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**GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RESPONDS TO
NEW YORKERS' "PENT-UP DEMANDS" FOR ACTION**

**NYPIRG'S INITIAL RESPONSES TO ENVIRONMENT, HEALTHCARE, HIGHER EDUCATION,
MASS TRANSIT, VOTING RIGHTS AND REFORM PROPOSALS**

(Albany, N.Y.) NYPIRG responded to Governor Cuomo's budget plans today by calling them meaningful responses to New Yorkers' "pent-up demands" for action in Albany. While the devil is in the details, and when it comes to the budget details matter greatly, the Governor's proposals offer a starting point for actions to improve New York.

Environment: While details are under review, the Governor's proposed "Green New Deal" offers an important starting point for the changes needed to protect residents from **catastrophic climate change**. Key climate change actions that must be included are: stopping all fossil fuel infrastructure projects and committing to a fossil-free future, with measurable metrics and robust reporting. With over \$80 billion in **water infrastructure** needs, the Governor's proposed increase by \$2.5 billion funding for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act, if it is over the same time period, puts New York on a faster track to repair and replace failing pipes and protect water sources. New York must keep up with its trend of increasing funding to finally meet the state's outstanding drinking water needs. **Banning plastic bags** and **expanding the bottle bill** are critical steps to drastically reducing litter and solid waste, but banning plastic bags must be coupled with a fee on paper bags to be most effective.

Healthcare: Too many New Yorkers need health insurance and still don't have it, despite the federal Affordable Care Act. The Governor's pledge to strengthen the state's health exchange and to expand coverage is necessary. The state should look to other approaches, such as one that relies on a "single-payer" system, to ensure that every resident has insurance coverage. The state needs to do whatever it can to rein in the costs of prescription drugs.

Higher education: Allowing financial aid for eligible college students who are undocumented is a significant improvement in the state's Tuition Assistance Program. The Governor's plan to fund the next phase of the Excelsior Scholarship is welcome. However, we urge the Legislature to closely examine spending on opportunity programs, which provide aid and services to some of New York's most vulnerable students. Protections for student borrowers and regulating loan servicers are critically important and well past due.

Mass transit: The Governor called for congestion pricing in Manhattan to raise billions of dollars to pay for the repair and modernization of the MTA's ever-worsening transit system. As straphangers continue to suffer from some of the worst commutes in the country, the state must commit to significant improvements for the City's subways and buses, chiefly by fully funding the MTA's proposed 'Fast Forward' plan. We support progressive and sustainable sources of revenue, like congestion pricing, to ensure that happens.

Reforms: The Governor's plans to improve elections, dramatically overhaul and improve the state's campaign finance system – including a voluntary system of public financing and further steps to improve voting – are changes that should be embraced and improved. Measures to combat corruption in terms of contracting and ethics enforcement stand out as areas that need close review by the Legislature.

Legalizing marijuana for all adult use: The Governor's proposal to legalize cannabis for adult use in New York is an important step to reduce harms that current policies inflict on New York communities. NYPIRG sees no valid reason to treat 18, 19, or 20-year-old *adults* differently than adults 21 or older. New York must create a legal marijuana system that considers public health and safety issues, and be led in policy discussions by impacted communities.