



THIS WEEK IN NEW YORK

COVERING NEW YORK & CITY GOVERNMENT

MARCH 15, 2024 EDITION

"Obstacles don't define us. Rather, it is the unparalleled courage and character of us that defines us as a people. So my confidence in the future is steeped in our glorious past - in the face of adversity, we always persist. We persevere, we prevail." Governor Kathy Hochul

In the News-New York State



"15 days in Albany time is a lifetime."

Speaker Carl Heastie, in *City & State*



The Senate and Assembly passed their one-house budget bills yesterday, each adding over \$13 billion to the \$233 billion 2024-2025 State spending plan Governor Kathy Hochul proposed in January. The legislators and the Governor will now focus on consensus, with the goal of having a spending plan in place by the start of the new fiscal year on April 1st.

The additional spending in the Senate was earmarked for increasing Medicaid and human services services, rejecting Governor Hochul's revisions to school Foundation Aid school, and its new housing plan. The Assembly also proposed increases to Medicaid, school aid, and human services.

Both the Senate and Assembly agreed to a 3.2% cost of living increase for direct care workers, as opposed to Governor Cuomo's suggested 1.5%. In addition, the Senate added a \$4,000 per employee wage enhancement (over two years) for workers earning less than \$75,000.

The Senate earmarked \$250 million to create a new state entity to fund developments on state-owned land, the New York Housing Opportunity Corporation, fashioned after the Mitchell-Lama program. In addition, it called for new tax breaks for developers similar to New York City's expired 421a program to build more affordable housing.

Meanwhile, the Assembly proposed \$500 million each to support the existing Mitchell-Lama developments and the Foundations for Futures program to support homeownership and create housing on state- and municipal-owned sites. In addition, it reappropriated \$250 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program and restored \$40 million for the Homeowner Protection Program.

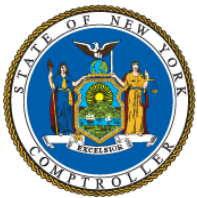
With respect to labor, the Senate included provisions to reduce the final average salary calculation window for Tier 6 members from five to three years; to continue to exclude overtime from Tier 6 pension contribution calculations to March 31, 2026; to allow Tier 6 court system peace and court officers to retire after 30 years of service at 55 without seeing a reduction in benefits, and to

reduce the normal retirement age for this class of employees from 63 to 62; and to increase the current earnings limitation for public service retirees who return to work for the State from \$35,000 to \$50,000.

The Assembly included legislation that would provide pension benefits for first grade New York City police officers who have served for 25 or 30 years and to restore 20-year service retirement for New York City police officers hired on or before July 1, 2009. In its budget narrative, the Assembly asserted that it is “committed to improving benefits provided under tier 6,” including the Final Average Salary three-year look back proposal.

The Legislature returns to Albany on Monday, March 18th, with 8 scheduled session days between now and the start of the new fiscal year.

"I feel like I do every year – it all begins now," Governor Hochul said.



Comptroller DiNapoli: LIRR Must Better Prepare for Severe Weather to Prevent Service Disruptions and Costly Damages

The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) needs to do more to properly prepare for severe weather events, according to an [audit](#) released this week by New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. The audit found the LIRR delayed a critical weather-related systemwide risk assessment of its infrastructure for over a decade and failed to complete several resiliency projects on-time following Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

“Severe weather is becoming more common and a failure to properly plan and be prepared will cause more commuter headaches like train delays and service disruptions,” Comptroller DiNapoli said. “While extreme weather such as blizzards, heavy rain, wind storms or heat waves cannot be prevented, railroad officials need to be prepared to minimize its impacts. The LIRR is the busiest train system in North America and is the primary means of transit from Long Island to New York City which means it must be prepared to operate as effectively as possible during all weather conditions.”

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) oversees the LIRR, which serves about 200,000 customers on weekdays. The LIRR has 700 miles of track, stretching from Montauk on Long Island to Penn Station and Grand Central in Manhattan to Atlantic Terminal in Brooklyn and Hunters Point Avenue station in Queens. The audit review period was from April 2009 to January 2023.

