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**SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE**  
**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**JUNE 13, 2017**

**A Public Hearing on the Suffolk County Community College Budget was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York.**

**MINUTES TAKEN BY:**  
**Diana Flesher, Court Stenographer**

**MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:**  
**Denise Weaver, Legislative Aide**

1           *(\*The public hearing was called to order at 12:35 P.M. \*)*  
2  
3

4           **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

5           Good afternoon. We are here at this moment to open the public  
6           hearing on the Suffolk County Community College budget. We see no  
7           cards, Mr. Clerk?  
8

9           **MR. RICHBERG:**

10          No cards.  
11

12          **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

13          No cards. Thank you. Anyone in the audience that would like to  
14          address us on this public hearing, please let us know and come  
15          forward. Seeing none as well, I will then make a motion to close  
16          the public hearing; second by Legislator Calarco.  
17

18          **MR. ZWIRN:**

19          Madam Chair, may I just make two comments with respect to the  
20          college budget?  
21

22          **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

23          Of course.  
24

25          **MR. ZWIRN:**

26          You know, I just want to put something on the record before we  
27          close the hearing. I don't know if it was appropriate to do it  
28          after the public portion or just at some point, I just want to --  
29

30          **MR. NOLAN:**

31          Right. This is the -- one of our two required public hearings on  
32          the Community College budget. The other one will be on Tuesday.  
33

34          **MR. ZWIRN:**

35          Yeah. One of the things I'd just like to say is that one of the  
36          issues that we had was that there was a -- a recommendation by the  
37          County Executive one-and-a-half percent increase in the  
38          contribution to the college budget. And the college board of  
39          trustees had recommended two-and-a-half percent. And the college  
40          can live, we understand the stresses that the County's going  
41          through, we recognize that and we can live with the one-and-a-half  
42          percent.  
43

44          So there will be shortfall with respect to the revenue in the  
45          budget. And we would like the opportunity to be able to manage  
46          that -- the board would like to manage that themselves. As opposed  
47          to the Legislature imposing a 400 and some-odd thousand dollar  
48          decrease, we believe we can manage it through the reserves that we  
49          have and we'd like to be able to do that.  
50

51          There will not be a tuition increase over the \$100 so it's not  
52          going to be that we didn't get the money, therefore, we're gonna,  
53          you know, try to place blame somewhere. We'll live with the \$100.  
54          That's what the board of trustees has indicated that even though  
55          they have the -- they have the final say but that's what their  
56          indication has been.

1 One thing we wanted to make clear is that the Community College  
2 Budget Committee that was set up by the Legislature with the  
3 college and representatives, the chairwoman was on the committee as  
4 well, was not to take the place of the budget process. Because  
5 there is -- there are comments that are made in the County  
6 Executive's report that says *that the Community College Budget*  
7 *Committee issued last month recommended increasing the County*  
8 *contribution by 1.5% a year for each of the five years discussed*  
9 *given the County's fiscal challenges. Therefore, we are*  
10 *recommending 1.5%.*

12:38PM

11  
12 Every year we're going to go through a budget process. The model  
13 that was worked on with that one-and-a-half percent also included  
14 the expectation of \$100 increase in FTE from the State, which did  
15 not materialize. We got half that. And despite getting an  
16 increase of \$50 for FTE, the State will actually be giving the  
17 college less money than they did this current year.

18  
19 The other thing was also including a tuition increase of \$200 a  
20 year. And the board of trustees has determined that they do not  
21 want to go to \$200. It's only going to be a \$100 increase. So  
22 therefore, there will be a shortfall. And the college is asking  
23 for the Legislature to let us take it out of reserves and let us  
24 handle it ourselves and we will do that.

