

Dear Friends,

In last week's newsletter (which you can [view here](#)), I explained the basic process for adoption of the NYS budget. **On Monday, March 14, the Assembly passed the "Assembly One House Budget", which is the Assembly's response to the Governor's budget proposal.** The State Senate also adopted its "Senate One House Budget". While there are not gaping differences between the two proposals, the two chambers are now coming together in budget conferences to develop a single budget response to the Governor's proposal. As a new member, I was honored to be appointed to one of the conference committees.

The Assembly One House Budget makes historic investments in **health care, housing, education, higher education and local governments**, and includes funding for **critical transportation projects, small businesses, environmental protection** and more.

The Assembly also passed important legislation this week **to modify the practice of solitary confinement in our prison system**, as well as **to expand the number and accessibility of Veterans Treatment Courts.**



[2021-2022 Budget Update](#)

The recently-adopted American Rescue Plan provides **significant pandemic relief funding to New York, at all levels of government** (we are very grateful to New York's Democratic Congressional Delegation - most especially Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer - for fighting to make this happen). At the same time, economists have **revised upward the state's revenue projections**, due in large part to New York's economy pulling out of the recession faster than anticipated (although we still have a ways to go).

These two critical developments explain, at least in part, why the NYS legislature feels it is prudent and responsible to propose higher spending levels than the Governor's budget proposed. And it is also for these reasons that the Assembly and State Senate proposals **do not include most of the funding cuts** sought by the Governor in his budget.

Highlights of the Assembly One House budget:

- \$208.3 billion spending plan, which is \$15.6 billion or 8.1% over the 2020-21 budget adopted during the onset of the pandemic-induced recession. **The higher budget levels are critical to helping our communities recover and restart New York's economy.**
- The proposal would **increase the top personal income tax rate** from 8.82% to 9.85% for single filers earning more than \$1 million and couples earning more than \$2 million. It would also establish two new brackets: 10.85% for taxpayers between \$5 million and \$25 million and 11.85% for taxpayers over \$25 million.
- **Restoration of the ongoing middle-class tax cuts**, which the Governor had proposed discontinuing.
- Significant investments in our schools, including a **\$1.4 billion increase in Foundation Aid** and full Foundation Aid phased in over three years. Foundation Aid, the largest unrestricted aid category supporting public school district expenditures, would be funded for a total of \$19.8 billion. The budget also includes **\$10 million for homeless students** and **\$10 million to support mental health in schools.**
- **\$18.6 billion in higher education**, including [increased funding](#) for opportunity programs. **Rejects proposed tuition increases** for SUNY and CUNY.
- **\$3.125 billion in combined federal and state dollars [for programs that provide rent relief](#)**, as well as \$200 million to reduce homelessness. As a member of the Housing Committee, I advocated for rent relief not only for tenants who couldn't pay their rent due to pandemic-induced financial distress, but also for distressed landlords whose tenants failed to pay rent or otherwise did not qualify under the parameters of the rent relief program.
- **\$1 billion for a new Small Business Reopening and Relief Grant Program**, to aid small businesses, including farms. Grants could be used to cover various business costs including payroll, rent, mortgage, property taxes, insurance, utilities, and the purchase of various pandemic-related expenses such as PPE and HVAC installation. **The program would also set aside \$500 million of the fund for companies that fall into priority categories, including Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBE), microbusinesses with 10 employees or less, small businesses in economically distressed areas, veteran and service-disabled veteran owned/operated small businesses**, as well as small businesses that operate within an industry sector that experienced a significant negative impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **\$11.3 billion for the state's transportation network.** Significant funding for local road repairs, including: \$503.1 million for direct funding to localities known as CHIPs; \$65 million for extreme weather conditions; \$100 million for a new grant program to reimburse localities for costs incurred on certain state and federal roads; and \$400 million for other local highway and bridge capital projects.
- **Significant investments in environmental protection,** including \$400 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (which includes \$100 million in anticipated federal funding) and \$500 million for clean water infrastructure projects, which I strongly advocated for as a member of the Environmental Conservation Committee.
- **\$94.2 million for the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)** to create new service slots, including an expansion of certified housing supports, community habilitation, respite services, housing subsidies, self-direction of services and an expansion of day programs and employment options.
- **\$20.84 million for veterans programs,** an increase of \$1.19 million over the Governor's proposal. This budget restores funding to critical programs that help

veterans receive their benefits, smoothly transition into civilian life, and improve their mental health during these unprecedented times. As a member of the Veterans Committee, I strongly supported this increase in funding.
- **\$1.8 billion in federal funds for expanded access to childcare.** The plan also includes \$500 million for additional state funds to support childcare providers and families, and expand eligibility and access to subsidies.
- **\$100 million in funding for an Arts Recovery and Revitalization Program.**

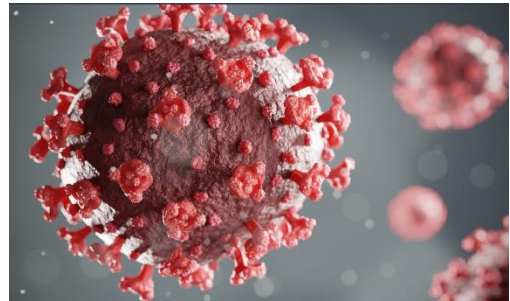
Once the Conference Committees finish their work, and an updated budget is reported back to both chambers, additional negotiations will then take place with the Governor. A final budget must be voted on by March 31.