Systemwide Risk Assessment Delayed

Auditors found that a systemwide weather-related risk assessment of the LIRR’s transportation facilities to identify and address how to lessen the impacts of severe weather had not been completed as of February 2024. This delay left the agency at risk and their system vulnerable to damage if hit by another major storm. The LIRR said the risk assessment would be completed by the end of 2023.

Superstorm Sandy Projects Delayed

In 2012, Superstorm Sandy shut down LIRR service systemwide for days and cost the rail line millions of dollars in damages. Following the Superstorm, the LIRR started 15 capital projects totaling over \$568

million to repair damages and to improve resiliency efforts. Auditors reviewed four of the projects, including a rebuild of the Atlantic Avenue Tunnel and resiliency improvements at the Long Island City and West Side Storage Yards. They determined none of the projects were completed on time and two exceeded their respective budgets.

Extreme Weather Plans Not Updated Regularly

Auditors found the LIRR is not regularly updating their extreme weather plans, which are meant to guide employees in how to safely maintain service during severe weather. From January 2018 through January 2022, important recommendations following severe weather events were often not included in the guidance or documented if implemented.

Comptroller DiNapoli's recommendations for the LIRR include:

- Complete its systemwide risk assessment.
- Update its extreme weather guidance and verify newly added recommendations are implemented.
- Revise its Hurricane Guide to include written procedures and required steps in preparation for the season and ensure compliance.
- Establish clear and complete written procedures to address the maintenance, inspection and testing process of equipment.

In response, the MTA said the systemwide risk assessment was not delayed, but underway and steps have been taken to identify, access, analyze and test weather-related risks. The MTA also added that the Superstorm Sandy projects were not behind schedule and extreme weather guidance for employees has been updated based on lessons learned from the storm.

In the News-New York City



Mayor Adams Announces More Than \$120 Million In Federal Grants

New York City Mayor Eric Adams this week announced the City has won two federal “Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Program – Neighborhood Access and Equity Program” grants worth a total of \$123.6 million. NYC Parks and the Trust for Public Land won a \$117 million federal grant to further develop the QueensWay, while the City and State Departments of Transportation won a \$5.6 million federal Reconnecting Communities grant to fund planning near the Brooklyn Queens Expressway.

The QueensWay proposal was conceived by the Trust for Public Land and Friends of the QueensWay. Once complete, QueensWay will transform a vacant corridor of the former LIRR Rockaway Beach Branch into 47 acres of new park space and seven miles of greenway.

The project will cover the Queens neighborhoods of Rego Park, Forest Hills, Glendale, Forest Park, Woodhaven, Richmond Hill, and Ozone Park. The Queensway will connect neighborhoods with a new greenway corridor between diverse residential and commercial areas in the borough. The \$117 million grant is the largest competitive federal infrastructure grant won by the Adams Administration

The \$5.6 million DOT grant will study the future of the northern and southern sections of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway (BQE). The work funded by this grant will focus on BQE North — from the Kosciuszko Bridge to Sands Street — and BQE South — from Atlantic Avenue to the Verrazano Bridge.



Speaker Adams Outlines Vision to “Move Forward Together”

New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams delivered her State of the City address this week, outlining the need and her vision to ensure New York City remains affordable for working- and middle-class families, and city government is strengthened to deliver services that meet the needs of all New Yorkers.

Speaker Adams announced several new proposals, including those to increase and preserve affordable housing, expand access to post-partum and doula care, improve government effectiveness in delivery of essential services, and strengthen infrastructure.

Housing:

The Speaker outlined the following housing-related priorities and proposals:

- Re-envision the Aqueduct Racetrack in Speaker Adams’ district and an adjoining city-owned lot to be repurposed for housing, homeownership, and community amenities.
- Leverage the City’s over 200 libraries and other city-owned land for potential housing development.
- Revise Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) to permit an affordability option that requires an average of 40% area median income (AMI) as one of the required options in tandem with the ZHO citywide text amendment.
- A proposal to recalibrate and lower AMI levels financed by the City to reflect inflation of AMI.
- Propose policy to provide that 5 percent of affordable housing units financed annually by the City are dedicated to creating affordable homeownership opportunities for families earning less than \$130,000 per year.
- Combat deed theft by advancing legislation requiring speculators to disclose fair market rate of property and the City to create a program that assists people with protecting their assets and managing an inherited property.

