



Assemblymember

Vivian E. Cook



Summer 2017

Dear Neighbors:

This year marks the 240th Legislative Session which commenced on January 4, 2017. As your elected representative of the 32nd Assembly District, I am pleased to announce the passage of a \$153.1 billion 2017-18 state budget. This budget invests in public education, funds a first-in-the-nation free tuition plan to help students go to college, Raises the Age to give young people a second chance, expands ride-hailing services like Uber and Lyft, and makes a significant commitment to ensuring every New Yorker has clean drinking water. In addition, I am pleased to report the most recent projects and community organizations I have been able to secure funding for, which include: \$1 million New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Capital Project at Baisley Park for Senior Center Renovations; \$1 million NYCHA Capital Project at South Jamaica Houses for Youth Center Renovations; J-CAP; Alley Pond Environmental Center Education Program; Child Center of NY After School Program; LP FAM's Youth Organization; Movement of the Children Dancer; Southeast Queens Kids Wrestling Association; and Rochdale Village Social Services.

In this newsletter, you will find highlights of the new 2017-18 NYS Budget, as well as information regarding some important new health care initiatives we are undertaking in Southeast Queens. As part of my service to the community I believe that it is of utmost importance to provide you with information regarding my work in Albany and in our neighborhoods. I would encourage you to read this newsletter, as it contains a wealth of condensed information on issues that may affect you, and to perhaps pass it along to a neighbor as well.

If you are in need of additional information or would like to share your thoughts, I welcome you to please reach out to me. I may be reached at (718) 322-3975, or feel free to stop by my district office. I am always happy to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Vivian E. Cook

Cook Secures Funding to Help Strengthen the Healthcare Infrastructure as Well as Combat Healthcare Disparities in Southeast Queens

Assemblymember Vivian E. Cook is known for her advocacy to help improve the quality of life for her community. To that end, she has identified a community-based grass roots organization with a proven record of positive and measurable outcomes to increase healthcare infrastructure and decrease healthcare disparities in Southeast Queens.

“Minorities continue to experience inferior healthcare when measured against other groups and populations. Minorities experience higher rates of infant mortality, HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, kidney failure, and other life threatening and debilitating diseases. Without careful integration of a grass roots comprehensive healthcare initiative in Jamaica, Queens, New York to address these disparities, the health conditions of our community will continue to decline as the cost to the State of New York will continue to increase,” she said.

In support of the State’s Prevention Agenda Toward the Healthiest State, Assemblymember Cook’s goal is to improve the healthcare of the residents of Jamaica through increased emphasis on disease prevention programs. “When you review death rates by race, the statistics are alarmingly disproportionate to African Americans. The underlying problem, in part, is due to the lack of access to quality healthcare, collection of data indicators, early detection and preventative measures, and patient education,” stated Dr. Robert Evans, CEO of Community Wellness Centers.

Preventing illnesses by providing patient education to this community aids in early identification, treatment, and longevity of a better quality of life, while lowering the costs in healthcare for our citizens and state. “It simply makes more sense to be proactive in providing quality healthcare and early diagnosis and treatment,” Dr. Evans explained. To accomplish this goal an investment in patient education, prevention, identification, and implementation will yield savings in healthcare in Southeast Queens.

Assemblymember Cook recently began this local initiative by partnering and funding with J-Cap. J-Cap is one of the oldest known and respected healthcare and substance abuse assistance institutions in the State. Queens Village for Mental Health for J-Cap has experience and expertise in patient education, outreach, treatment, research, and positive and measurable outcomes.

This funding has allowed J-Cap to purchase diagnostic technology that will enhance their ability to provide better patient treatment and care, resulting in improved health outcomes and the overall reduction in healthcare costs. This funding has also allowed J-Cap to focus its current funding stream on expanding other comprehensive care models in other specialties such as its Women’s Clinic.

