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Finishing Albany's Unfinished Business Coalitions Release CounterBudget of Final Budget Priorities

(Albany, N.Y.) Statewide organizations today converged in Albany to release a Counter-Budget detailing outstanding budget issues that are critical to working, middle class and unemployed families in New York State. With the "Big Ugly" completed last week, the groups came together to remind the Governor and State Lawmakers that many critical budget issues still must be addressed.

The groups urged lawmakers to use the CounterBudget as a road map for what programs and policies must still be included in the budget and spelled out how they can be paid for.

As the legislature entered its final deliberations on the budget, the coalition argued for the need to "put people first" by taking action on issues including increasing the minimum wage and welfare grant, eliminating proposed transfer language that would weaken budget oversight, and restoring needed funding to human services programs and education.

"The legislature is failing to address the growing strains on New York State's 'human' infrastructure, jeopardizing our economic future. We have record rates of homelessness, hunger, foreclosures and extremely high unemployment. With many of the most contentious budget issues resolved, it's time to refocus our priorities and start 'putting people first,'" said Ron Deutsch, executive director of New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness.

According to Michael Kink, executive director of Strong Economy for All, "For our state government to work for everyone, we can't allow another budget with deep cuts to low-wealth school districts, safety net services and higher education. The most damaging program cuts must be restored and we need smart investments in our future. And this can easily be paid for if our elected officials are willing to take the special deals away from the 1% to make it happen."

"New York State should not balance its 2012-2013 budget in ways that will make economic conditions worse or place a drag on the recovery by further cutting the staffing levels of state and local government agencies and nonprofit service providers. Rather than cutting essential services, the Legislature and the Governor should close corporate loopholes - - particularly those that favor large multi-state corporations at the expense of New York-based small and medium sized businesses," stated Frank Mauro, executive director of the Fiscal Policy Institute.

"At the same time lawmakers are giving tax breaks to millionaires and corporations, SUNY and CUNY students are being asked to pay 30% more in tuition to receive an education at campuses that are grossly underfunded and increasingly controlled by private corporate interests," said Rafael Gomez, NY Students Rising.

"We thank the Assembly and the Senate for standing up against an experimental competitive grant policy that would pit child against child as they seek to make their educational dreams a reality," said Nikki Jones, Alliance for Education, Communications Director. "While the Governor and the Legislature finalize the budget, children from across the entire state will wait to see what level of priority is placed on their future. Thousands of public school students, from pre-k to high school, will lose teachers, guidance counselors, and librarians in addition to countless quality programs and courses such as

kindergarten, after school, sports and tutoring simply because \$805 million does not repair \$2.7 billion worth of damages. It doesn't take a mathematician to do the math."

"The State Senate must stop playing games with the health of New Yorkers and the economic vitality of our small businesses. It is a matter of life and death for many if the State Senate Majority gets its way and stalls once again on creating New York's Health Insurance Exchange." said Jessica Wisneski, Legislative and Campaigns Director of Citizen Action of New York. "There is no need for further study, studies show that costs would be reduced by as much as 66% for individuals and 22% for small businesses. In addition, more than 1 million people, who now don't have the luxury of seeing a doctor when they need to will gain coverage under an Exchange. The Governor and Assembly have shown their strong support and we call on them to stop the Senate from slowing down creating more quality, affordable health insurance choices for New York's families and small businesses."

"We refuse to accept austerity conditions for the students of New York, whether they're in kindergarten or college. It's time to end the underfunding of public education and stop using tuition hikes and teacher layoffs to fill the budget gaps left by Albany's disinvestment in education," said Barbara Bowen, president of the Professional Staff Congress. "There is money in New York for our schools, for CUNY and SUNY, for better financial aid and for ending tuition hikes. To give students the opportunity they deserve, Albany must make our tax system more progressive and close loopholes."

"Some people would have you believe there's no choice; that we must throw state services under the bus," said NYS Public Employees Federation (PEF) President Ken Brynien. "There's always a choice, and this time we have far better options than to force the people of Flatbush to travel up to an hour for the hospital services that SUNY's Downstate University Hospital has been providing to them for decades, right in their own neighborhood. We can make far better choices than shutting down the mental health services those same people depend on at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center. And in Rochester we don't have to shove people with severe developmental disabilities out of Monroe Developmental Center and close it down."

"This state's leaders need to get their priorities right and put New Yorkers first, instead of the millionaires, billionaires and big corporations. They are the ones who duck their taxes, play fast and loose with the investment and financial markets and have put us all in these economic straits. It's long past time we stopped pandering to them."

"First and foremost the state budget process should be transparent. Otherwise, we cannot hold New York's leaders accountable for their actions," said Alison Jenkins, Fiscal Policy Program Director, Environmental Advocates of New York. "While he may have good intentions, Governor Cuomo's 'transfer language' in his budget proposal essentially reduces--to one, Governor Cuomo--the number of people with meaningful oversight of decisions regarding the use of taxpayer money."

"Human services have lost nearly \$1 billion in funding in the last two years, as need has grown to all time record highs. We are disappointed not to see any of the many viable corporate tax reform options considered in the FY13 budget thus far. New Yorkers deserve fair, sustainable tax reforms to ensure enough revenue to meet service demand," said Michael Stoller, Executive Director of the Human Services Council.

"The Assembly needs to join the Senate to restore the cuts to the EPIC program. Seniors had been paying a maximum copayment of \$20 and suddenly it jumped to over \$100 for some drugs when EPIC stopped supplementing Medicare Part D. If you are living on \$20,000 a year, it has become difficult to buy the medicine you need," said Maria Alvarez Executive Director, NY StateWide Senior Action Council.