Health, Mental Health & Safety

The Speaker outlined the following health related priorities and proposals:

- Support peer-to-peer mental health programs for students, including requiring the City to develop and offer peer-to-peer mental health training.
- Establish pilot program for post-partum support groups and require informational campaigns on resources for those experiencing pregnancy loss; budget proposals to increase funding for nurse family partnership and provide funding to for psychologists in H&H hospitals.
- Urging the City and State to expand mental health courts and their related programs, Forensic Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) teams and therapeutic hospital beds to confront the mental health crisis.
- Call for the City and State to provide investments to sustain and potentially expand trauma recovery centers (TRCs). The Council provided initial funding to establish the first TRCs in New York State within the Bronx and Brooklyn

Government Effectiveness

The Speaker outlined the following priorities and proposals regarding government effectiveness:

- Launch the New Arrivals Strategy Team, led by experienced former government leaders to convene sectors and stakeholders to advance solutions that help migrants access short and long-term stability.

Transportation & Infrastructure

- Continued support for expanding Fair Fares eligibility to 200% of federal poverty level, following expansion to 120% in current budget.
- Legislation to establish safe “Higher Ground” spaces, like cooling centers, above the flood plain during severe storms to host New Yorkers endangered by flooding, because they live in basement apartments or other vulnerable areas.
- Prioritize administration to invest in flood protection and resiliency infrastructure upgrades in impacted communities, as part of the Zoning for Housing Opportunity text amendment.

Briefs

New York Becomes Home to America’s First Utility-Scale Offshore Wind Farm

Governor Kathy Hochul this week announced the completion of the South Fork Wind project, with all 12 offshore wind turbines constructed and the wind farm successfully delivering power to Long Island and the Rockaways.

At full capacity, the approximately 130-megawatt wind farm will generate enough renewable energy to power approximately 70,000 homes. The renewable energy is generated roughly 35 miles off the coast of Montauk.

First approved by the Long Island Power Authority (LIPA) Board of Trustees in 2017, South Fork Wind began construction in February 2022. The wind farm reached its “steel in the water” milestone in June 2023 with the installation of the project’s first monopile foundation, and its final turbine was installed in February.

New York State Health Department Releases Maternal Mortality Reports Detailing Racial, Ethnic Disparities

The New York State Department of Health this week released two new separate reports that show, despite continued efforts to reduce maternal mortality especially among racial and ethnic minorities, the rate of pregnancy-related deaths is still “far too high” in New York State.

"The number of Black people who die of causes related to pregnancy is indicative of long-standing health disparities resulting from inequitable care and systemic racism," New York State Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said, "These inequities are unacceptable. Governor Hochul and I will continue to fight for the elimination of health disparities and so all birthing people have healthy births no matter their race or ethnicity."

The State Health Department released New York State Report on Pregnancy-Associated Deaths in 2018-2020 which summarizes findings and recommendations from the comprehensive reviews of pregnancy-associated deaths statewide. The report describes the work that is underway in the Department to address this public health issue and highlights key findings in pregnancy-related deaths that include:

- A total of 121 pregnancy-related deaths occurred from 2018-2020, which included 41 pregnancy-related deaths in 2018, 42 in 2019, and 38 in 2020.
- The overall pregnancy-related mortality ratio in New York State was 18.5 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2018 to 2020.
- Black, non-Hispanic women had a pregnancy-related mortality ratio five times higher than White, non-Hispanic women (54.7 versus 11.2 deaths per 100,000 live births).
- White, non-Hispanic women comprised 29.8 percent of pregnancy-related deaths while accounting for 49.1 percent of all live births.
- The pregnancy-related mortality ratio for cesarean delivery was 3.1 times that of vaginal delivery (23.8 versus 7.6 deaths per 100,000 live births).
- It was determined that 73.6 percent of pregnancy-related deaths had at least some chance of being prevented.

Comptroller DiNapoli: Local Sales Tax Collections Up 1.6% in February Compared to Last Year

Local sales tax collections in New York state increased by 1.6% in February compared to the same month in 2023, according to data released this week by State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. Overall, local collections totaled \$1.67 billion, up \$26.8 million from the same time last year.