I will keep you posted on the progress of the budget. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the information above -- or about any budget-related issues *not* mentioned above (as these were the highlights) -- please don't hesitate to reach out.

COVID-19 Updates

Eligibility

As a reminder, the Governor [announced last week](#) an expansion of those who are now eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine:



- New Yorkers **60+ years** are now eligible
- The following **essential workers** are now eligible:
 - Public-facing government and public employees
 - Not-for-profit workers who provide public-facing services to New Yorkers in need
 - Essential in-person public-facing building service workers

This includes workers such as public works employees, social service and child service caseworkers, government inspectors, sanitation workers, DMV workers, County Clerks, building service workers and election workers.

[Click here](#) for the full list of all those who are eligible to receive the vaccine.

Vaccine distribution eligibility also has been expanded:

- In addition to those who are 60+, **pharmacies now can also vaccinate teacher and (as of 3/21) [those with comorbidities](#).**
- ALL providers -- with the exception of pharmacies -- can vaccinate any eligible New Yorker

To schedule your appointment via the state website go to am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov or call 1-833-NYS-4-VAX (1-833-697-4829). [Click here](#) for the most updated list of non-State providers in the area.

Please contact my office if you need help getting an appointment. Call us at (914) 244-4450 or e-mail me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov and we will do what we can to help. Please also check back on [our website](#) for the most up-to-date resources and tips.

Attention Veterans of All Ages!

BEGINNING TUESDAY MARCH 16TH VA HUDSON VALLEY WALK-IN COVID-19 VACCINE CLINICS ARE NOW OPEN TO ALL VETERANS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE CARE AT VA, REGARDLESS OF AGE.



VA HUDSON VALLEY WALK-IN COVID-19 VACCINE CLINICS

BEGINNING TUESDAY, MARCH 16:  **MONDAY 8:30 AM THROUGH FRIDAY 2:30 PM**

NOW OPEN TO ALL VETERANS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE CARE AT VA, REGARDLESS OF AGE.

 **UPDATED AGE REQUIREMENT**

LOCATIONS

CASTLE POINT CAMPUS
41 CASTLE POINT ROAD,
WAPPINGERS FALLS, NY 12590
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM

FDR MONTROSE CAMPUS
2094 ALBANY POST ROAD
MONTROSE, NY 10548
BUILDING 15, ROOM 16

*PLEASE CALL US IF YOU'D PREFER TO SCHEDULE A VACCINATION AT ONE OF OUR COMMUNITY CLINICS

IF YOU'D LIKE TO APPLY FOR VA HEALTH CARE, PLEASE CALL US AT **845-831-2000 EXT. 215100 OR 203309.**

Employees Granted Time Off for Vaccination

In the interest of ensuring everyone can get vaccinated once they are eligible, the legislature passed -- and the Governor has now [signed into law](#) -- legislation **granting public and private employees time off to receive the COVID-19 vaccination.**

- Under this new law, employees will be granted **up to four hours of excused leave *per injection*** that will not be charged against any other leave the employee has earned or accrued. This legislation is effective immediately.

Reopenings Continue

The Governor also announced the following reopenings with strict health and safety protocols in place, ***including the requirement that all attendees have proof of a recent negative COVID-19 test or proof of immunization prior to the event:***

- **Wedding receptions and catered events** [can now resume statewide](#) at 50% capacity, up to 150 attendees.
- MLB fans rejoice! **Professional sports in large outdoor stadiums** [can reopen](#) at 20 percent capacity **beginning April 1.**
- **Regional sports venues that hold 1,500 people indoors or 2,500 people outdoors** [can reopen](#) **beginning April 1,** with capacity limited to 10% indoors and 20% outdoors.
- **Large outdoor performing arts venues** that hold 2500 people [can reopen](#) at 20% capacity. **beginning April 2.**



2020 Tax Return Deadline Extended & Tracking Stimulus Payments Online

Recognizing the continued challenges taxpayers face (plus the huge administrative undertaking facing the agency from the American Rescue Plan), [the IRS has extended the deadline to file your 2020 tax return.](#)

- **2020 income tax returns are now due Monday, May 17.**
- The IRS is still encouraging **those who are owed a refund to file as soon as possible**
- Individuals who need additional time to file beyond the May 17 deadline can request a filing extension until October 15.
- Please note that **the first estimated 2021 tax year payments (for those who make them) are still due on April 15.**



While on the subject of the IRS, for those of you who will be receiving stimulus payments (up to \$1,400 per person), you can **track the status of your payment here.** Please note that data is not yet available for all who will be receiving payments.