12:38PM

25  
26 The only thing I'd just like to say about the reserves, there are  
27 times when the college needs those reserves. The college does not  
28 have the ability to borrow money. When hurricane Sandy, Superstorm  
29 Sandy came through, three of the roofs in the Selden campus were  
30 badly damaged and we went to the reserves to pay for that.  
31 Eventually, we were reimbursed by FEMA, but in the -- if we had not  
32 been, we would have had -- to be able to fix those roofs and that  
33 comes out of the reserves. There was a major settlement several  
34 years ago, several million dollars, again, was paid out of the  
35 reserves. I know the committee previously has just, you know,  
36 decided to borrow money to pay for a settlement. The college  
37 cannot do that. We have the option of going to reserves or else  
38 coming back before the Legislature and asking for help.

12:39PM

39  
40 So, I just wanted to put those items on the record. And the board  
41 of trustees will be sending a letter describing what I just said  
42 earlier about the -- the special committee that was set up and  
43 their understanding just so that everybody's on the same page.  
44 Thank you.

12:39PM

45  
46 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

47 Thank you, Ben. I know that some of our Legislators have questions  
48 for you so I'll let them go first. Legislator Barraga.

49  
50 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

51 Yeah, Ben, you know, just a couple of things with reference to the  
52 Community College Budget Committee. As you pointed out, they had  
53 estimated a \$100 increase in FTEs. It's only \$50. They indicated  
54 in their projections a \$200 increase in tuition. It's only a 100  
55 so obviously to be nice, there's a lot flexibility in their plan  
56 here because obviously things aren't turning out exactly in the

1 short-term the way they projected in their five-year plan.

2  
3 **MR. ZWIRN:**

4 That's correct.

5  
6 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

7 The other issue, too, and I would caution you with reference to the  
8 reserve, you're gonna take 6.3 million but since 2013 and '14 when  
9 the reserve was at 25 million, now you're going to be down about  
10 fifteen-and-a-half million, that's a 39% reduction in the reserve  
11 fund. And certainly take a look at Middle States, the accrediting  
12 agency, they normally recommend to have ten or fifteen percent of  
13 your operating budget in reserve. You're going to fall below eight  
14 percent; you're going to be around seven-and-half percent.

15  
16 **MR. ZWIRN:**

17 You're right. The model -- that's why we say it was just to be  
18 advisory because it would be -- we could not sustain that, that  
19 one-and-a-half percent over the years. And with a modest increase  
20 from the State, we would go through the reserves and we'd be in the  
21 negative. So that's why we say we'd like to do it every year.

22  
23 The committee was set up to take a look at some of the problems  
24 that we faced, putting a model in place. But you're absolutely  
25 right; if it remains at one-and-a-half percent and the State  
26 doesn't come through with additional funding, we'll go through the  
27 reserves and financially we'll be in serious trouble.

28  
29 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

30 The other issue we should discuss to some degree is out-of-County  
31 tuition. You know, obviously the college with three campuses over  
32 a period of six or seven years, your FTEs for the most part are  
33 down by 2000 students, almost 2000 students. So when you have an  
34 FTE of like \$2750 coming from the State, that's a loss of about --  
35 in excess of \$5 million a year in terms of monies coming from the  
36 State of New York. Give me an explanation, when -- when -- most of  
37 the students who are going to colleges outside of the County, a  
38 large percentage of them, maybe 56% go to Nassau Community College;  
39 and a number go to FIT; and then about 25% go to other community  
40 colleges throughout the State. How does the FTE scenario work?  
41 For example, in our budget I think we're putting in \$13 million for  
42 these out-of-county students. Do we get the FTE -- are they  
43 counted into our FTE at Suffolk?

44  
45 **MR. ZWIRN:**

46 No.

47  
48 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

49 No, okay. Now, I find very interesting. Because when you have a  
50 2000 student reduction, if those 3900 students were going here,  
51 we'd have the FTE in state aid. This is ridiculous because here we  
52 have three eminent campuses, great community college. And yet you  
53 have loads of people from Huntington and Babylon on the west end  
54 going to Nassau Community College or FIT. It would seem to me  
55 that, you know, we have to take a look at that law at some point,  
56 if it's a state law because I think this -- there's nothing wrong

1 with saying to someone, *look, if you want to go for an associates*  
2 *degree and the program isn't offered at Suffolk County Community*  
3 *College, go someplace else and we'll pick up some of the cost.* But  
4 these people are going to Nassau Community or other colleges and  
5 yet those degree programs are right here; and yet we're taking a  
6 political hit because we're not getting the FTE. We're out \$5  
7 million.

