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**MAYORS AND COUNTY EXECUTIVES FROM ACROSS NEW YORK STATE
ANNOUNCE *NEW YORK LEADERS FOR PENSION REFORM***

Bipartisan Coalition Representing More than 15,000,000 New Yorkers Will Lead Vigorous Campaign to Pass Governor Cuomo's Pension Reform Proposal for Future Employees

Mayors and county executives from across New York State, representing more than 15,000,000 New Yorkers, today announced that they have formed a bipartisan coalition to address the crisis of skyrocketing pension costs. New York Leaders for Pension Reform will lead a vigorous campaign across the state to ensure state legislators understand the importance to local governments of passing Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's reform plan to get pension costs under control without reducing retirement benefits for a single existing public employee. Coalition members also will travel to Albany later this month to advocate for the Governor's plan.

Taken together, annual pension costs to local governments across the State have gone from \$1.7 billion in 2002 to \$12.5 billion today – an increase of more than 630 percent. Despite opposition to reform by Comptroller DiNapoli and others, members of the coalition know first-hand how runaway local pension payments have already significantly reduced localities' ability to fund education, public safety, social services, economic development and other services – and how skyrocketing costs threaten to force severe budget cuts or tax increases in the years ahead. That is why local government leaders are demanding action from the Legislature now.

Governor Cuomo's plan will create a new tier of pension benefits for yet-to-be-hired employees who are participating in the New York State and New York City retirement systems. Existing employees and retirees will be unaffected. The new plan would reasonably raise the retirement age for newly hired employees, and exclude overtime from the formula used to calculate the final average salary for pension payments. Further, the proposal would provide employees with the option of participating in a defined contribution plan – similar to plans common in the private sector – that some employees may decide is a better choice for their individual career path.

Today, coalition members – full list below – spoke out in favor of the Governor's proposal:

“Exploding pension costs are the single biggest threat to local government's ability to deliver needed services,” said **Westchester County Executive Robert Astorino**. “It will be impossible to provide any real property tax relief while operating under these debilitating labor costs that automatically increase every year at an unsustainable rate. The Governor's proposal is a good first step toward delivering savings in the long-term and I thank Mayor Bloomberg for spearheading this coalition. We must continue working together to enact this plan and other reforms that will provide relief for both today and the future.”

(more)

“Suffolk County’s pension costs per employee have risen over 1,200 percent in the past decade, that is an unsustainable mandate and it is crowding out other investments we must make in our communities,” said **Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone**. “I am pleased to join with Mayor Bloomberg and local officials from throughout New York who understand the need for pension reform.”

“In Wyoming County we collect \$15,184,695 in property tax levy. Wyoming County simply cannot afford to maintain this level of pension costs,” said **Chairman of the Wyoming County of Board of Supervisors Douglas Berwanger**. “Therefore, the Wyoming County Board of Supervisors supports Governor Cuomo’s efforts to achieve passage of the pension reform initiative.”

“The first time I traveled to Albany as Mayor in 2002, pension costs accounted for \$1.5 billion of New York City’s budget. Now, pension costs account for one out of every six dollars – or 12 percent of New York City’s entire budget. These costs are unsustainable,” said **New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg**. “Local governments around the state are all in the same boat, and we are joining together to support Governor Cuomo’s push for pension reform to ensure that boat does not become a sinking ship. Passing responsible pension reform is essential to ensure that we can afford retirement benefits for tomorrow’s workers – and the public services that today’s citizens deserve and demand.”

“Rapidly increasing pension costs have become an unsustainable burden for local governments throughout New York,” said **New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson**. “Pension reform is urgently needed in order to relieve pressure on both taxpayers and municipal services.”

“The pension system cannot continue as it exists, it is bankrupting localities across the state,” said **Watertown Mayor Jeff Graham**. “I look forward to working with Mayor Bloomberg and my colleagues in government to achieve these reforms.”

“The Governor proposes pension reforms that would create flexibility in pension and retirement choices for public employees. Next to Medicaid, pension costs in New York State are the most significant burden on local governments. Unsustainable at its present rate of double digit growth, the new proposal ensures long term affordability for taxpayers while offering a secure retirement system for New York State’s public employees,” said **Genesee County Legislature Chair Mary Pat Hancock**. “We urge support for the pension reforms and the other important mandate relief measures in the 2012-2013 Executive Budget.”

“All local governments in New York State are dangerously close to financial ruin due in large part to the cost of public employee pensions, we need reform and Governor Cuomo’s proposal is a step in the right direction,” said **Hornell Mayor Shawn Hogan**. “As New York State’s longest serving mayor, I have never seen such dire financial times as we currently face, we must have a new tier now.”

“It is imperative that Albany Legislators support pension reform including the new tier proposed by Governor Cuomo. The present system is unsustainable and unaffordable and is directly affecting every municipality from New York City to Plattsburgh,” said **Plattsburgh Mayor Donald**

Kasprzak. “I fully support immediate pension and retirement mandate reform and strongly urge the Albany Legislature to do the same as well.”

