

Budget talks extended

Governor, State Legislature set April 10 deadline

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ALBANY — Gov. Kathy Hochul and the State Legislature on Monday agreed to extend budget negotiations to April 10 on the late state budget, which was due Saturday.

"I have been negotiating in good faith with the legislature, but it is clear there is more work to be done before we reach an agreement," Hochul said Monday. "For that reason, I am submitting a bill to the legislature that would extend the budget deadline to April 10th, giving us the time we need to deliver a final budget that is responsive to the ur-

gent needs of New Yorkers."

The State Legislature, which is due to leave Albany for its annual Passover-Easter break, adopted Hochul's budget "extender" legislation Monday afternoon to keep the state funded and operating until April 10. After that, another extender could be approved to continue negotiations.

"We are disappointed that all parties couldn't come together to pass a final budget in a timely manner," said Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D-Yonkers). "We will be passing a short-term extender to ensure our public employees continue to be paid and state operations can carry on as usual while budget negotiations proceed."

The budget, which is expected to total more than \$227 billion, was due at midnight Friday night.

Two major issues have de-

veloped an agreement, according to Hochul and the legislative leaders.

Hochul wants to amend a 2021 law that sought to eliminate bail for most nonviolent felonies. Hochul wants to end a provision that says judges should use the "least-restrictive option" for ensuring that a defendant returns for a court date. Legislative leaders said they are open to clarifying a judge's powers as long as it doesn't weaken the bail law.

Hochul also faces opposition from the Democratic majorities of the Senate and Assembly over her proposal to increase housing and affordability statewide by giving a state board the power to overrule local zoning officials who reject new housing projects for reasons other than public safety.

"New Yorkers are concerned about public safety, the rising

cost of housing and ensuring high-quality schools for all our kids, and any budget deal must make progress on these core issues," Hochul said.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) said he is frustrated by the delay. He said the vast majority of negotiation sessions so far have been devoted to Hochul's proposal to amend the bail reform law.

Yet there are other contentious issues, including how to increase the minimum wage and index it to inflation, Hochul's proposed payroll tax in areas served by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to help fund the mass transit system, and her proposed increase in tuition to public colleges.

Hochul and the legislature could agree to drop any of the policy issues from the budget agreement and move them to the remainder of the legislative

session, which is scheduled to end June 8. But under the state constitution, a governor has extraordinary leverage over the legislature in crafting a budget and could ultimately seek to impose his or her policy measures.

Late budgets have become common in Albany over the last 20 years. The only penalty for a late budget is for legislators whose pay is suspended until a budget is adopted. Legislators then collect the back pay under law.

State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli said a quick agreement is important.

"In these uncertain times, New Yorkers need a spending plan that supports our state's continued economic recovery, provides for those in need and still struggling from the pandemic's impacts, and bolsters reserves to ensure the sustainability of services," he said.