



# NYPIRG NEWS RELEASE

**For immediate release: 2 Pages**

Wednesday, February 1, 2023

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## NYPIRG REACTIONS TO GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S FY 2023-2024 EXECUTIVE BUDGET

*Budgets are about priorities.* How the Governor balanced unlimited demands with limited resources shows New Yorkers what her priorities are. Here are NYPIRG's *preliminary* assessments of the Governor's proposed budget priorities, as well as its critical omissions:

**Higher education.** Outside of the major universities (both public and independent) the finances of 4-year and 2-year colleges are increasingly precarious. The Governor's plan to increase public college tuition and allow for additional hikes at SUNY University Centers should be *rejected*. With a drastic dropoff in enrollment, the SUNY and CUNY systems need support, but without increasing costs to students and their families. The Governor's plan provides some new, recurring state support for fringe benefits, general operating support, modest increases to financial aid programs, and maintains the funding floor at 100% for community colleges. Colleges – both public and independent – need additional *state* support.

**Environment.** Despite the fact that the State needs to raise at least an estimated \$10 billion a year to implement the Climate Leadership & Community Protection Act (Climate Act), the Governor did not include in her proposed budget the fair and just *Make Polluters Pay Climate Change Superfund Act* (S.2129) that would raise \$3 billion annually for much-needed climate resilience and adaptation projects funded by a fee on large oil companies for their past greenhouse gas emissions. The Governor also did not include eliminating the most egregious fossil fuel taxpayer subsidies of \$330 million annually, legislation which does that is the *Stop Climate Polluters Handout Act* (S.3389). Governor Hochul has included recommendations to take some necessary steps to achieve the critical 2030 Climate Act targets.

NYPIRG commends the Governor for including a proposal to close the curtain on fossil fuels in new building construction with a policy to *electrify* all new buildings. However, delaying the all-electric new buildings start date from the beginning of 2024 to the end of 2025 for buildings 3 stories and under, and 2028 for all commercial buildings and residential buildings over 3 stories should be *rejected*. It is technically and economically feasible to implement it immediately.

NYPIRG supports the Governor's continued funding of the state's multi-million program to upgrade community *water* infrastructure, however, research shows it needs to be doubled to \$1 billion.

NYPIRG supports the concept of "a statewide producer responsibility program that will transfer the responsibility of end-of-life management for packaging and paper products back onto the producer," although we are just now reading her new plan. However, the Governor made no mention of the state's *existing* responsibility program for beverage containers – the Bottle Deposit Law.

**Democracy.** Much has been done in recent years to improve the state's inadequate voting laws, but more is needed. New York continues to lag behind the national average in voter participation. Yet, the Governor proposes little to further improve the system. Will New Yorkers still have easy access to absentee mail-in ballots? The budget appropriates \$25 million to fund New York's new voluntary system of public financing of elections. But, little mention was made to reform New York's campaign financing system – even with the obvious need to reduce the influence of "pay-to-play" activities and little oversight of independent expenditure campaigns.

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**Health 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. In terms of a short term solution, lawmakers should support the Governor's plan to provide funding to public hospitals to cover the costs of patient care that is not covered – or inadequately covered – by health insurance.

NYPIRG supports the Governor's plan to hike *cigarette* taxes – as long as the plan includes meeting the CDC requirements for spending on tobacco control and boosting enforcement of anti-bootlegging laws – as well as her call for banning the sale of flavored tobacco products – the “gateway” for kids to start this deadly addiction.

New York has the oldest housing stock in the nation and the highest percentage of pre-1950 housing – the housing most likely to contain *lead paint*. As a result New York has the highest number of lead poisoned kids in the nation – the Governor pegged that number at 7,000; most observers believe the real number is much higher. Overwhelmingly these kids are poor and live in communities of color. The Governor is proposing \$37 million dollars over two years for programs to prevent lead poisoning in 24 of the “hardest hit communities” in the state. The legislation sketches out the proposal, but details are sorely lacking. There's a lot of moving parts to addressing this problem, including: funding; cooperation of local health departments and housing code agencies; training and resources; laboratory access for dust sample tests; ensuring adequately trained inspectors and clean-up technicians; resources for rental property owners; and oversight and enforcement to backstop the initiative. The Governor is taking on an important fight – one that her predecessors paid only lip service. It's important to make a long-range financial commitment and get the details right on this.

Another public health crisis needs attention as well. The state must develop a comprehensive plan to respond to the growing threat posed by *antibiotic-resistant* infections.

**Transportation.** The finances of the MTA are so bad that it may lead to a crisis – not only for the agency, but the state as well. The Governor's proposal to add \$800 million in recurring funding through expanded payroll taxes and \$300 million in one-time state aid would provide badly-needed revenues to help the MTA limp through its current financial crisis. These steps may indeed avoid service cuts, but to achieve higher ridership, state funding must be enough to both avoid fare hikes and increase service. Longer-term solutions – including additional revenues to make the system more climate-change resilient – are needed.