



ASSEMBLYMAN

**Michael Cusick**

**Update from Albany**



MAY 2017

**Dear Neighbor,**

*I am writing to continue to keep you informed and updated on the completion of the New York State Budget and the particular details that affect Staten Islanders. As your representative in Albany, I work each and every day to advocate for policies and legislation that will positively benefit the people of our borough. During this session, I sought to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing Staten Islanders, including the ongoing heroin & opioid epidemic, inadequate transportation services, and lowering the tax burden on our middle class families.*

*This newsletter contains information on what I and my colleagues accomplished on your behalf in the 2017-18 State Budget. Should you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my district office at (718) 370-1384 or by email at [cusickm@nyassembly.gov](mailto:cusickm@nyassembly.gov).*

*Sincerely,*

**Michael J. Cusick**  
Member of Assembly  
District 63



## Continuing the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge Discount

A primary focus was to make certain that the bridge tolls did not increase and further hamper Staten Islanders who commute across the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge. In addition to the \$10.3 million in funding to maintain the Staten Island discount, a major effort was made to secure an additional \$3.5 million to fully offset an additional toll increase that would have taken place due to a recent rate hike, effectively bringing the discount from \$5.74 to \$5.50.

*For more information: (SIR EZ-Pass/MTA Discount)  
Call 800-333-8655 or  
visit <https://e-zpassny.com/en/about/plans.shtml>*



### Reminder to Sign Up For These Discounts

#### Goethals, Bayonne and Outerbridge crossings

A toll relief plan gives E-ZPass holders a reduced toll on their third trip over New Jersey spans in a calendar month. Once the third trip is taken, the first two trips paid at peak rate are rolled back to \$6.25. To sign up for the three-trip plan call the Port Authority at 1-800-333-8655 or visit [www.panynj.gov](http://www.panynj.gov). Those enrolled in the 10-trip plan for the VNB will be automatically absorbed into the three-trip plan.

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## Investing In Our Education



### Budget Funding

The state budget increases education aid by \$1 billion for a total of \$25.7 billion, a 4.1 percent increase from last year's budget, reaffirming the Assembly Majority's unrelenting commitment to putting every student on their path to success. The budget also increases Foundation Aid by \$700 million for a total of \$17.2 billion. Additionally, \$25 million for JCC's and other nonpublic schools to provide security for facilities at risk of hate crimes or attacks because of their ideology, beliefs or mission.

### Excelsior Scholarship

The budget also sets aside \$163 million for Governor Cuomo's Excelsior Scholarship which will make CUNY and SUNY schools tuition-free for families who earn less than \$100,000 annually in the fall of 2017, increasing to \$110,000 in 2018, and reaching \$125,000 in 2019. Nearly 940,000 New York families are eligible for the program. In addition, students who attend private institutions and who have families who make under \$125,000 will be eligible for \$6,000 for the scholarship award. The budget also invests \$8 million to provide open educational resources, including electronic-books, to students at SUNY and CUNY.

### Enhanced Tuition Award

Under the FY 2017-2018 Budget, a new Enhanced Tuition Award will also enable students attending private not-for-profit colleges to receive financial assistance to complete their college degree. The program provides a maximum award of \$3,000, requires private colleges to provide a match and freeze student tuition for the duration of the award – maximizing the financial benefit to the student. The Enacted Budget includes \$19 million for the program.

### 4201 Schools, 4410 Pre-School and 853 School-Age Programs

The final budget provides for a \$2.3 million increase for 4201 schools, which are state-funded institutions that serve the special education needs of children who are deaf, blind and/or severely physically disabled. It also provides \$903,000 to restore funding to the Henry Viscardi School and \$903,000 to restore funding for the New York School for the Deaf.

Though funding levels remained the same as last year for 4410 and 853 programs, the final budget this year requires SED to establish an alternative methodology for approved preschool special integrated classes

## Supporting Our Seniors

### Enhanced STAR

The process by which seniors are able to register with their local assessor or when they file their income tax returns will remain in place. The executive proposal which would have had required eligible seniors to instead register with the state and participate in the Income Verification Program was rejected.



### Title XX Funding for Senior Centers

The slashing of Title XX funding to support senior centers was narrowly avoided this year. If New York City had been forced to reallocate the funds for other expenses, \$17 million in funding would have been lost and 65 senior centers could have been forced to close.

### Longterm Care

The state budget provides \$13.5 million to support long-term care, including restoring \$10 million to preserve spousal refusal, ensuring couples do not lose their life savings in the event a spouse becomes ill and needs nursing home care.

