

Assemblymember Harvey Epstein

Assembly District 74



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Dear Neighbor,

We have worked to ensure that this budget will strengthen the economy, invest in our future and support hard working New Yorkers. The reforms we include in today's budget create a better criminal justice system, a plan to reduce congestion, while investing in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) aging infrastructure, and modifying mayoral governance of our schools. Along with the great wins, also comes major gaps and losses that we must keep fighting for.

During the rest of the session we have much work to do to deliver a fair legalization of adult use marijuana rooted in racial and economic justice, and a strengthen and renew the rent laws that expands protections for tenants and closes loopholes that have accelerated the housing crisis in our state. We also need to commit to fully funding the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) for the 400,000 New Yorkers who live there. Below are some updates and thoughts on the 2019-2020 enacted budget. I truly believe this is a step in the right direction, but there is still much more to do.

See you around the district,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harvey Epstein", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Harvey

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Budget Summary



Criminal Justice Reform

It is long past time that we reform our antiquated criminal justice system. This year's budget plan includes eliminating cash bail for most misdemeanor and non-violent felony offenses, because wealth should not determine if a person accused but not convicted of a crime sits in jail while awaiting trial. It also enacts a necessary reform of the speedy trial and discovery sections of the criminal law.

This law will require courts to determine at each court appearance, where possible, whether the speedy trial clock will continue to run during the time between court appearances. The legislation will also allow the court to inquire as to whether the prosecution is, in fact, ready for trial when the prosecution claims readiness. It will also require that the government certify it has met disclosure obligations before a statement of readiness is accepted.

The legislation was inspired in part by the tragic case of Kalief Browder, a teenager who was imprisoned for nearly three years at New York City's Rikers Island jail awaiting trial in a case that ultimately was dismissed. Kalief Browder later committed suicide.

The budget law also includes reforms to the laws governing the exchange of information in criminal cases. The revised "discovery" law, requires early, scheduled disclosure, while maintaining strong oversight by the judge.

Congestion Pricing

We took important steps to raise badly needed revenue to address the transportation crisis in our city by laying the groundwork for a system of congestion pricing that will raise \$15 billion dollars to fix the subway, make our streets safer, and reduce pollution. The MTA requires a dedicated, sustainable funding source to make necessary infrastructure improvements such as upgrading signals and making stations accessible for people with disabilities. We received a commitment for exemption in the form of a tax credit for low income and disabled New Yorkers who like us live in the congestion zone and might need to drive. The plan also requires the establishment of a traffic mobility review board, which will make recommendations regarding the CBD toll amount, and will be tasked with examining traffic and ensuring annual revenues.

Plastic Bags

By banning plastic carry out bags, and authorizing counties and cities to impose a five-cent fee on paper bags we take an important first step in getting plastic bags out of our State. However, the bill does not go far enough since you can continue to get single use plastic bags in dry cleaners and all types of restaurants. We must continue to work on preserving our environment while protecting our economy.

Higher Education

We included \$27 million to implement the Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act, as well as \$4.5 million for the Foster Youth College Success Initiative. While the spending plan makes critical investments in college affordability, and funds important opportunity programs in the SUNY and CUNY systems, \$32.2 million for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and \$35.5 million for the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) - there are also major gaps. We still have not closed the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) Gap, which is at a deficit of about \$140 million. We have yet to increase funding to pay for our CUNY and SUNY faculty and staff, and we did not allocate any funds for support for students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Education

Fully funded public schools are the cornerstone of our state, but yet again we are dealing with a budget that falls short of what is truly needed to ensure that all children in our city and state have the opportunities that public education provides. Many of my colleagues and I stood with advocates to push for levels of funding that our children deserve. We will continue this fight. The budget does not go far enough, but this is an important first step to demand for for education. The Enacted Budget includes \$27.86 billion in General Support for Public Schools, a \$1 billion increase over the 18-19 school year, and \$18.4 billion in Foundation Aid to help fund the state's neediest schools.

Health

The budget includes \$641 million in restorations for Medicaid, which includes funding for hospitals, nursing homes and pharmacy benefits, along with funding to cap reimbursement for deductible, ambulance and psychologist services. The budget also makes investments in public health, including \$16 million in contingency funding for potential changes to Federal Family Planning grants and \$4 million for prevention of maternal mortality. The budget also requires that three cycles of in-vitro fertilization be covered by insurance in the large group market and require fertility preservation treatments in all markets. Like many states, New York is battling an ongoing opioid epidemic. The enacted budget includes \$2 million to fund Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialist in New York City. In addition, the plan provides \$4.73 million to expand the jail-based substance use disorder services in county jails. The budget also includes \$350,000 for loan forgiveness and scholarship programs to recruit and retain staff in the prevention, treatment and recovery service system.

Taxes

I am disappointed that we failed to include a bold pied-a-terre tax which would have generated over half a billion dollars for subway improvements to the benefit of the millions of New Yorkers who rely on public transit. The well-connected real estate lobby caused the collapse of this progressive proposal.

Elections

The influence big real estate is able to wield shows just how important it is for us to create a public matching system for small-donor donations in the state.

Without publicly funded elections, corporate special interests will continue to kill policies that would improve critical services for New Yorkers like housing, healthcare, and adequate and accessible public transportation. In this budget we have taken a step in the right direction towards the creation of a system for the public financing of elections, but I do not believe the details of this system that is vital to our democracy should be put in the hands of an unelected commission that is not responsive to constituents.



[Budget Questions or Concerns? Click here](#)

[Want to Read More on the Budget? Click here](#)

News from the District

I am proud to join more than 150 bipartisan state and local elected officials and municipalities around the country in challenging the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 census.

On Monday, April 1, we filed an amicus brief in support of plaintiffs in *Department of Commerce v. New York*, currently before the U.S. Supreme Court, which addresses the important issue of whether a citizenship question should be added to the 2020 census. We argue that the addition of a citizenship question in the 2020 census will significantly impair the accuracy of the census, which determines the allocation of more than \$900 billion of federal funding.

The addition of a citizenship question will result in inaccurate census data and divert hundreds of millions of dollars away from vital programs that support public education, nutrition, healthcare, victims of crime, community development, rehabilitation centers and unemployment insurance, among so many others. Put simply, the improper allocation of this funding—away from those who need it most—will negatively impact the lives of millions of Americans. These impacts will be felt by all Americans, in regions all across the country, from urban centers to rural neighborhoods, including in communities like ours.

For this reason, I urge the Supreme Court to affirm the decision of the lower court rejecting the addition of a citizenship question to the 2020 census and ensuring the proper allocation of federal funding to the communities and individuals who need and rely on that funding.

Upcoming Events

Come up to Albany next Tuesday!

New York State's rent stabilization laws expire on June 15, 2019. Private equity landlords are harassing tenants, illegally raising rents, and evicting long term residents of our neighborhood. We need to renew, strengthen, and expand these laws so they serve the tenants they are meant to serve. We need #UniversalRentControl!

Join the Housing Justice for All Campaign for #TenantTuesday lobby day on April 9th! They'll leave for Albany from CAAAV's offices at [55 Hester St, New York, NY 10002](#) at 6:00 AM Sharp! Show up at 5:45 AM to make sure you don't miss the bus. They'll return to NYC by 3:00 PM. Breakfast and Lunch will be provided!

In The News

Democratic Rift Over N.Y. Budget as Progressive Backlash Grows

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