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NYPIRG REACTS TO GOVERNOR HOCHUL'S EXECUTIVE BUDGET PRESENTATION

(Albany, N.Y.) Governor Kathy Hochul today released her executive budget plan for fiscal year 2025-26. Her \$252 billion plan covers a wide range of issues. Her presentation is followed with the introduction of legislation and the Legislature holds joint budget hearings to dig deeper into the details of her plan. NYPIRG's reactions to the Governor's proposals are based on today's presentation and will offer a more detailed look during the hearing process.

Below are NYPIRG's initial reactions:

Environmental Protection and Energy

- NY's transition away from fossil fuels. The Governor's plan offers too little in the effort toward curbing the state's reliance on fossil fuels. Her plan adds \$1 billion to be spent over 5 years for building decarbonization retrofits, climate mitigation and adaptation projects but not much else. The final budget should include the NY HEAT Act (S2016-A/A4592-A of 2024) a game changer for New Yorkers to save money on utility bills while cutting climate pollution from buildings and creating good, green jobs.
- The growing solid waste crisis. The state is facing a growing solid waste crisis. In about two decades, the state's landfills will fill up, the pace of recycling has decreased, and more and more packaging fills up municipal solid waste facilities. As far as we can tell, the Governor does little to attack this problem. Most notably, the executive budget ignores improvements to the state's most successful recycling program – the "bottle bill" (S237-C and A6353-A of 2024). Moreover, the executive budget contains nothing about how best to reduce other packaging waste, certainly nothing on the scale found in the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (S1464/A1749).
- Clean Water Infrastructure. The Governor proposes to keep flat the funding of the Clean Water Infrastructure program to \$500 million. It's well-known that the state's clean water infrastructure needs are tremendous and funding should be increased to \$600 million rather than stay flat another year.

Higher Education

- Public College Tuition: While we further analyze the budget, it seems that tuition rates are proposed to be frozen. The state should provide more aid to alleviate the burden of current tuition and fee rates, including providing for the first 60 credits to be free for all public college students and reforming financial aid programs like the Tuition Assistance Program to be able to cover non-tuition costs.
- Public College Funding: The Governor's proposal includes \$210 million in new, recurring funding for SUNY (\$114 million) and CUNY (\$96 million) operations. The amounts are offset by \$81 million (SUNY) and \$59 million (CUNY) in one-time funding from last year's final budget. While creating new recurring funding is a benefit, the overall increase of \$19 million at SUNY and \$48 million at CUNY represents significantly less than what is needed to keep up with inflation and meet the needs of SUNY and CUNY students.

- Bundy Aid, aid available for independent, non-profit higher education institutions, is kept at its historically low level of funding: \$16.332 million and only for those with endowments of under \$750 million. Investing in higher education is a strong strategy for developing the state’s economy. We urge that Bundy Aid be increased.
- Community Colleges and Financial Aid: The executive budget proposes that funding “floor” for Community Colleges be maintained at last year’s level to protect from enrollment changes. The executive budget also proposes \$47 million for students aged 25-55 pursuing specific associates degrees at community colleges, with some wrap-around services like textbooks covered as well. The proposal should be amended to be more inclusive and account for other financial barriers like public transit costs. While we dive into the details, we’ll advocate for increased funding levels for community colleges, opportunity programs, and call for upgrades to the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) to extend aid to graduate students and increase the maximum award to match SUNY tuition.
- We await the details for the important goals of addressing college student food insecurity, such as by increasing SNAP enrollment, and promoting voter participation among college students and at college poll sites.

Transportation

- Capital Funding: The Governor’s budget book “assumes” \$32.7 billion of base funding for the 2025-2029 MTA’s Capital Program. The executive assumes that \$3 billion will be generated from the state, \$3 billion from New York City, \$12.3 billion from the MTA (“\$3 billion of which would be self-funded by Bridges and Tunnels”) and \$14.4 billion from the federal government. Any failure in those assumptions will leave a huge hole in the MTA’s finances. One important addition to be included in the final budget is \$10 million in funding for the “QueensLink” EIS.

Elections and Government

- Funding for elections. The Governor proposes \$142.4 million in funding for the state Board of Elections. Her executive budget also includes \$14.7 million in funding to local boards of election to replace or upgrade electronic polling equipment and \$15 million to local boards to buy equipment to help them respond to extreme weather events.
- Funding for public financing. The executive budget includes \$100 million for matching the first \$250 in donations to a campaign.