[HALT Solitary](#)

For far too long, the long-term use of solitary confinement has been widespread in correctional facilities in New York and across the country. The extended isolation – for up to 23 hours a day – and denial of basic needs and human interaction is traumatic, and often affects an individual's mental and physical health for years to

come. Although there has been some reduction in use in recent years, **according to the NYCLU, the average length of stay in a special housing unit (SHU) – the most restrictive form of isolation – is 105 days, but people have been kept in SHU for more than a year.**

Incarcerated people – like all of us – have fundamental human rights and don't deserve to be locked into a torture chamber. According to the United Nations Special Report on Torture, solitary confinement can amount to just that – torture – and yet thousands of New Yorkers are subjected to forms of isolation in state prisons on any given day.

Indeed, **many individuals subjected to segregated confinement have serious mental illnesses, only to find themselves limited in their access to mental health services during the period of segregated confinement.** This often exacerbates the individual's symptoms (including anxiety, depression, anger, paranoia and psychosis) during and after the confinement. Because of this, it should be no surprise that about a third of suicides in New York correctional facilities occur in segregated confinement.

Solitary confinement also disproportionately affects Black individuals, people of color and other marginalized group. The New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) found that on a single day in 2019, 57% of people in solitary confinement were Black and 24% were Latinx

That is why the both the Assembly and State Senate have passed the **Humane Alternative to Long-Term (HALT) Solitary Confinement Act** -- of which I am a proud sponsor -- which **restricts the use of segregated confinement and creates alternative therapeutic and rehabilitative options.**

The bill **limits the amount of time people can spend in segregated confinement** to 15 consecutive days or 20 out of 60 days in total, and creates objective, limiting criteria for the use of segregated confinement. The bill also **restricts isolation for vulnerable individuals**, such as those under 21 years old, older New Yorkers, disabled individuals, pregnant women and those who are in the first eight weeks of postpartum recovery. Moreover, **it prohibits the use of special diets and the limitation on services, treatment or basic needs as punishment**

In truth, there is nothing groundbreaking here – this approach is working safely and successfully in states as different as Colorado, Mississippi and North Dakota. The support for this legislation runs wide and deep, ranging from Mental Health Association of New York State to the New York State Catholic Conference. In drafting this legislation, the legislature has listened carefully to prisons-rights advocates, mental health professionals, and to correctional professionals as well. We understand that it is possible to safely and responsibly limit the prolonged, inhumane and arbitrary use of solitary confinement. We are mindful of the security and safety of both the incarcerated and correctional staff, and we are confident strict security can be maintained and even enhanced by humane practices and protocols.



Following the passage of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act by the Assembly, New York Campaign for Alternatives to Isolation -- who helped to lead the charge on this issue -- held a virtual press with members of the Assembly and State Senate (who voted yesterday to pass the legislation), both to celebrate the victory and to bring further awareness to the issue. I was honored for opportunity to speak, to thank all those who have worked tirelessly on this issue, and to encourage them to keep up pushing until it is signed law by the Governor. [#HALTsolitary](#)

[Veterans Treatment Courts Expanded](#)

The Assembly this week also [passed legislation](#) expanding access to [Veterans Treatment Courts \(VTCs\)](#).

Although New York has 35 VTCs, not every veteran has access to these courts. This legislation expressly authorizes the state's chief administrative judge to designate more of these courts throughout the state. Additionally, in counties where no VTC exists, the legislation gives judges the ability to remove appropriate criminal court cases against veterans to VTCs in adjoining counties, provided that both the sending and receiving counties' District Attorneys agree. The bill would prohibit transfer to a VTC in cases where the offense charged is a family offense, as defined in the Criminal Procedure Law, involving members of the same family or household.



With specially-trained judges and appropriate referral resources, VTCs help veterans and their families get treatment and services that can help prevent future problems.

Celebrating America's Heroes

Nurses and other healthcare workers have been true heroes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Ensuring safe staffing levels at our hospitals is a cause that I, along with many of my other colleagues, are fighting for.

Today is Certified Nurses Day. Let us take this opportunity to show our gratitude to nurses for all they do today, and every day, to help save lives.



As always, if there are any issues that you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov (or simply reply to this email). **Please also follow me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up-to-date information.**

Miss any of our previous newsletters? You can [find them here](#).

Sincerely yours,



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