

LONG ISLAND

Village mayors, town supervisors take AIM at governor's budget

Politicians on Friday gathered to ask Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to restore more than \$19 million in state aid to Long Island municipalities eliminated from his 2019-20 budget.



Assemb. Fred Thiele speaks during a rally for the restoration of Aid and Incentives for Municipalities funding into the New York State budget at Huntington Town Hall on Friday. Photo Credit: Barry Sloan

By Chau Lam

chau.lam@newsday.com

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A group of village mayors, town supervisors and other politicians gathered Friday in Huntington, calling on Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to restore more than \$19 million in state aid to Long Island municipalities that was eliminated from his proposed \$175.2 billion budget for 2019-20.

Officials, who for years relied on money from a program called Aid and Incentives for Municipalities, said they may be forced to cut services and trim staff if they don't receive the funding.

"We'll have to make choices — whether that is to cut our senior program, make changes to the highway department or the police department," said Jay Schneiderman, supervisor of the Town of Southampton, which expects to lose about \$184,000.

Cuomo's budget, made public Jan. 15, eliminated the funding, commonly referred to as AIM, to communities the administration said don't rely heavily on the money. Under the governor's proposed budget, towns and villages would lose the funding if the money covered less than 2 percent of the municipality's expenditures in 2017.

The affected municipalities have nearly \$1.6 billion in reserves, more than 26 times the loss in revenue, said Morris Peters, a spokesman for the governor's budget division.

Cuomo and state lawmakers have until March 31 to agree on a budget.

State Sen. Jim Gaughran (D-Northport) and Assemb. Fred Thiele (I-Sag Harbor) promised to work toward putting the AIM funding back when state lawmakers come up with their proposed budget, but urged Cuomo to heed the call of Long Island officials and provide an amendment to his budget, which Thiele said the governor could do by Feb. 14, Valentine's Day.

"Don't send flowers, send the AIM money," Thiele said.

The Suffolk County Supervisor's Association, which represents the county's 10 towns, wrote a letter to Cuomo, opposing the cut.

"As you know, the alternative to cutting vital services are not in any way more appealing to our residents — raising taxes or dipping into reserve funding," according to the letter, dated Jan. 25. "Raising taxes would fly in the face of your soon-to-be permanent tax cap. How can you, with one stroke, cap taxes and in the next, force local municipalities to raise taxes?"

Huntington Town Supervisor Chad Lupinacci said his community stands to lose about \$1.1 million which represents 0.55 percent of the town's annual budget of about \$200 million.

The town, Lupinacci said, would consider cutting services and staff to balance the budget.

Lupinacci said he would prefer the town not use the money in its reserve funds, which help the town lower borrowing costs. Huntington has \$17 million currently, down from \$41 million in 2008, during the Great Recession.

"It just shows you how you have to dip into it when there is a rainy day," Lupinacci said.

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