

## COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



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### Media Release

COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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# “MAYDAY FOR MANDATE RELIEF” PANEL CALLS FOR STATE ACTION

*State Mandates Crippling Local Budgets and Taxpayers*



“Mayday for Mandate Relief” panel from right to left: Dr. Howard Koenig (South Country School District Superintendent), Vincent Lyons (NYSUT), Scott Martella (Suffolk County rep for Governor Cuomo), Suffolk County Legislator Kate Browning, Nassau County Legislator Dave Denenberg, James March (Nassau/Suffolk School Boards Association) and Dan Tomaszewski (Longwood School Board of Education).

**Hauppauge, NY** – New York State mandates that are unfunded or underfunded will cost Suffolk County over \$770 million in its 2012 operating budget alone. School aid formulas do not treat Long Island public schools fairly, and community colleges across New York State are not receiving the levels of funding required under state law. These were among the topics of discussion at a forum hosted by Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley) at the Suffolk County Legislature in Hauppauge on Tuesday, May 15. The forum was one of many that were held in counties across New York State to bring attention to the crisis caused by state unfunded mandates.

The diverse panel that led the discussion was joined by public speakers from non-profit organizations and unions that are also affected by state unfunded mandates. The panel was chaired by Legislator Kate Browning and included Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Suffolk County representative Scott Martella, who will bring the local concerns back to New York’s mandate relief councils. The panel also included Nassau County Legislator Dave Denenberg, the Nassau/Suffolk School Boards Association President James March, South Country School District Superintendent Dr. Howard Koenig, Vincent Lyons of NYSUT and Longwood School Board of Education Vice President Dan Tomaszewski.

The panel heard testimony from the Suffolk County Probation Officers Association, Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, Suffolk County Quality Consortium and the Suffolk County Community College Faculty Association.

“It is clear that unfunded and underfunded mandates are affecting all aspects of local organizations and services,” stated Legislator Kate Browning. “The tax cap was approved with promises that mandate relief would follow. That has not happened and the consequences are proving drastic. We need relief now or vital services and jobs will continue to be cut.”

“Since the tax cap was instituted, state mandates have only gotten worse,” stated Dan Tomaszewski, Vice President of the Longwood School Board of Education. “This trend is going to cripple important educational programs as mandated costs rise and revenue does not.”

“Budget cuts to educational programs and continued job reductions are still outpaced by costs over which local Boards of Education and voters have little or no control,” stated James March, President of the Nassau/Suffolk School Boards Association. “Unfunded and underfunded state mandates remain an ever expanding presence within an increasingly finite school budget.”

“Probation received a 46.5% reimbursement rate at its height,” stated Peter Dykeman, Suffolk County Probation Officers Association. “Today’s reimbursement is 14% and falling fast. In 2006, 33 state mandates were created alone. Regardless of their intent, execution of these mandates becomes more than difficult as our resources, both financial and physical, continue to wane.”

Legislator Browning noted that since the passage of the tax cap, relief has gone in the opposite direction.

- The Safety Net program saw a decrease in state aid from 50% to 21%. This will result in an increase of over \$20 million to Suffolk County’s budget by the end of 2013.
- New York State Article 28 funding was also cut, which reduced state reimbursement to county health centers and jeopardized their closure in 2011.
- The local share of Medicaid payments statewide is 16% of total Medicaid spending; compared to the next highest state California at only 2.5%. Suffolk County’s Medicaid payment is over \$252 million in 2012, and is estimated to rise to \$262 million in 2013.
- Pension contributions have been rising exponentially as well. What used to be an annual payment between \$0-20 million started to rise after the financial crisis hit Wall Street in 2008. Suffolk County’s contributions were \$87 million in 2010, \$104 million in 2011, \$124 million in 2012, and is estimated at \$139 million for 2013.

“The projected growth in unfunded mandates based on current trends, coupled with the 2% local property tax cap, is not sustainable,” concluded Legislator Browning. “Local governments can only do so much on their own. We have tightened our belts, but without mandate relief deficits are going to rise across the state and critical services will suffer as a result.”

Governor Cuomo’s Mandate Relief Council, which continues to deliberate, is charged with reviewing specific mandates identified by local governments, and advancing proposals to reduce the statutory and regulatory burden on our municipalities. To submit proposals to the Mandate Relief Council, download forms from the council’s website at [www.governor.ny.gov/mandatereliefcouncil](http://www.governor.ny.gov/mandatereliefcouncil).

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