



Friend,

After hard-fought negotiations, we have a budget. I am proud to report that we won funding and legislative victories in a number of areas, including an increase in the personal income tax rate for millionaires, a tax hike on corporations, increased funding for K-12 schools to comply with the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit, funding for electric vehicle charging stations, funding for college students with disabilities, and unemployment benefits for workers excluded from traditional unemployment insurance. The message is clear: **when we fight, we win!**

Below you can read more about highlights of the 2021-2022 Budget, and the areas where we need to keep fighting.

See you around the district,

Harvey Epstein  
74th Assembly District

## BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS



### Economic Justice

The Legislature stood firm in its conviction to raise taxes on the ultra-wealthy and we won \$4.3 billion through tax increases starting at 9.65 percent on single filers with incomes of over \$1 million (the new tax rate kicks in at \$2 million for those filing jointly). Incomes over \$5 million would be taxed at a rate of 10.3 percent and incomes of \$25 million would be taxed at 10.9 percent. The rates are set to expire in 2027.

Corporations will also pay more in taxes, up from 6.5 percent to 7.25 percent through 2023. Businesses with revenues below \$5 million annually would not be affected by the increase. Multiple polls showed that over 75 percent of all New Yorkers believed we should increase taxes on high income earners. I am proud to say we followed through on the mandate the overwhelming majority of New Yorkers gave us.

(continued on page 2)



## Budget Highlights (continued from page 1)

In addition, we have one of the lowest corporate tax rates in the northeast: according to the Tax Foundation Connecticut's rate is 7.50 percent, Pennsylvania's is 9.99 percent, New Jersey's is 11.5 percent. New York remains well positioned to receive additional tax revenue without any loss of jobs or businesses.

We won these increases thanks to the work of dedicated organizers, who made sure that the members of the legislature knew taxing the wealthiest was a priority and a necessity to ensure a just recovery. In combination with federal aid, the additional revenue generated by the tax increases on millionaires and corporations will set us on a course for economic recovery.

### Housing

The pandemic worsened already deep economic inequalities across our state. Renters were hit particularly hard and are still experiencing difficulties paying their rent. I am pleased that the Legislature stood up for tenants and delivered a sweeping program, the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program (CERAP), which will distribute over \$2 billion of federal funds to help qualifying tenants pay back rent. In addition, the assistance will be available to cover up to 3 months of future rent.

The program imposes strong protections for tenants as a condition for their landlords accepting funds through the program, including prohibiting a landlord from raising rents for one year, most types of evictions (except in nuisance cases), and collecting late fees.

The program will be administered by the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA). As soon as information about the newly created program is available online, I will provide an email update.

Please contact my office if you need assistance applying by calling 212-979-9696 or emailing [blascoj@nyassembly.gov](mailto:blascoj@nyassembly.gov).

### Education

The enacted budget provides a \$1.4 billion increase in Foundation Aid and a three-year Foundation Aid phase-in that will finally fulfill the State's commitments under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. This is a major victory for the New York's public school students and families.

Additionally, we won a \$105 million expansion of full-day prekindergarten to provide pre-K funding to 210 districts who don't currently receive state-funded full-day pre-K.

We also fought back against the Governor's proposed \$200 tuition hikes at CUNY and SUNY and won: the budget prevents continuing tuition increases at SUNY and CUNY by putting in place a three-year freeze.

We increased the maximum award under the Tuition Assistance Program by \$500 to assist the neediest students in the State—the largest growth in the program in 20 years—and committed to eliminate the TAP Gap in four years, providing millions of additional recurring operating aid to SUNY and CUNY on top of restoring \$72 million in operating aid cuts to SUNY and CUNY.

### People with Disabilities

I am proud to report our historic victory securing \$2 million in funding for college students with disabilities. Every budget cycle I have been a part of as an Assemblymember, I have rallied with CUNY students with disabilities to include additional funding in the budget to help college students with disabilities.

This year, our resolution in support of college students with disabilities advocacy day achieved a record 60 cosponsors. We translated that support in the chamber to 2 million dollars for additional supports for college students with disabilities. It's been over 25 years since the state put money towards these college students' needs. During that time, more students with disabilities have entered higher education. I am proud we won this victory for the over 73,000 students with disabilities and I am grateful to the students we worked closely with to achieve this monumental funding.

### Environment

The approved spending plan invests \$1.84 billion in funding for the environment. This includes \$500 million for clean water infrastructure and \$300 million for the New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).

We authorized the \$3 billion Environmental Bond Act of 2021, "Restore Mother Nature," to fund environmental improvements that preserve, enhance, and restore New York's natural resources and reduce the impact of climate change. The Bond Act will appear on the ballot in the 2022 general election.

We also expanded the Climate Smart Community Projects program to incentivize the creation of more publicly available fast chargers so electric vehicle adoption becomes more viable. I'm proud to have fought for this expansion and will continue fighting to increase truly publicly available fast charging infrastructure throughout the state.

