

Towns, schools ask Assembly members for relief in N.Y. budget

Jenny Lee-Adrian • Poughkeepsie Journal •
March 20, 2010

Town and school officials urged Assembly members Joel Miller, R-Poughkeepsie, and Marc Molinaro, R-Red Hook, to prevent state costs from being shifted onto them in the proposed 2010-11 state budget.

Miller and Molinaro held a hearing Friday on Gov. David Paterson's proposed budget in the Dutchess County legislative chambers in the City of Poughkeepsie. The deadline to pass a budget is April 1, the start of the state's fiscal year.

"Our towns, our school districts have done far better in being fiscally responsible than the state as a whole," Miller said. "We basically have no money now. We can't borrow anymore."

Molinaro was critical of past budgets that relied on generous revenue assumptions and underestimated expenditures.

"All of that bad budgeting is coming home to roost this year," he said.

Paterson's proposed \$134 billion budget had to close a deficit exceeding \$9 billion, according to state Division of the Budget spokesman Matt Anderson.

He said the state expects additional federal aid.

James Parla, superintendent of Wappingers Central

School District, asked Miller and Molinaro to look at districts that are highly dependent on state aid and to provide some relief, as well as expedite the elimination of unfunded mandates.

"We don't have the fund balance to try to get us through," Parla said. He said the district is looking at a double-digit property-tax-levy increase.

Regarding unfunded mandates, Anderson said, "We certainly understand those concerns."

Anderson said Paterson proposed a four-year moratorium on any unfunded mandates that would require municipalities and schools to undertake new programs. The moratorium could provide \$1 billion in savings to local governments in the next three years.

Miller said he proposed legislation two years ago to eliminate unfunded mandates on towns and schools, but the measure was defeated in the Assembly.

Town of East Fishkill Supervisor John Hickman said the state needs to cut waste. Towns need relief from unfunded mandates and state taxes, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's payroll tax, he said.

County Legislature Chairman Robert Rolison, R-City of Poughkeepsie, said, "It was a very good dialogue between the local level and the state level. The more discussion you have amongst the different levels of government, the better it's going to be."

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