8  
9 **MR. ZWIRN:**

10 You're absolutely right. And we have made a concerted effort to go  
11 -- we've worked with the Comptroller's Office to get the residency  
12 certificates so that we can identify the students that are going  
13 from -- Suffolk County residents who are going to Nassau Community  
14 College, in particular, and try to contact them and to try to bring  
15 some of them back. And we have, if you look at the numbers that  
16 are in the BRO report, that the actual numbers have gone down going  
17 to Nassau Community College.

18  
19 FIT is a world unto itself. It is a two-year school; it's a  
20 four-year school. In Nassau County there were lawsuits brought.  
21 FIT has been successful. When the community college program was  
22 originally set up, it was so that you can go anywhere in the State.  
23 That was part of the deal; that you didn't have to go with  
24 community college in your own county. Even if the academic, you  
25 know, courses were offered in that county, that would make a lot of  
26 sense.

27  
28 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

29 Yeah.

30  
31 **MR. ZWIRN:**

32 And that, you know, we advocate for it but then we get -- you know,  
33 SUNY, part of the problem is that that's how the system was set up.  
34 In addition, the state in its wisdom, the Legislature, and you  
35 probably remember this when you were up there, also committed to  
36 paying half the out-of-county tuition.

37  
38 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

39 We don't, we don't.

40  
41 **MR. ZWIRN:**

42 And the state doesn't. So now it's down to -- it used to be the  
43 County. General Fund used to pay it -- well, the General Fund  
44 still pays it, but they charge back the towns for -- for that  
45 revenue. So, you know, it's subject to available appropriations,  
46 it's -- the state relieves itself of its obligation.

47  
48 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

49 I think over a number of years now we've been taking that cost and  
50 passing it down to the towns or municipalities.

51  
52 **MR. ZWIRN:**

53 In the last -- in the last year of the Levy administration.

54  
55 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

56 Yeah.

1 **MR. ZWIRN:**

2 It was the last year of the Levy administration, to take pressure  
3 off the General Fund, we passed the \$14 million onto the towns and  
4 they put a separate line on the town.

5  
6 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

7 I think -- because, you know, it really comes down to logistics;  
8 it's a lot easier, I guess, to commute from Huntington to Nassau  
9 Community College or Babylon to Nassau Community College than  
10 coming out to Selden.

12:46PM

11  
12 **MR. ZWIRN:**

13 It's the western towns that have the most students at Nassau  
14 Community.

15  
16 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

17 It's just that when you really take a look at it from a fiscal  
18 perspective, there's a lot of money being lost. Suffolk County  
19 Community College --

12:46PM

20  
21 **MR. ZWIRN:**

22 No question.

23  
24 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

25 Because of not being able to get the FTEs that roughly 4,000 --  
26 even if you got half of them.

27  
28 **MR. ZWIRN:**

29 And we have looked at the programs that they might offer that we  
30 don't offer at Suffolk. And we are now beginning to offer some of  
31 those programs.

12:46PM

32  
33 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

34 But most of the programs that these students are going for you  
35 already offer.

36  
37 **MR. ZWIRN:**

38 And the ones we don't we're --

39  
40 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

41 They just don't want to travel.

42  
43 **MR. ZWIRN:**

44 -- we are going to offer.

45  
46 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

47 Something has to give here because, you know --

48  
49 **MR. ZWIRN:**

50 It's true, if we had those students back here we wouldn't --

12:46PM

51  
52 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

53 You wouldn't have a deficit.

54  
55 **MR. ZWIRN:**

56 We wouldn't have a problem.

1 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

2 You wouldn't have a problem. You wouldn't be going into --

3  
4 **MR. ZWIRN:**

5 Ten percent of the student body that we have is --

6  
7 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

8 That's a loss of roughly in excess of \$5 million based on 1960  
9 students coming back, that's what you're down for the last seven  
10 years, that's cumulative. I mean, it's not just one year. It's  
11 5.3 million this year and last and the year before going back to  
12 2010. That's a tremendous loss of money and something should be  
13 done to correct it. Maybe the state legislation should be modified  
14 that if -- if a community college offers your associates program in  
15 your major, you got to go to that community college. The County  
16 and the State's not going to pick up money for you to go someplace  
17 else in some other county.

