



For immediate release: 2 Pages

Tuesday, January 18, 2022

For more information:

Blair Horner 518 436-0876 x257

bhorner@nypirg.org

REACTIONS TO GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S FY 2022 - 2023 EXECUTIVE BUDGET

Budgets are about priorities. How the governor balanced unlimited demands with limited resources shows New Yorkers what her priorities are. Here are some important priorities, as well as critical omissions, which were unveiled today in the proposed Executive Budget. (This is NYPIRG's preliminary review):

Higher education. Too many of New York's institutions of higher education are teetering on the financial brink. The governor's proposed increases in operational funding of \$1.5 billion over five years to SUNY and CUNY. Her plan acknowledges the severe needs of NY's public higher education institutions after a decade of state disinvestment but may be insufficient to meet the needs of SUNY and CUNY. The governor proposed closing the so-called "TAP Gap," providing additional support for SUNY and CUNY to hire more full-time faculty, maintaining full state support for community colleges, increasing TAP funding to extend eligibility to individuals who are incarcerated and more part-time students, increasing funding to opportunity programs, and expanding on-site campus childcare centers at SUNY and CUNY. These are important proposals for education equity. However, little mention was made of broad reaching affordability measures to address public college tuition rates and the additional costs students face when completing their degrees. Bundy Aid to independent non-profit institutions was also missing from the executive budget.

Voting. Much has been done in recent years to improve the state's inadequate voting laws, but much more is needed. The governor's proposal to require polling places on certain college campuses will go a long way to engaging young adults in New York's civic life. In addition, by lowering the voter registration deadline from 25 days to the constitutionally required 10-day registration "blackout" period should boost voter participation by new voters. Yet, there were no obvious proposals to overhaul New York's ineffective bipartisan elections administration.

Ethics. The governor proposes to replace the Joint Commission on Public Ethics with a new entity. Her plan relies on an unusual idea of relying on law school deans to oversee the system. There are many as yet unanswered questions on how that untested system will work.

Environment. The governor's proposed expansion of the Environmental Bond Act to \$400 million helps the state to begin to respond to its widespread efforts to combat climate change, protect drinking water, and address mounting solid waste challenges. The governor's plan also continues the state's multi-million program to upgrade water infrastructure. She proposes new measures to further shift from reliance on fossil fuels to electricity in transportation. These are important steps toward ending reliance on the combustion engine – and the pollution and global warming that results. As we await the budget bills, we are eager to see details about her plan to require that new buildings be powered solely by electricity, banning new gas hookups. The policy is a critical step in the climate fight and to improve air quality, but must be implemented on a faster timeline.

The governor did not include eliminating non-essential fossil fuel subsidies worth \$334 million annually. Moreover, the governor's solid waste plan fails to include a long overdue expansion and modernization of the 40-year-old Returnable Container Act, affectionately called the "Bottle Bill." It is not clear what the governor intends to do about requiring "producers, not taxpayers," to fund recycling efforts.

Health care. No one can argue that the state must shift resources into health care during a raging pandemic. The governor has advanced a plan to boost expenditures to increase the ranks of the state's health care workforce. Yet, prior to the pandemic, the state's hospitals ranked near the bottom of the nation in terms of federal quality of care data. Will the details of her budget mandate better medical care?

Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers still lack access to one of the most basic rights – one to health care. The governor's proposal expands existing programs to provide additional coverage, but that still leaves too many New Yorkers without coverage.

Other public health crises need attention as well, in particular: A comprehensive plan to respond to the growing threat posed by *antibiotic-resistant* infections, whether she plans to restore the previous Administration's devastating cuts to the *tobacco control* program, and what appears to be no proposals for innovative programs or a significant boost in funding to prevent children – predominantly poor children of color – from exposure to *lead dust*.

Transportation. Another item in which the details contained in the budget bills will matter. As part of her plans to eliminate “rail deserts” in New York City, the governor proposes to construct a new rail service connection between Brooklyn and Queens. According to her budget book, her plan will increase “on budget assistance will increase by over 24%.”