



# NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

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## NYPIRG REACTIONS TO APPROVAL OF STATE BUDGET

(Albany, N.Y.) The impact of the deadly coronavirus and its devastation of the state's finances were greatly mitigated by action in Washington. The federal stimulus offset proposed cuts to vital services and programs. The addition of new revenues to the state's coffers should help balance the state's books in the future and triggered long-needed changes in the state's programs.

Here is an overview of those impacts:

### Higher Education Policy

The new state budget enacts dramatic changes to how institutions of higher education are funded. In a first-in-a-generation move, the state is funding college costs that have for too long been dumped onto students and their families. For higher education, the budget:

- Includes what may be the single-biggest hike in the maximum TAP award.
- Begins to close the so-called "TAP Gap," including a commitment to eliminate it over the next four years, and aligns college tuition credit reimbursement with TAP award levels.
- Restores state support for independent colleges through "Bundy Aid".
- Freezes public college tuition for the next three years.
- Stabilizes community colleges whose finances have been devastated in recent years.
- Includes across-the-board increases and restorations to the state's college opportunity programs.
- Increases funding for mental health services at CUNY and SUNY.
- Restores funding for CUNY and SUNY childcare centers.
- Increases funding for students with disabilities.

### Environmental Policy

While the budget agreement creates some new improvements, funding to address the climate crisis has been left off the table to be addressed off-budget.

- Agreement to put on the ballot in November 2022 a \$3 billion "Restore Mother Nature" bond act designed to provide funding to offset the impacts of climate change – an idea worthy of support and desperately needed. The agreement does not create a new funding stream for the borrowing – such as making the oil companies which have undermined the science of global warming pay – thus New Yorkers will foot the bill unless lawmakers develop a new funding stream.
- Maintains funding at \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund.
- Provides an additional \$500 million in clean water funding.
- Extends and expands NYSERDA's program to incentivize electric vehicles and charging stations.
- Raids \$23 million in funds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI).

### Government Reform

- Despite the well-established fact that the state's ethics oversight is fatally flawed, nothing was done to address that problem -- despite mounting evidence of its failures. Voting changes will be considered off-budget.
- The redistricting commission receives \$4 million in funding.

## **NYPIRG BUDGET RESPONSE, PAGE 2**

- Appropriations are included for early voting and the new public financing program.
- It is unclear if there are adequate resources available for the State Board of Elections to adequately handle its responsibilities under the new automatic voter registration and online voting programs.

### **Health Care Policy**

- In separate legislation, the current immunity protections established in last year's budget agreement was eliminated.
- Nursing home nurse staffing ratios were set.

### **Mass Transit Policy**

- Commits \$3 billion to the MTA's 2020-24 Capital Program.
- Restores the proposed budget raid of \$160 million dollars to State Transportation Operating Aid, including \$145 million dedicated for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's operating budget and eliminating the need for a fare increase in 2021.
- Fails to reinstate on-demand e-hail pilot for the MTA's paratransit program.
- Appropriates \$1.3 billion for capital construction projects related to the Empire Station Complex Plan that restricts spending to Penn Station expansion or other "transportation improvement projects", but fails to provide details of the nature of these projects or how they will positively impact public transportation.

### **Consumer Protection/Utilities**

The pandemic has demonstrated that broadband internet access is an essential 21st Century utility necessary for education, work, healthcare and accessing government benefits. More needs to be done in this area, but the budget is a significant step forward. Expands broadband affordability for lower-income New Yorkers by requiring that internet service providers offer \$15 per month high-speed internet plans to qualified low-income households.