



NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY

April 29, 2020

Dear Members of New York's Congressional Delegation:

We write as elected representatives serving millions of New Yorkers in nearly every corner of the state. As our elected representatives in Washington, you have a keen understanding of the challenges our state is facing in the wake of the global pandemic and know that New York has become an epicenter of this terrible virus. In order to make it through these very difficult times and to continue to provide vital services to our residents, the need for unrestricted aid from the federal government to New York State and its localities is critically important.

As you know, New York has been devastated by COVID-19 in a way that was unimaginable only a few short weeks ago. Nearly 300,000 of our fellow New Yorkers have tested positive to date and more than 18,000 have lost their lives. Under your leadership, the federal government has stepped up to provide critical assistance to our state and local governments, and for that we are eternally grateful. Yet the challenges New York continues to face are immense.

In mid-March, New York took bold action to stem the tide of the devastation brought on by this terrible virus. While absolutely essential to protect human life, these necessary measures have had a disastrous effect on state revenues derived from all sources, including sales tax, personal income tax, business taxes and motor fuel taxes. Unfortunately, after six weeks of economic inactivity and with state and local governments bearing the brunt of the costs to battle COVID-19, New York is on an economic precipice.

To be blunt, we are struggling to find a path forward for our state and local governments to continue to operate without considerable financial assistance from our federal government. Without aid, we cannot continue to fund critical services such as healthcare, public safety, transportation and education.

Under the cloud of a global pandemic, the most productive state in the country is facing massive cuts to our medical professionals, first responders, teachers and transportation workers – those who put their lives on the line to keep New Yorkers safe and whose jobs do not end with the pandemic. And it is not just these workers. With non-essential businesses closed down, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers have lost their jobs and are facing financial hardship through no fault of their own.

The recently-enacted budget for fiscal year 2020-21 was passed at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and it adopted many difficult choices to close a \$7 billion gap. As this year's budget was

being finalized, the economic toll of the public health crisis created a new deficit. Instead of adopting a budget that included draconian cuts to all programs, the legislature granted the Division of Budget the authority to align state expenditures to available resources, allowing reductions to be made when the financial plan is deemed out of balance, with appropriate legislative review.

The true extent of our precarious financial position is now coming into focus. Released on April 25, 2020, New York's updated financial plan provides a spending scenario that would send the state and regional economy into a tailspin, with \$10 billion in spending reductions to all sectors of state spending, with exceptions related to public health and safety, and other mandatory costs.

The financial plan assumes \$8.2 billion in local assistance cuts, which equates to a 20 to 30 percent reduction to just about every critical service our – and your – constituents depend upon: school aid, Medicaid, aid to municipalities, property tax relief for homeowners, child care, CUNY, state community colleges, agricultural supports, aid for our seniors, aid for the direct care workforce and veterans' programs to name just a few.

The Division of Budget also projects a 10 percent reduction to the operations of our state's workforce. A \$1.6 billion reduction would impact essential state services that our taxpayers rely upon – from the maintenance and repair of our roads and bridges, to the economic and intellectual engine of SUNY, to environmental protection staff and to those processing unemployment claims.

In short, if cuts of this scale become a reality, no element of daily life for most New Yorkers would be left unscathed. Unemployment would increase dramatically over already-intolerable levels. Services to promote general health and well-being would be eliminated. The housing market would grind to a halt. The ability of people to pay rent and stay in their homes would be jeopardized. Local economies would be devastated. Services to children, the needy and our seniors would be decimated. The quality of life of all of our residents would be diminished.

A recent suggestion to allow states to file for bankruptcy to manage the financial crisis that has arisen is short sighted, irresponsible and, above all else, not legal. Additionally, states declaring bankruptcy would send negative shock waves through an already unstable stock market. New York is home to the third largest economy in the nation – larger than most small countries – and is the global center for securities exchange. Our taxpayers are among the highest contributors to the federal government, while the state ranks dead last in distribution of federal aid.

We are the United States of America, not the United States until one needs help. New York State has always been there for our country during its times of need. Now we are counting on our federal government to stand with us. Your strong collective voice on behalf of the people and state you represent is needed now more than ever because unrestricted aid has never been more essential. Please let us know how we can work together to deliver for the people of our communities in this time of critical need.

Sincerely,



Carl E. Heastie
Speaker

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Majority Leader

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Assemblymember

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