### Small Business Relief



In late summer of 2020, after a series of Assembly-led hearings on the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses, I along with Senator Hoylman introduced legislation, known as the Save our Storefronts (SOS) Act (A.3190 / S.3349), to direct a minimum

(continued on page 4)

# Legislative Victories

## Marijuana Legalization

We legalized recreational use of marijuana in the state of New York. Adults age 21 and over can possess up to 3 ounces of marijuana for recreational use and can consume it where smoking tobacco is permitted (though not inside a vehicle). Police can no longer use the smell of marijuana (burnt or unburnt) as justification to stop and search someone. Once regulations for the sale of marijuana are developed, New Yorkers will be able to purchase it legally. It is expected to take 12-18 months for retail sales of marijuana to begin.



I'm grateful for the tireless work of the advocates and legislative leaders who pushed for the creation of a comprehensive bill that focuses on communities of color who have been unfairly criminalized for decades. I believe we delivered a bill that truly invests in the communities harmed by the racist war on drugs, generates revenue for schools and drug prevention programs, and protects children.

## Ending Solitary Confinement in New York's Prisons



Solitary confinement in excess of 15 days has officially been abolished in New York's prisons. The HALT Solitary Confinement Act, subject to limited exceptions, prohibits the placement of an incarcerated person in segregated confinement for more than 15 days or 20 out of 60 days unless specific crimes are committed while in confinement. It would also provide for mental health screenings and a heightened level of care for prisoners placed in segregated confinement.

Studies have consistently found that subjecting people to segregated confinement for 22 to 24 hours a day without meaningful human contact, programming or therapy can cause deep and permanent psychological, physical, developmental and social harm, and that people placed in solitary confinement thereafter may have a more difficult time complying with prison rules. Despite these proven harms, at any given time there are approximately 3,000 people in New York State prisons in segregated confinement, some for months, years and even decades.

The eradication of this inhumane policy is a step toward improving our correctional system. I want to once again thank the organizers behind HALT Solitary for their heroic efforts in pushing this life-saving legislation across the finish line.

## Incentivizing Education in Prison

My bill (A.3078) to expand merit time eligibility criteria to include the pursuit of a college degree in prison has passed the Assembly. Non-violent offenders are eligible to reduce their sentences through the merit time system. Under current law, a merit time allowance may be granted when an incarcerated person successfully participates in a work and treatment program and when they obtain either a GED, an alcohol and substance abuse treatment certificate, a vocational trade certificate following at least six months of vocational programming, or performs at least four hundred hours of service as part of a community work crew.

The status quo incentivizes incarcerated people working towards a college degree to leave those programs and instead opt for vocational or other programs to meet the eligibility criteria for merit time. Attaining a college education while incarcerated is one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism, with 85% to 98% of graduates not reoffending. By incentivizing college education in prison, we are setting up incarcerated individuals with a better chance of succeeding upon release.



## Repealing the Walking While Trans Ban

I am proud to report that the legislature repealed the Walking While Trans ban. This bigoted law gave police license to harass New Yorkers simply because of their appearance. For example: if you were standing outside after leaving a party dressed in a short skirt, a police officer could have made an arrest based on his inferences. This law has been enforced unevenly, with trans women and women of color being arrested disproportionately. It was an honor to co-sponsor and vote for the repeal of the Walking While Trans ban and I want to thank Assemblymember Paulin, Senator Hoylman, and the advocates like TS Candii and Bianey Garcia who rallied around this important bill and got it done.

(continued on page 4)



## Legislative Victories (continued from page 3)

### Informing Epilepsy Patients on Ways to Stay Safe

Sudden Unexpected Death in Epilepsy (SUDEP) is responsible for the deaths of about 3,000 Americans every year. Sadly, this condition took the life of one of my constituents. In partnership with the family and Senator Brad Hoylman, I introduced legislation to require epileptic patients be informed by their doctors about the existence of this condition so that preventative steps can be taken to save lives.

I am happy to report that the bill passed the Assembly with overwhelming support. I look forward to the bill passing in the Senate and the Governor signing the bill into law.

## Budget Highlights (continued from page 2)

of \$500 million in expected federal aid to small businesses and small nonprofits. The legislation was reintroduced in January of 2021, and a campaign to include the direct relief provided in the SOS Act in the state budget ramped up after the Governor's executive budget did not include adequate relief for storefronts.

We won our campaign: the enacted budget includes 1 billion in direct recovery grants and tax credits to the small business sector with a focus on businesses with 10 or fewer employees and women and minority-owned businesses. We allocated 800 million for grant payments to small businesses impacted by COVID-19. An additional 40 million was earmarked for nonprofit arts and cultural institutions who need assistance.

This is a historic victory for the storefronts and local cultural institutions that make up the fabric of New York. For over a year now, necessary government mandated closures and restrictions have devastated these vital establishments. Now, our hard-fought campaign is declaring victory. With \$1 billion in aid set to flow to these businesses, the sector can start to rebuild. When small businesses are thriving, our state is thriving. I look forward to working with advocates and my colleagues in government to ensure this aid is quickly and equitably disbursed.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



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## UPCOMING EVENTS



### Ranked Choice Voting Forum

Join us and advocates from Rank the Vote NYC for a forum on ranked choice voting on **June 10<sup>th</sup> at 6 P.M.** just in time for the New York City primary. Panelists will walk participants through the ranking process and answer audience questions.

RSVP to [blascoj@nyassembly.gov](mailto:blascoj@nyassembly.gov) or call **212-979-9696**.