18  
19 **MR. ZWIRN:**

20 Well, next year when you have some free time, maybe we'll go up to  
21 Albany together and meet some of your old colleagues up there.

22  
23 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

24 You're going to Albany.

25 *(\*Laughter\*)*

26  
27 Just tell me how you made out when you get up there.

28  
29 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

30 Thank you, Legislator Barraga. Legislator Kennedy.

31  
32 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

33 Actually I'm turning this over to Legislator Hahn.

34  
35 **LEG. HAHN:**

36 Do we have students from Nassau?

37  
38 **MR. ZWIRN:**

39 Very few. It goes the other way. It's dramatic. I mean, there  
40 was one time we had actually one of the student trustees was from  
41 -- was from Nassau County, one of our student trustees. And he was  
42 terrific but for the most part it's not -- it doesn't work that  
43 way.

44  
45 **LEG. HAHN:**

46 Okay. So do you have those numbers? And did you say that you had  
47 a list of majors what it was for.

48  
49 **MR. ZWIRN:**

50 We took a look because, you know, we don't like to lose Suffolk  
51 County students because we have three campuses and satellites. You  
52 know, they're very -- want to be very aggressive, you know,  
53 educating our -- our residents. There was some programs that  
54 Nassau Community College had, dental hygienist, there were a couple  
55 of programs that we thought might be attracting students so that we  
56 are now going to offer those -- we're getting in the process of

1 doing that at Suffolk County and hopefully we'll bring some of  
2 those students back.

3  
4 But we -- we were very aggressive when Dowling closed and  
5 Briarcliffe closed. We waived fees for those students to bring  
6 them in and we did bring a number of those students in. We have a  
7 very aggressive marketing campaign trying to bring those students  
8 in. And we reached out working with the Comptroller, John Kennedy.  
9 I got the residency certificates, which the student has to provide  
10 if they're going to another community college outside the County so  
11 we could contact those people personally and find out why they  
12 weren't coming here and what could we do to try to bring them back.  
13 So we're aware of it and we want -- we'd like to get as many of  
14 those students as we can.

15  
16 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

17 Leslie, did he answer your question?

18  
19 **LEG. KENNEDY:**

20 Yes, he did.

21  
22 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

23 Okay, thank you. Any other questions from the Committee? Just  
24 quickly doctor -- Ben, what was the shortfall that you were  
25 referring to?

26  
27 **MR. ZWIRN:**

28 Doctor's good. I stayed at a Holiday Inn last night. I'm almost a  
29 doctor.

30 *(\*Laughter\*)*

31  
32 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

33 That's good. What's the -- what was the shortfall that you -- I  
34 know you didn't give me a specific number, but can you just tell  
35 the Committee know where the shortfall would be.

36  
37 **MR. ZWIRN:**

38 For the County, about \$417,000, I think, is -- we'll just add that  
39 to reserves. And I think we can manage that this year. We'd like  
40 to have the opportunity to manage that shortfall.

41  
42 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

43 How much do you have in the reserves at the moment?

44  
45 **LEG. BARRAGA:**

46 About 15 million.

47  
48 **MR. ZWIRN:**

49 Well, it's 24, as we speak right now, but it'll be going down.

50  
51 **CHAIRPERSON MARTINEZ:**

52 Okay, thank you. So we don't have any other questions nor  
53 comments, Ben. And the rest of the college thank you for being  
54 here. And this concludes our public hearing. And I believe we had  
55 a motion and a second to close it. All in favor? Opposed?  
56 Abstention? The public hearing is closed. Thank you.

(\*The public hearing was adjourned at 12:49 p.m.\*)  
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