New York State Conference of Mayors Meets to Determine 2020 State Budget Priorities

City and village officials from across New York are calling for increased State investment in their communities and changes to recent criminal justice reforms

ALBANY, NY – As part of the New York Conference of Mayors (NYCOM) annual Legislative Priorities Meeting in downtown Albany, 80 mayors and other local officials gathered to discuss and determine legislative priorities for the upcoming session. The top priorities include urging the Governor and the Legislature to increase municipal aid for the first time in eleven years. Additionally, members of NYCOM focused on critical changes necessary to make the new criminal procedure discovery laws workable and affordable, increases in infrastructure funding, particularly highway aid, and tools to address New York’s abandoned property crisis.

“Local governments throughout the State do a really good job providing essential services that New Yorkers rely on,” said Robert Kennedy, president of NYCOM and mayor of the Village of Freeport, “but we need the Governor and the Legislature to understand that we can’t continue to do this without their help – not just going forward, but also looking back at what was done this past session and what the real impacts of those actions will be.”

“The challenges and duties facing local governments are really not that different from those facing the State,” said Peter Baynes, executive director of NYCOM. “We both need to provide efficient and high quality infrastructure and public safety, and it is essential that we work together to form a proactive and positive partnership. When cities and villages succeed, so does the State of New York.”

NYCOM is again looking to the State to finally increase the $715 million Aid and Incentives to Municipalities (AIM) program of general purpose aid, which has not seen any additional funding in eleven years. In fact last year, 90% of the villages and towns were at risk of losing their AIM funding but the cut was restored through county sales tax revenue. “I think our State leaders realized – based upon the outcry from our members – that AIM actually is an essential source of local property tax relief,” said Mayor Kennedy. “It’s almost $1 million for the Village of Freeport alone.”

The other priority issue discussed was the criminal justice reforms enacted in June – particularly as they relate to discovery. The new requirement that dramatically accelerates the timing of discovery by tying it to the date of arraignment will have significant cost and compliance implications for cities and villages with police departments and/or local justice courts. NYCOM will propose amendments to this unfunded mandate along with a request for funding and more time to implement the changes.

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NYCOM requests amendments to the law that will:

- Make discovery in felony cases not applicable until after indictments;
- Exclude from discovery any violations or information not charging a misdemeanor or crime;
- Provide a stay from discovery requirements for 30-days involving cases which may be subject to plea discussions;
- Withhold sensitive information, such as victim contact information, without having to obtain a court order;
- Request a six month delay in the implementation of this year’s reforms until July 2020; and
- Ensure that cities and villages are provided with additional financial support to offset the cost of these mandated measures.

Finally, while the mayors acknowledge some of the infrastructure funding sources have begun to make a difference, significant capital needs remain, which is in large part due to the age of New York’s massive network of local roads, bridges and highways. NYCOM supports increasing Consolidated Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS) funding to not only ensure that these critical resources are sufficient, but to also facilitate compliance with federal curb redesign mandates and the related sidewalk repairs necessary to create more pedestrian-friendly and accessible municipalities.

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The New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM) is the association of, and for, cities and villages in New York. Since 1910, NYCOM has united local government officials in an active statewide network focused on the singular purpose of finding the most effective means of providing essential municipal services. Representing more than 12 million New Yorkers, NYCOM is a strong advocate for city and village interests at all levels of state government, and a leader in the training and education of local officials.