This partnership will work directly with Ms. Diane Gonzalez, CEO of J-CAP, and Dr. Robert Evans, of Community Wellness Centers of America, to integrate healthcare disparities prevention strategies with a goal of preventing chronic diseases; promote a healthy and safe environment for women, infants and children; promote mental health and prevent substance abuse; prevent HIV, sexually transmitted diseases, vaccine-preventable diseases; reduce emergency room visits and hospital readmissions; and enhance collection of quality data indicators.

The overall goal of this initiative is to improve the healthcare infrastructure and decrease health disparities in the Southeast Queens community, while eventually serving as a national model.

York College Students Come to Albany



Assemblymember Cook meets with York College students enrolled in the Nursing Program.



Assemblymember Cook had the pleasure to meet with students on their annual trip to Albany to lobby legislators for funding for Campaign for Summer Jobs.

Investing in Our Schools and Our Children

The 2017-18 state budget increases education aid by \$1 billion for a total of \$25.7 billion, a 4.1 percent increase from last year's budget, reaffirming the Assembly Majority's unrelenting commitment to putting every student on their path to success. The budget also increases Foundation Aid by \$700 million for a total of \$17.2 billion.

The budget includes a \$50 million increase in Community Schools Aid for a total of \$150 million. This funding allows schools to be converted into community schools that deliver valuable services to both students and families, including offering critical support to at-risk children, strengthening neighborhoods, and preventing the schools from being taken over by the state.

Additionally, the budget provides:

- \$817 million in total funding for prekindergarten programs;
- \$35 million for after-school programs;
- \$5 million to expand half-day and full-day prekindergarten for 3- and 4-year-olds in high-need school districts;
- \$2 million for Advance Placement (AP) Test Assistance;
- \$2 million for the Master Teachers Program;
- \$400,000 for Excellence in Teaching Awards; and
- \$300,000 for cyberbullying prevention.

Giving Students a Needed Boost

"For too many students, hurdles outside of the classroom stand between them and the future they want and deserve," Assemblymember Cook said. "We're committed to making sure those struggles don't get in the way of their success, because every young person should get a fair shot."

The budget provides \$16.7 million for Early College High School programs, which help at-risk students earn both a high school diploma and an associate degree.

To further strengthen education services, the budget includes:

- \$103 million in funding for 4201 schools for the blind and deaf;
- \$20 million for Teacher Resource and Computer Training Centers – an increase of \$5.7 million;
- \$1.5 million in restorations for the Consortium for Worker Education (CWE), for a total of \$13 million, to provide career training and job placement services, as well as \$250,000 for an enhanced credentialing program;
- \$1 million to restore funding for adult literacy education, for a total of \$7.3 million; and
- \$1.2 million for regional community schools technical centers.

In addition, the budget provides \$25 million for technology projects at nonpublic schools and \$25 million for security upgrades to nonpublic schools, community centers, and daycare facilities at risk of hate crimes or attacks. The budget also provides nonpublic schools \$5 million to hire STEM teachers and \$7 million for costs related to complying with immunization requirements, along with an \$8 million increase for nonpublic school aid.

Protecting Public Libraries

"Public libraries are essential neighborhood assets, offering everything from books and educational materials, to technology and job search tools to community programs," noted Assemblymember Cook.

The budget restores aid to public libraries by \$4 million to ensure they can continue to provide services and resources to residents, for a total of \$95.6 million. In addition, the budget provides an increase of \$10 million in capital funding for a total of \$24 million.

Implementing the Excelsior Scholarship, Supporting State Colleges and Universities

The 2017-18 state budget makes a substantial investment in SUNY and CUNY schools and helps expand access to higher education through scholarship and opportunity programs.

"Working families in New York State and across the nation are seeing the costs of a college education soar as the need for a college degree to access good-paying jobs has never been greater," said Assemblymember Cook. "This year's budget allows eligible students to attend public colleges and universities tuition free, helping even more young people make their college dreams come true."

