

Press Release

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Diverse Organizations Join Together to Tell Governor that his Vetoes Will Hurt! Urge the Legislature to Override the Vetoes and Restore the Budget they Have Already Passed

(Albany, NY) - A diverse array of organizations joined together today to tell Governor Pataki that the vetoes he issued on August 20, 2004 are having a negative effect of children, families, the elderly and other taxpayers throughout New York State.

Organizations representing libraries, community colleges, veterans, at-risk youth, individuals with disabilities, low-income people and alcohol and substance abuse treatment providers told the Governor that these vetoes will hurt real people and that he should not be playing political games with lives of our state's residents.

The organizations urged the legislature to override the Governor's vetoes as soon as possible. "Time is of the essence!" said Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of the Statewide Emergency Network for Social and Economic Security (SENSES). "As of September 30th we will be halfway through the state's fiscal year with countless important programs trapped in 'veto limbo.' A wide range of affected organizations, from libraries to youth development organizations, have no sense of how to budget for and staff the programs and services for which they are responsible. The vetoes are causing chaos. If the Governor is the 'adult' in this process someone should tell him he is neglecting his children!"

The Governor not only issued vetoes on items of appropriations, as authorized by the state constitution, but on language governing those appropriations as well. Many of the language vetoes have the effect of reallocating federal funds from purposes approved by the legislature to those preferred by the Governor. This will, in effect, result in major funding cuts for numerous programs that assist vulnerable populations in transitioning into the workforce.

According to the Division of the Budget, the vetoes, in the aggregate, will reduce state spending by \$235 million during the current fiscal year. According to Frank Mauro, Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute, "The Legislature failed to approve many of the Governor's proposals for increasing state revenue, particularly in future years. That clearly makes balancing future budgets harder rather than easier but it in no way justifies the vetoing of the numerous small but important items in this year's budget that were somehow chosen as targets. The \$235 million is in no way necessary to balance the

current year's budget and the claim that the Governor vetoed "almost every spending increase added by the Legislature that he could" has turned out not to be true. This raises real questions as to whether these vetoes are about budget balancing or about something else entirely."

Vetoes Hurt Students and Local Property Taxpayers

The Governor vetoed numerous appropriations for community colleges and SUNY and CUNY colleges. "Public Higher education is too important to New York's economy and to New York's students to be cut. These vetoes will result in increases in tuition for students and/or increases in property taxes to maintain the current level of services expected from our higher learning institutions," stated Anthony Wildman, Director of Higher Education Services for NYSUT.

Vetoes Hurt Children and Families that use Libraries

"The Governor's veto of library aid restoration comes on top of seven years of static funding for libraries, which have seriously eroded the ability of our libraries and library systems to maintain levels of service, let alone make any advancements in serving the needs of an increasing information hungry society," said Michael J. Borges, Executive Director of the New York Library Association.

"Libraries are essential parts of our schools and communities and yet they are consistently shortchanged in the state's budget process," said Mr. Borges "The state spends less than one tenth of one percent on library aid and yet libraries serve 51% of the state's population (just counting those with library cards) and probably more, where else does so little state dollars serve so many people."

Vetoes Hurt Families of People suffering from Alcohol and Substance Abuse

"Children and families are already bearing the burden of the failed budget process", according to John Coppola, NY Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers Executive Director. "Staff have already been laid off and vital services that were successfully reducing chemical dependency and child abuse and neglect have been abruptly terminated", Coppola added.

Vetoes Hurt Children and Families that Need Health Insurance

The Governor also vetoed a \$1 million appropriation for facilitated enrollment to the Child Health Plus program. This coupled with the loss of matching federal funds means a 15 percent cut to the program. Donna A. Lawrence, Vice President, National Field Operations and Executive Director, New York State Office of Children's Defense Fund stated that, "With 45 million uninsured Americans, New York State's Facilitated Enrollment Program is a nationally recognized model of how to help families enroll into health insurance. Governor Pataki's veto threatens the very success of community-based

facilitated enrollment and means that over 20,000 New Yorkers will not get the help they need to enroll in and keep their health insurance."

Vetoed Hurt those in Need of Family Planning

"Funding for family planning services must be preserved in the state budget. The Governor's vetoes seriously threaten New York's ability to provide reproductive health care to those who need it most," said JoAnn Smith, president and CEO of Family Planning Advocates of New York State. "A healthy state depends on healthy families."

Vetoed Hurt those in Need of Affordable Housing

According to Blair Sebastian, Executive Director of the NYS Rural Housing Coalition, "The Governor has devastated the successful Rural and Neighborhood Preservation programs that provide essential housing and community development services to poor communities. If not overridden, his vetoes will result in fifty percent funding reductions to these organizations forcing them to cut programs, layoff staff and in some cases, close their doors after faithfully serving their communities for twenty-five or more years. Low income homeowners and tenants will lose access to programs that have prevented homelessness and allowed members of these communities to access safe, decent and affordable housing.

Vetoed Hurt Persons with HIV/AIDS

"Over \$85 million in front-line housing, disability and children's services funding is at stake in this fight, and thousands of New Yorkers living with AIDS and HIV and their families need those services to survive. We support the Assembly Majority's effort to override the vetoes, and we call on the Senate Majority to do the same," stated Michael Kink, Esq., Legislative Counsel for Housing Works, Inc.

Vetoed Hurt Children

Governor Pataki also vetoed numerous TANF funded programs that serve at-risk youth. "Last year, we served over 350 young men and women between the ages of 14 and 21, many of them dropouts, drug abusers and felons. Our work gives young people a second chance and an opportunity to turn their lives around. Today, we are on the precipice of closing our doors. If our legislators do not take swift, responsible action, those young men and women, and many more just like them, will go unserved. This will mean higher rates of incarceration, engagement in the criminal justice system, involvement of probation and chronic unemployment – all of which have much higher costs to all of us taxpayers." stated Richard Heyl de Ortiz, Executive Director, Youth Resource Development Corporation.

Vetoed Hurt Veterans

“The Governor’s veto of all funds to community organizations for homeless veterans outreach and supportive services through the Department of Family Assistance ends the State of New York’s longstanding commitment to our veterans and those community organizations throughout the state which provide these critical services. This action by the Governor sends a bitter message to our returning servicemen and women.” stated Joseph Sluszka, Executive Director, Albany Housing Coalition Inc.

Vetoes Hurt Individuals with Disabilities

The Governor’s vetoes of TANF Surplus language bills will also mean an end to many successful program initiatives that have successfully been helping move people into the workforce. “New York can’t afford **not** to restore the \$1 million increase in the Disability Advocacy Program, DAP is a cash cow to New York State generating \$2-\$3 for every dollar invested. This money flows into state and local coffers and into communities where it is needed the most” Stated Kristin Brown, Director of Legislative Advocacy for the Greater Upstate Law Project and Public Interest Law Office of Rochester.

Vetoes Hurt Immigrants

"Over one million immigrant New Yorkers want to learn English but there are only classroom seats for one out of every twenty," said Mark Lewis, Albany representative for the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella coalition of over 150 member groups that work with immigrants across the state. "Governor Pataki's veto of nearly \$5 million in funding for English and adult literacy classes will prevent thousands of immigrants from getting the English skills they need to become the productive workers that our economy desperately needs. New York's immigrants and our economy need the Senate to join the Assembly and override these vetoes--the investment will be paid back many times by a stronger economy," concluded Mr. Lewis.

(attachments: Veto summaries by issue area, legislative budget analysis with vetoes, and TANF Surplus funding chart with vetoes)

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