In February 2024:

- New York City's collections totaled \$759 million, an increase of 5.7%, or \$40.7 million, from a year earlier.
- County and city collections in the rest of the state totaled \$805 million, a decrease of -2.2%.

- Nearly two-thirds (37 of 57) of counties experienced year-over-year decreases.

These monthly sales tax collections are from the cash distributions made to counties and tax-imposing cities by the state Department of Taxation and Finance, and the amounts are based on estimates of what each municipality is due.

Mayor Adams, Governor Hochul, Port Authority Announce Agreement to Support Replacement of Midtown Bus Terminal

New York City Mayor Eric Adams, New York Governor Kathy Hochul, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey this week announced a new agreement to support the \$10 billion replacement and expansion of the 73-year-old Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan.

The \$10 billion facility will include a new 2.1 million square foot main terminal, a separate storage and staging building, and new ramps leading directly into and out of the Lincoln Tunnel. The revised project plan — includes a central main entrance, more street-level retail, and a multi-story indoor atrium and new public open space. The project is expected to create approximately 6,000 union construction jobs, and is expected to be constructed in phases, with a temporary terminal and new ramps completed in 2028 and the new main terminal completed in 2032. The proposal includes the permanent closure of a portion of 41st Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues.



According to the Mayor, the City has committed 40 years of tax revenue which is expected to help the Port Authority raise an estimated total of up to \$2 billion, 20 percent of the project cost. The project includes three potential new commercial developments on three sites, two of which will be positioned atop the new bus terminal and the third to be built at a nearby site owned by the Port Authority and private owners.

Mayor Adams Boosts Pay for 80,000 Human Services Workers With \$741 Million Cost-of-Living Adjustment

New York City Mayor Eric Adams this week announced a \$741 million investment for an estimated 80,000 human services workers employed by non-profit organizations with a city contract as part of a new cost-of-living adjustment.

“Human service workers are the hands and heart of New York City, providing 24/7 work that benefits all New Yorkers.” said Mayor Adams. Human services workers will see a 3% cost of living adjustment in each of the next three years effective July 1, 2024, July 1, 2025, and July 1, 2026.

New York State

Monday, March 18th

New York State Assembly, Assembly Chamber, 2 p.m. (Tuesday through Thursday are TBA)

New York State Senate, Senate Chamber, 3 p.m.

Tuesday, March 19th

New York State Senate, Senate Chamber, 3 p.m.

Wednesday, March 20th

New York State Senate, Senate Chamber, 3 p.m.

NYS Commission on Ethics and Lobbying, 540 Broadway, Albany, NY, 10 a.m.
Commission Meeting

Thursday, March 21st

New York State Senate, Senate Chamber, 3 p.m.

New York City

Monday, March 18th

Committee on Education, Council Chambers - City Hall, 10 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Education

Committee on Higher Education, Committee Room – City Hall, 1 p.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Higher Education

Tuesday, March 19th

City Council Stated Meeting, Council Chambers – City Hall, 1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 20th

Committee on Public Safety, Council Chambers – City Hall, 10 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Public Safety

Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection, Committee Room – City Hall, 1 p.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Consumer and Worker Protection

NYS Commission on Ethics and Lobbying, NYS Conference Center 5th Floor, 10 a.m.
Commission Meeting

Thursday, March 21st

Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction, Council Chambers – City Hall, 10 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Meeting – Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addiction

Committee on Health, Council Chambers – City Hall, 10 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Meeting – Health

Committee on Parks and Recreation, Committee Room – City Hall, 1 p.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Parks and Recreation

Friday, March 22nd

Committee on Children and Youth, Council Chambers – City Hall, 10 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Children and Youth

Committee on Environmental Protection, Resiliency, and Waterfronts, 250 Broadway – Committee Room, 16th Floor, 11:30 a.m.
Preliminary Budget Meeting – Environmental Protection, Resiliency, and Waterfronts

Committee on Contracts, Committee Room – City Hall, 1 p.m.
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Contracts

 **Happy St. Patrick's Day** 

&

 **Happy St. Josephs Day** 

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