The state budget provides funding to establish the Excelsior Scholarship, a groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind initiative to make SUNY and CUNY schools tuition-free for New Yorkers who earn less than \$125,000 annually. Students who attend a private college in New York and earn less than \$125,000 annually would also be eligible for a scholarship award of \$6,000.

The budget also includes \$100 million for SUNY and \$60 million for CUNY in capital funding for maintenance and expansion purposes. Further, the state budget allocates \$450 million for SUNY and \$224 million for CUNY for critical maintenance. To help students and their families meet the rising, non-tuition costs of college, the budget includes \$8 million to help SUNY and CUNY develop online educational resources to help alleviate the high cost of textbooks for students.

"The SUNY and CUNY programs receive much-needed funding in the state budget so they can continue to do great work educating and nurturing the leaders of tomorrow," said Assemblymember Cook.

To ensure community colleges can continue helping its students get ahead, the budget allocates \$6.2 million to SUNY community colleges and \$3.1 million to CUNY community colleges for an increase of \$50 per full-time equivalent (FTE) student, for a total of \$2,747 per FTE student. The budget also includes \$3.1 million for a new scholarship program for part-time students attending SUNY or CUNY community colleges so students with family or other responsibilities can finish school on their own schedules.

The budget restores \$2.5 million in funding for CUNY ASAP and \$1.5 million for SUNY GAP to help provide remediation to community college students. The budget also restores \$1.1 million to SUNY child care centers and \$902,000 to CUNY child care centers.

In addition, the final state budget funds a host of other SUNY-led programs, including:

- \$87.9 million for SUNY Health Science Centers to help support top-notch teaching hospitals across the state;
- \$60 million for Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), a restoration of \$5 million; and
- \$6.5 million for Advanced Technology Training and Information Networking (ATTAIN) labs, a restoration of \$2 million.

The budget also requires the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) to complete a college affordability study examining student loan debt relief and student loan refinancing options as well as affordability initiatives to help find ways to reduce the cost of student textbooks, transportation, and housing.

Supporting College Opportunity Programs

The 2017-18 state budget restores \$23.8 million for opportunity programs:

- Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP): \$35.5 million, a restoration of \$5.9 million;
- Educational Opportunity Program (EOP): \$32.2 million, a restoration of \$5.3 million;
- Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge program (SEEK): \$28.1 million, a restoration of \$4.6 million;
- Liberty Partnerships: \$18.4 million, a restoration of \$3 million;
- Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP): \$15.8 million, a restoration of \$2.6 million;
- Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP): \$11.9 million, a restoration of \$1.9 million; and
- College Discovery Program: \$1.3 million, a restoration of \$225,000.

The Foster Youth College Success Initiative is funded at \$4.5 million, a \$1.5 million restoration and a \$1.5 million increase to help foster youth attend and succeed in college.

Tax Policies to Help the Middle Class

The budget implements previously approved middle-class income tax cuts. It also enhances the Child and Dependent Care Credit for taxpayers earning between \$50,000 and \$150,000. The credit is based on a sliding income scale for working parents who pay for child care or those who live with a spouse or dependent who is physically or mentally incapable of self-care.

Combating the Heroin Epidemic

Despite increased media attention and legislative action, the heroin and opioid epidemic continues to rage in communities across New York State. The 2017-18 state budget increases funding by \$43 million over last year – for a total of \$213 million – to fight the heroin epidemic and increase access to treatment for New Yorkers struggling with a substance abuse disorder. This funding supports a variety of treatment and prevention programs, including family support navigators, peer supports, recovery clubhouses, and community coalitions, \$10 million in additional capital support to increase the number of beds in in-patient treatment facilities, and restores \$2 million for New York City Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS).

“The heroin epidemic has affected families in every corner of the state,” said Assemblymember Cook. “By increasing funding and targeting it to the right programs, we can ensure more people get the help they need to conquer their addiction.”

Protecting Medicaid and Affordable Care

The final budget restores funding for Medicaid and other public health programs and addresses rising drug and health insurance costs so that more New Yorkers have access to the health care they need.