## Lowering Taxes for the Middle Class

### Record Low Taxes for Middle-Class New Yorkers

The enacted Budget continues to lower Personal Income Tax rates for middle-class New Yorkers. In 2012, middle-class tax rates were lowered from 6.85 percent to 6.45 percent for taxpayers in the \$40,000-\$150,000 income bracket, and to 6.65 percent in the \$150,000-\$300,000 income bracket. Under these new reforms, the rate will drop even further this year and will continue to drop all the way to 5.5 percent and 6 percent, respectively, when the cuts are fully phased in. These new lower tax rates will save middle class New Yorkers nearly \$6.6 billion in just the first four years, with annual savings reaching \$4.2 billion by 2025.

### The "Internet Tax" will not be included

The Governor's proposal would have required online marketplace providers to collect sales taxes from outside New York who use their platforms who sell goods to New.





## Veterans

The Veterans Counseling Program received \$5.8 million for services and expenses in the State Operations Fund and also \$5 million for Aid to Localities Funds including county and city veterans service agencies, supplemental burial benefits, and Gold Star Families annuity. The PFC Joseph Dwyer PTSD Peer-To-Peer Veterans Counseling Program also saw an increase in funding now totaling \$3,090,000.

## Combating the Opioid Epidemic

The state budget increases funding by \$43 million over last year, bringing the total support for prevention, treatment and recovery programs, to \$213 million. This funding will help to increase access to treatment and prevention programs including family support navigators, peer supports, recovery clubhouses and community coalitions for individuals who suffer with substance abuse. Additionally, \$10 million will be given to increase the number of beds in in-patient treatment facilities and restores \$2 million for New York City Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialists (SAPIS).



## Increased Wages for Direct Care Workers

The spending plan provides \$160 million over two years to support two 3.25 percent wage increases (a total of 6.5 percent over two years) for direct support professionals, with the first raise starting January 1 and then the other increase on April 1, 2018 to ensure that state-funded non-profits that specialize in the care of our disabled and seniors will be afforded the ability to recruit and retain employees, while providing the same level of excellent care that our most vulnerable neighbors need.

## Protecting New Yorkers from the Soaring Cost of Prescription Drugs

Under the FY 2017-2018 Budget, New York is the first state in the nation to cap the growth of prescription drug spending in its Medicaid program, which has grown 25 percent over the past three years. The agreement provides the Department of Health with a range of tools to lower the cost of prescription drugs, including the ability to drive down the cost of certain drugs whose price is high relative to its therapeutic benefits. This unprecedented agreement enables the Medicaid program to allocate more resources for other essential health services and ensures high-quality care across New York State.

## Affordable Housing

The FY 2017-2018 Budget continues funding for the state's \$20 billion comprehensive, five-year plan for affordable and supportive housing to ensure New Yorkers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness have safe and secure housing. The Budget includes \$2.5 billion in funding to advance the creation of 100,000 new affordable and 6,000 supportive housing units.

## YMCA Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA)

Funding in the amount of \$400,000 was put into place for services and expenses for the YMCA's HEPA program, which addresses childhood obesity early on before potentially greater health concerns happen later in life.



## Discount Program for Veterans

Assemblyman Cusick partnered with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to initiate a discount program for veterans of the United States military who live in Staten Island. To join this program and receive reductions on goods and services at participating businesses, sign up at Assemblyman Cusick's office at 1911 Richmond Avenue. Please bring your discharge papers (DD-214) to receive your Staten Island VETS card. You will be given a listing of participating businesses that offer discounts at their establishments. For more information, contact our district office at (718) 370-1384.



*Assemblyman Cusick thanks Staten Island's veterans at a Memorial Day service at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial at the Armory.*



*Assemblyman Cusick with Army Major Adam Scher at the Travis Fourth of July Parade.*



## Total Fitness Challenge

To encourage children to exercise both their mind and body during the summer months, I established the Total Fitness Challenge in 2007. We are kicking off the 2017 Total Fitness Challenge which is open to all students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Each child must read at least 30 minutes every day and perform as many physical activities as they want. The different physical activities are assigned various point values which count toward each student's total score. A Total Fitness medal will be awarded to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place top scorers from each grade among the island-wide entries. A trophy will be given to the school having the most points and participants in the challenge.

Brochures will be sent to each school and distributed at the end of the year. For more information, visit: [www.totalfitnesschallenge.org](http://www.totalfitnesschallenge.org) or call my District Office at (718) 370-1384.



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*Assemblyman*

# Michael Cusick

## UPDATE FROM ALBANY

MAY 2017

## UNCLAIMED MONEY

The New York State Office of the Comptroller may have money that belongs to you! There is over \$14 billion dollars of unclaimed money from bank accounts, stocks, and bonds, utility deposits, income tax refunds, and inheritances to name a few. To see if New York State has money that belongs to you go to the Comptroller's website ([www.osc.state.ny.us](http://www.osc.state.ny.us)) and click on "Unclaimed Funds."