

# Cuomo budget priorities

## Governor's plan seeks boost in major programs

Funding in Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's proposed 2017 state budget for major programs and initiatives:

### ENVIRONMENT

Nearly \$1.24 billion to the state Department of Environmental Conservation — an increase of \$228 million from last year.

The increase is due to a boost in capital spending as well as \$2 billion from a proposed clean water infrastructure fund. If approved by the State Legislature, the clean water funding will be bonded and spread out over five years.

The plan also includes \$300 million for the Environmental Protection Fund, which pays for open space, climate change, solid waste and parks and recreation programming and initiatives. The same amount was allocated last year.

The spending plan calls for \$70 million, up from \$40 million last year, for a capital infrastructure program called Adventure NY intended to improve access to state land, update campgrounds and upgrade the DEC's recreational facilities.

The clean water infrastructure plan, the most ambitious environmental initiative in the budget, will help local governments improve wastewater infrastructure, as well as fund treatment to remove contaminants from drinking water.

In a budget briefing for the press, Cuomo said contaminants were especially troublesome in upstate New York and on Long Island. "We want to get ahead of that crisis," he said.

The budget recommends keeping the full-time equivalent of 2,946 DEC employees — the same as last year — although some forest and land positions will be added, budget documents show.

— EMILY C. DOOLEY

### TRANSPORTATION

The budget promises funding for several new transporta-



The budget plan includes improvements to 16 LIRR stations and new rail links to two places in Suffolk.

tion initiatives Cuomo proposes, including improvements to 16 Long Island Rail Road stations and new rail links to two destinations in Suffolk County.

The LIRR station renovations would cost \$80 million — \$45 million from the state and \$35 million from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. The budget also commits a total of \$80 million to "improve system connectivity" at Long Island MacArthur Airport in Ronkonkoma and Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton.

Overall, Cuomo's budget increases transportation spending by 7.1 percent — to \$9.26 billion from \$8.65 billion last year. That includes increases of \$265 million for the MTA and \$326 million for the State Department of Transportation.

Funding for local roads projects through the state's Consolidated Highway Improvement Programs remains steady at \$478 million. Transit operating aid would be about \$5 billion — an increase of 0.6 percent. The MTA would get \$4.5 billion of that, while other transit systems in the state, including Nassau's NICE Bus and Suffolk County Transit,

would split the remaining \$502 million.

The budget also appropriates \$1.5 billion toward the state's \$8.5 billion commitment to the MTA's five-year capital plan, which funds major infrastructure projects such as the LIRR's construction of a second track between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma. That plan is expected to be amended later this year to include funding for Cuomo's proposal to build a third track between Floral Park and Hicksville.

— ALFONSO CASTILLO

### HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education spending would rise by \$383 million to \$7.45 billion, or 5.4 percent.

State universities and colleges — including Stony Brook University, Farmingdale State College and SUNY Old Westbury — would receive a total increase of \$153 million, or 5.7 percent, in general fund appropriations. The state would spend \$21 million less, or 2.7 percent, on two-year schools such as Nassau Community College and Suffolk County Community College.

The Higher Education Services Corporation, which runs the state's Tuition Assistance

Program, would get an increase of \$152 million (14.9 percent), to \$1.17 billion.

Cuomo also wants to renew a plan that limits resident tuition increases at SUNY and CUNY institutions to no more than \$250 per year for the next five years. He also asks lawmakers to pass the DREAM Act, to make students who are immigrants without documentation eligible for state financial aid.

Earlier this month, Cuomo proposed the Excelsior Scholarship program, a supplemental financial aid program to pay the tuition of full-time students from families earning up to \$125,000 annually. Once fully phased in over two years, the program would cost \$163 million annually, according to the budget proposal.

— CANDICE FERRETTE

### ENERGY

The budget would extend the Alternative Fuels Property and Electric Vehicle Recharging Property Credit for five years, but lists no cost for the extension.

The budget also calls on the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to provide \$360 million to "leverage \$1 billion in pri-

vate sector investment" in 11 large-scale renewable energy projects across the state, including wind, solar energy, fuel cells and hydroelectric power. The spending plan doesn't list specific projects. But it calls the \$360 million the "largest-single state investment at one time," and an increase of \$210 million over previous awards.

The budget also calls for following through on a previously disclosed plan to end the state's Temporary Utility Assessment on March 31, for statewide ratepayer savings of \$122 million.

— MARK HARRINGTON

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Cuomo would aid biotechnology startups, drugmakers and producers of medical devices with \$650 million in tax breaks and grants over five years.

He said the initiative seeks to commercialize inventions from research institutions such as Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory and Brookhaven National Laboratory. State funds would be matched by at least \$100 million from the private sector.

The proposal comes as "Long Island is seeking to grow its life sciences industries and create a larger biotech economy," Kevin Law, president and CEO of the Long Island Association business group, said yesterday.

Law also welcomed Cuomo's request for another \$100 million for downtown redevelopment. Last year, Westbury beat out 20 local communities to win \$10 million in the first \$100-million Downtown Revitalization Initiative competition.

Cuomo wants \$750 million for state tax credits and grants that would be distributed in the seventh Regional Economic Development Councils competition. The Long Island council has secured \$486.5 million for 569 projects since being established in 2011.

Cuomo also has proposed \$70 million for tourism promotions and an expanded "Buy American" program for state contracts that he said on Tuesday would help manufacturing and construction companies.

— JAMES T. MADORE