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**From**

**Legislator Tom Cilmi**

**FOR RELEASE: June 9, 2011**

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## **Budget Battle Round 3**



Suffolk County Legislator Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore) promised to "keep trying" to make the County's budget process more transparent. So said Cilmi on a recent Facebook post just after a Legislative meeting which saw the tabling of Cilmi's latest bill to reform Suffolk's budget process.

After a motion to approve by Cilmi and a second by Legislator Lou D'Amaro (D- Huntington Station), the tabling motion was also made. After significant debate from both sides, the tabling motion passed 11 – 6, sending the bill into legislative limbo.

Since the bill will continue to be on the agenda for future meetings until it expires, Cilmi said he will continue to make the argument for transparency. "You're either for transparency or for confidentiality. You can't have it both ways," said Cilmi. "Those who were opposed to this say that the current process is bi-partisan and that meetings are open to Legislators who are not on the so- called 'working group' [the group that assembles the omnibus amendment]. The fact is that while the working group has members from all parties, it's limited to 9 legislators to stay in compliance with the County's open meetings law. It's true that aides may sit in on meetings, but aides aren't elected to represent the people. And that doesn't change the fact that the whole process occurs behind a closed door in the basement of the Legislature, far from public view and media scrutiny. That's just not right."

Cilmi's bill would give the process over to the Budget and Finance Committee and require that omnibus budget amendments are constructed at public meetings of the Committee. This is Cilmi's third attempt at reforming the process by which the Legislature amends and adopts the County's \$2.7 billion Operating Budget.

Earlier bills included one which eliminated omnibus budget amendments, those which combine a myriad of various line item changes into one bill. Another bill would have required more time for budget amendments to be public prior to a vote. Presently, amendments only need to be "laid on the table" two days prior to a vote and may be changed on the floor during the vote. Both of those bills had similar support and suffered similar fates.

Legislator Cilmi has filed another bill which would require budget bills to be laid on the table five days prior to a vote and would require a super majority of twelve legislators to amend a budget bill on the floor. This bill differs from his previous bill in that it also requires the County Executive to submit his budget proposal five days sooner. Cilmi hopes that this is enough to sway other legislators. He said, "The main concern with my first bill was that our Office of Budget Review was on a tight schedule and wouldn't have time to prepare amendments any sooner with the current schedule. This would give them the same amount of time as they presently have which is something the Presiding Officer said he would support, therefore I'm hopeful this one will pass."

A public hearing is scheduled for the next Legislative Session later this month.