



COMMUNIQUE

UNION SAVES CUNY SLU FUNDING IN CITY BUDGET

State Budget & 22,000 City Jobs Hinge on Washington Taking Action on HEROES Act

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Just minutes before the clock struck midnight on July 1—the deadline for a new city spending plan—the New York City Council passed an \$88.1 billion budget for the 2021 fiscal year. The 32-17 vote (one member was absent) came after hours of contentious hearings that centered mainly around how much would be trimmed from the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

The final budget is a far cry from the initial \$95.3 billion executive budget proposed by the mayor in January before the deadly coronavirus cast its

grip on the city, shuttering businesses and wreaking economic havoc. In order to make up for billions in lost tax revenue, the city was forced to cut back.

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on the Council to reduce the size of the city's police force and cut its budget by at least \$1 billion. However, not all politicians stand on the side of "defund the police," which resulted in the hostile budget debate.

While there were plenty of reductions and cuts, funding for the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies (SLU) was restored at \$1.02 million. Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton said the union was the leading voice on behalf of 22 unions and community organizations that serve on the SLU Advisory Board.

"SLU provides educational and occupational opportunities for poor and working-class people to prepare the next generation of civic and labor leaders so they can serve the labor community and the communities in which they live and work," Middleton said. "SLU has an important mission and a stellar record of success in serving student of color in overwhelming numbers. We had to make sure the funding for such important education was not on the chopping block."

The budget agreement did save \$115.8 million for youth summer jobs programs, which, given the dire state of the local economy, provides needed experience and income for the city's disadvantaged youth, and funding for broadband in NYCHA.

While the overall Parks Department budget was cut by an estimated 14%, \$9.9 million was allocated for reopening a quarter of the city's pools. The mayor's office said three pools in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens are slated to be open on July 24, with 12 more opening on Aug. 1. The city's beaches, including Rockaway, Coney Island, and others in the Bronx and Staten Island, opened on July 1.

The budget includes many reductions to services by the city's agencies and cuts \$65 million from the Fair Fares program that provides half-price Metrocards to low-income city residents. Outreach services for the city's homeless will now be conducted by social service agencies.

With the budget now passed, the city still faces a huge obstacle as the scene shifts to Washington D.C. where Congress is working on a stimulus package that will help bail out municipalities hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the HEROES Act as a critical part of the COVID-19 recovery effort, but the U.S. Senate has failed to take similar action on the bill that would provide more than a trillion dollars in much-needed aid to state and local governments.

New York City is counting on its share of that money, plus help from Albany, to prevent any further reductions in service—and possibly as many as 22,000 layoffs of public workers—if Congress and Albany fail to act.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has said that New York State needs \$61 billion in new federal funding from the HEROES Act to avoid massive cuts in the state budget and has warned of billions in further cuts without it.

On the state front in Albany, the 2019-2020 legislative session will go down in history as anything but typical. During this two-year session alone, legislators passed close to 5,000 bills—five times the amount of a regular two-year session.

In addition to heavy negotiations surrounding the state budget, many bills were passed and signed into law, including Local 1180's bill that guarantees equal pay for equal work, and CWA District 1's flagship bill, the New York Call Center Act.

Other important legislation that passed included a list of regulations for the limousine industry, keeping young people who are arrested from being held in maximum security prison while awaiting arraignment, licensing elevator repair technicians, giving strikers unemployment insurance after two weeks instead of seven, prevailing wage for utility workers, WTC health coverage, domestic violence protections and support, a study of mandating women on corporate boards, prohibiting pelvic exams when a patient is unconscious and cannot consent, and various provisions that improve retirement, benefits and protections from Janus or similar cases.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic upheaval at the capital, the legislature still managed to pass the state budget on time, but allowed for adjustments during the year in case of severe revenue shortfalls and lack of emergency funding. Once the budget was enacted, the legislature left Albany and conducted business remotely; bills were introduced, negotiations were ongoing, and some bills were actually signed into law.

During this period, the legislature even introduced new bills related to COVID-19, including preventing evictions and other rent and mortgage relief; emergency loans and unemployment insurance protections; allowing pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines; requiring contact tracers to be culturally and linguistically congruent with the neighborhood; prohibiting price gouging; whistleblower protection for healthcare workers; extending timelines for the Child Victim's Act; extending the filing deadline

for NYS taxes; extending the expiration date of local building permits; and requiring healthcare facilities to have a pandemic disaster plan.

The most notable was the bill establishing that the family of an essential worker who reported to the job and then died from COVID-19 would no longer be required to prove that the illness was contracted on the job in order to receive the accidental death benefit (see page 10).

Legislators returned to Albany the week of May 26 to process all the newly-introduced bills, pass the critical COVID-related bills to allow the state to function through the pandemic, and prepare for future crises—and then George Floyd was killed. Both the Senate and Assembly immediately tackled legislation that will impact how communities are policed. After one week, they passed a group of bills related to police conduct and protections of civil and constitutional rights, including requirements to repeal 50a and make law enforcement disciplinary records public; make false 911 calls a civil liability; create the "Eric Garner Chokehold Act"; require law enforcement officers to report when they discharge a weapon; require body cameras on NYS police; require law enforcement to provide medical treatment for persons under arrest; create a special investigations unit within the Attorney General's office; and create a law enforcement misconduct investigating unit. Most of these bills now have been signed into law. ■