



ERIE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

January 31, 2017

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, New York 12225

Re: Mandate Relief

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We, the undersigned, as County Legislators in Western New York, are writing to implore you to take meaningful steps to address unfunded mandates, which comprise the majority of the expenses faced by upstate counties.

Many of the programs you have proposed in the 2017 New York State budget are admirable; however, your decision to call out local governments for not doing enough to cut costs across the state was uncalled for and misguided.

Your message failed to address the most important issue for Western New York, if not all upstate counties: mandate relief. This is something you must take seriously if Western New York is to regain its competitiveness with the rest of the nation.

According to the New York State Association of Counties, the costs of just nine state mandates add up to the entire primary revenue source available to most counties. As you are aware, New York State law mandates we administer and fund each and every one of these programs. As counties, we are not only limited in our ability to pay for these mandated programs, but we are limited in our ability to choose how to administer them.

Let us be clear, we recognize that these state mandates are by no means your creation, nor unique to your administration. Western New York has struggled with unfunded mandates based on Albany directives for decades. We must find a solution.

Local governments are already making difficult decisions. Many counties, cities, towns and villages have deteriorating infrastructure, declining populations, and plummeting sales tax revenue, while these mandates continue to go unfunded. Many good paying manufacturing jobs that once were the foundation of our region have already left, and will likely never return. Statewide mandates handcuff county governments and are a major hindrance on our ability to pursue sustainable economic growth. Local governments need to have more freedom to cut costs.

Part of your message has been to encourage shared services as a method to cut costs at the local level. This is merely misdirection and shifting blame. Most counties in Western New York already work closely with their cities, towns and villages, currently sharing services from snow plowing and infrastructure upkeep, to consolidation of public health and safety entities like fire, EMS, police services and training facilities.

What we in Western New York need is an honest conversation and fruitful action regarding unfunded mandate relief. We've been asking for it for years, and no governor has addressed the issue in any meaningful way. Most recently you made the decision to veto the indigent defense legislation, which would have provided tangible savings to counties across the state. We were all disappointed in your decision.

In closing, as Western New York counties, we would again like to compliment the message from your 2017 Budget and State of the State address, but implore you to remain cognizant of the reality for all New York State counties. State directed mandates, which are often left partially or entirely unfunded, are driving up almost all of the costs we face and making affordable and effective government less and less attainable. We hope to continue this dialogue with you and the state legislature to finally address mandate relief once and for all.

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