The budget restores \$78.8 million in proposed reductions to Medicaid and restores \$37.6 million to public health programs. The measures:

- restore \$20.2 million to existing prescriber prevails provisions, which ensure patients and their doctors have the final say in choosing medication in managed care and fee-for-service plans;
- allocate \$14.6 million to restore the Essential Plan and reject proposed co-payment and premium increases;
- provide \$6.3 million to reject the executive proposal to limit coverage for over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and increase OTC co-payments; and
- provide Medicaid coverage for donor breast milk for hospitalized, high-risk preterm infants who can't receive breast milk from their mothers.

Further, the budget restores \$10 million in cuts to emergency rooms across New York State. It also provides \$10 million to support safety-net hospitals, which care for low-income and uninsured patients, \$10 million for critical access hospitals, which provide services in rural communities, and \$20 million for mental health facilities.

“The Assembly fought to ensure the hospitals that provide care to the most at-risk New Yorkers can continue serving their communities,” said Assemblymember Cook.

The state budget also provides funding for a variety of public health priorities, including:

- \$1 million for Community Health Advocates, which helps New Yorkers understand their health insurance and access the health care services they need;
- over \$1 million for HIV/AIDS Community Service Programs (CSPs) and Multi Service Agencies (MSA);
- \$750,000 for Family Planning Services;
- \$500,000 for New Alternatives for Children;
- \$500,000 for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP);
- \$500,000 for the Diversity in Medicine Program;
- \$400,000 for the Primary Care Development Corporation (PCDC);
- \$300,000 for the LGBT Health and Human Services Network; and
- \$250,000 for the Nurse Family Partnership.

Additionally, the final budget provides \$150 million for a life sciences laboratory public health initiative to help construct new laboratory facilities or update existing ones to support life science research and innovation. It earmarks \$20 million for bioscience and neuroscience programs.

Supporting Seniors' Health and Well-being

The 2017-18 state budget provides \$13.5 million to support long-term care, including restoring \$10 million to preserve spousal refusal, ensuring couples do not lose their life savings in the event a spouse becomes ill and needs nursing home care.

“A spouse who has to face the already devastating experience of moving a loved one out of their home and into a long-term care facility shouldn't also have to give up their financial security,” said Assemblymember Cook. “This program helps them keep their hard-earned savings to live on.”

Additionally, the budget includes:

- \$2.7 million to prevent limiting Managed Long Term Care eligibility to only those eligible for nursing homes; and
- \$750,000 to restore nursing home bed hold payments for therapeutic leave.

To protect seniors' hard-earned and well-deserved property tax relief, the budget rejects the executive proposal to change the Enhanced STAR program by requiring all seniors eligible for the Enhanced STAR program to register with the state and participate in the Income Verification Program. Currently, though, seniors can register with their local assessor or register when they file their income tax returns – a process that is far easier and causes fewer headaches.

Further, the budget extends consumer protections, including access to a pre-foreclosure settlement conference, to homeowners with reverse mortgages to help more New Yorkers stay in their homes and protect their investments.

Investing in Affordable, Supportive Housing Statewide

The state budget releases the long-awaited and hard-fought \$2.5 billion to combat homelessness across the state and fund programs for the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

The budget provides \$2.5 billion for affordable housing and anti-homelessness initiatives, much of which was appropriated last year but could only be released once a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was agreed to. The budget releases this money and provides:

- \$1 billion for supportive housing to construct 6,000 or more units statewide, including \$50 million in operating aid;
- \$472 million for the Multifamily New Construction Program;
- \$200 million for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) capital repairs;
- \$150 million for the Middle-Income Housing Program;
- \$146 million for the Multifamily Preservation Program;
- \$125 million for public housing authorities outside New York City;
- \$125 million for senior housing;
- \$100 million for 100% Affordable Housing in New York City;
- \$75 million for Mitchell-Lama preservation programs;
- \$63 million for the Small Buildings Program to rehabilitate buildings and build affordable housing units in them;
- \$45 million for the Rural and Urban Community Investment Fund Program;
- \$41 million for home ownership programs;
- \$13 million for the Manufactured Homes Program; and
- \$10 million for the Main Street Program, which helps fund preservation efforts in historic neighborhoods.

