three hours of paid time off on Election Day.

Modernizing our voting system

The state budget enacts an electronic voter registration system through which voters can register and have their application submitted to the appropriate local board of elections online. The state budget also authorizes the use of electronic poll books to administer elections and provides \$14.7 million in capital funding for counties to purchase e-poll books and on-demand ballot printers to support the implementation of early voting which can reduce crowding at polling sites and get voters in and out much faster.

Helping our veterans get ahead

While the brave men and women who fought for our country have a vast array of skills and invaluable experiences, there are times where they may need assistance when they come home. The 2019-20 budget honors the immense sacrifices made by our veterans by restoring more than \$1.6 million to various programs that will help these heroes begin new chapters of their lives. These vital programs help veterans use their diverse skills to find gainful employment, connect them to needed resources and provide legal and other services to low-income active-duty members so that veterans and their families are supported in their transition back to civilian life.

The funding includes:

- \$500,000 for the NYS Defenders’ Association;
- \$200,000 for Helmets to Hardhats;
- \$200,000 for Clear Path for Veterans;
- \$125,000 for Veterans of Foreign Wars; and
- \$100,000 for the SAGE Veterans Project.

Additionally, the budget changes the name of the state Division of Veterans’ Affairs to the Division of Veterans’ Services to avoid confusion with the federal department and includes \$1.38 million to allow it to fully fund county and city service agencies. It also earmarks \$4 million for the Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Project, a peer-to-peer program that helps veterans who have returned home and are facing the challenges of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

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