“Pension contributions are one of the fastest growing costs every county government faces,” said **Onondaga County Executive Joanne Mahoney.** “Onondaga County’s pension costs have more than doubled in only four years. These increases are not sustainable and real pension reform is needed now”

“New York State has reached a point where we can no longer afford the expensive public pension system,” said **Nassau County Executive Edward P. Mangano.** “Governor Cuomo’s reform plan would have no impact on current workers or retirees, rather it is part of a long-term strategy to be fair to both future employees while saving taxpayer money and reform a system that has become untenable.”

“Pension reform has been at the top of my legislative agenda in Albany,” said **Syracuse Mayor Stephanie A. Miner.** “Our pension bills have been growing exponentially each year and are a significant reason upstate cities are in precarious fiscal shape. I am pleased to join Mayor Bloomberg and other leaders to advocate for the initial reforms advanced by the governor.”

“The out-of-control increases in pension costs are threatening every local government’s ability to provide essential municipal services and adequately maintain and compensate our workforce,” stated **New York Conference of Mayors President and Ogdensburg Mayor William Nelson.** “Governor Cuomo’s reform proposal makes total sense, is long overdue and is good news for taxpayers, communities and public employees.”

“Governor Cuomo’s vision for reform is fair to those receiving pensions now and for those who will receive pensions in the future. More important, his plan protects taxpayers who can no longer afford to underwrite this unsustainable benefit,” said **Utica Mayor Robert A. Palmieri.** “Pension obligations make up more than 10 percent of Utica’s budget. The very survival of our cities depends on changing the pension system.”

“I’ve spoken numerous times about the need for pension reform and it’s very promising to see that Governor Cuomo is acting to address the issue,” said **Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz.** “I am confident that the Governor, working with the Assembly and Senate, can craft a solution that protects the retirement savings of our public workforce and their families, while addressing the economic realities presented to Erie County and municipalities across the state.”

“If retirement costs continue to escalate, counties and other local governments will have to make very difficult budget choices that pit the needs of paying for retirement against the need to provide services. None of us want to make those choices,” said **Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.** “The proposal that the Governor has drafted provides the benefits that public employees deserve, at a cost that governments can afford. This is a compromise that reflects the fiscal reality of our times, and I believe it is an important and essential step New York must take.”

“I am pleased to be working with Mayor Bloomberg and my colleagues around the state on this critical issue. Pension payments are one of the top budget drivers in my city,” said **White Plains**

Mayor Thomas Roach. “The pension reform plan put forth by Governor Cuomo in his Executive Budget is a sensible one – and one that must be passed if we are to have any hope of bringing these costs under control in the future. At the same time, it rightly recognizes and protects existing pension benefits for current employees.”

“The skyrocketing increases in our current, unsustainable retirement program will not only threaten the financial viability of every local government, school district and the state itself, but in the long run, will destabilize and bring down the very retirement system that so many claim to be concerned about. It stands to reason, if those who are paying the bills can no longer afford to do so and are going broke in the process, it’s really only a matter of time before the retirement system itself collapses under its own mounting weight,” said **Jamestown Mayor Samuel Teresi.** “The Governor’s proposal is a solid and effective step in the right direction and needs to be enacted as soon as possible.”

“I strongly support Governor Cuomo’s pension reform legislation. Under this proposed reform, new employee contribution rates would increase, bringing much-needed relief to county governments like Rockland,” said **Rockland County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef.** “It is vital that the state government address the huge unfunded mandate liability of pensions, which have significantly increased costs to the 62 counties of New York.”

Founding members of New York Leaders for Pension Reform are:

Mayors

Albany: Mayor Gerald D. Jennings
Hornell: Mayor Shawn Hogan
Jamestown: Mayor Samuel Teresi
New York City: Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
New Rochelle: Mayor Noam Bramson
Ogdensburg: Mayor William D. Nelson
Plattsburg: Mayor Donald M. Kasprzak
Rochester: Mayor Thomas S. Richards
Syracuse: Mayor Stephanie Miner
Utica: Mayor Robert A. Palmieri
Watertown: Mayor Jeff Graham
White Plains: Mayor Thomas M. Roach

County Executives and Legislative Leaders

Albany: County Executive Daniel P. McCoy
Dutchess: County Executive Marcus J. Molinaro
Erie: County Executive Mark Poloncarz
Genesee: Legislature Chair Mary Pat Hancock
Monroe: County Executive Maggie Brooks
Nassau: County Executive Edward P. Mangano
Oneida: County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.
Onondaga: County Executive Joanne M. Mahoney
Orange: County Executive Edward A. Diana

Rockland: County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef
Suffolk: County Executive Steve Bellone
Westchester: County Executive Robert P. Astorino
Wyoming: Chairman of the County of Board of Supervisors Douglas Berwanger

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