The budget increases funds for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NNORCs) for a total of \$2 million, which help keep seniors in the homes and neighborhoods where they have built friendships and support networks. “For the second year in a row, the Assembly has led the way, including these programs in our one-house budget and ensuring it was enacted in the final budget,” noted Assemblymember Cook.

“Seniors who stay in their own homes, with adequate support, are less likely to need expensive nursing home care,” said Assemblymember Cook. “They also bring stability and vitality to our neighborhoods.”



Members of the NYS Assembly presented a resolution to Mr. Jonathan E. Gradess, Executive Director of the NYS Defenders Association, who is retiring after 39 years of exemplary public service. The NYS Defenders Association, a not-for-profit membership organization, has been providing support to New York's public defense community since 1967. Its mission is to improve the quality and scope of publicly supported legal representation to low income people.

Being Fair to Direct Care

“From giving a voice to those who cannot speak, to lending a helping hand so that individuals with developmental disabilities can complete daily tasks with as much independence as possible, direct care workers devote themselves to others,” said Assemblymember Cook. “They are selfless, hardworking, and kind, and they serve as a lifeline to the families who depend on them. Unfortunately, many are forced to leave the field and the people they so nobly care for due to low wages.”

Low wages have left direct care workers struggling to get by and care for their own families, forcing them to leave the field, creating a staffing crisis. After the executive budget was released without any funding for a direct care worker wage increase, the Assembly fought to ensure that the final state budget dedicated \$14 million in 2017-18 and \$146 million in 2018-19 to fund a two-year, living wage initiative for direct care workers with the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health, and the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services.

Direct care workers and direct support staff will receive a 3.25 percent raise on Jan. 1, 2018. Additionally, direct care workers, direct support staff and clinical staff will receive a 3.25 percent increase on April 1, 2018.

“They have the training, patience, and dedication to help our most vulnerable succeed, bring them happiness, and lead better lives every day,” said Assemblymember Cook. “Their assistance is vital to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities are integrated in the community. Now, we can start paying them the fair, living wage they deserve.”

Raising the Age

The budget includes a measure to ensure young people who encounter New York’s criminal justice system are treated fairly and given a better chance to turn their lives around. Raise the Age, which raises the age of criminal responsibility in New York from 16 to 18 years old, is an issue the Assembly Majority has championed for more than 12 years.

“Raising the Age for teenagers is not about letting them off the hook for the crimes they commit, but acknowledging that many teens make mistakes, not because they are bad people, but because they are kids, and they often don’t know better and can’t fully appreciate the consequences of their actions,” Assemblymember Cook said. “If we truly want to reduce crime and increase safety, we need to give them a greater chance of turning their lives around and learning from their mistakes.”

The Assembly fought to help as many kids as possible, as quickly as possible, and worked diligently to have all nonviolent felony charges begin in Family Court, but ultimately compromised with a reluctant state Senate to make progress on many of the other important issues. After a long-fought battle, New York will no longer be one of only two states in the country to prosecute 16- and 17-year-old defendants in nonviolent cases as adults in Criminal Court.

Beginning Oct. 1, 2018, the new law prohibits imprisoning young people under the age of 17 in county jails. Beginning Oct. 1, 2019, this applies to young people under the age of 18. When pretrial detention is necessary, they will be held in local youth detention facilities certified by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). Young people age 16 or 17 charged and convicted as adults for serious crimes and sentenced to incarceration will be held in a youth-only facility operated by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) with special programming and services provided by OCFS. The new state budget provides \$4.6 million in funding for local detention centers statewide to fund necessary upgrades.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblymember

Vivian E. Cook

Reports to the People

Summer 2017

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