

Audio file

[Independent Perspective #1841 \(Todd Vaarwerk\).mp3](#)

Independent Perspective 1841 with Todd Vaarwerk on the New York State Budget and its effects on WNYIL.

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living (WNYIL). Our guest today is Todd Vaarwerk, chief policy officer of WNYIL. And I'm your host, Ernie Churchwell.

Welcome to the program, Todd.

00:00:15 Speaker 2

Always good to be here.

00:00:16 Speaker 1

And we're delighted to have you. This is the time of the year when Issues of the New York State budget upon which the work that our agency is able to do is heavily dependent. I think you can tell us something more about the process. What is going on and what needs to occur.

00:00:37 Speaker 2

So just as a quick reminder to the readers, the budget process starts with the governor very shortly after the state of the state shall issue a draft budget, then it will shift to the legislative branch, the houses of our state government, the Senate and the Assembly. Who are currently as this episode airs, developing their budget.

When those budgets are developed, the three legislative leaders will then enter into negotiations to make to bring all of those budgets together to a final budget.

Hopefully we always want to do that by April.

April 1st is what they would refer to as an on-time budget.

00:01:16 Speaker 1

There have been a few times in the recent past when not every budget has been finalized on time, correct?

00:01:24 Speaker 2

That would be correct. However, within the last few years, they instead of waiting until the end of May, some historically long budgets.

Normally we get this done by April 15th at the latest at this point.

00:01:41 Speaker 1

As far as the items on the budget of particular importance to independent living, what are the particularly crucial aspects?

00:01:50 Speaker 2

We want to talk about independent living funding every year. We have to fight for independent living funding because instead of taking the amount the legislature gave us last year and permanently adding it to our budget, they consider it a one year only add.

So, when they write the budget for this year, they take us right back to the funding level that we're at, which is \$19 million.

So, we're going to be advocating for a raise in the independent living funding to try and get us, ideally to any point between \$19 and \$25 million dollars.

00:02:21 Speaker 1

And you're talking about for all the centers for independent living across the Empire State, correct?

00:02:27 Speaker 2

Correct, all 40 of them.

00:02:28 Speaker 1

Because if people thought, whoa, the center Buffalo and its branches in the nearby cities. If they're getting that kind of money, they must be doing pretty good.

00:02:39 Speaker 2

No. We're only getting about 1/40th of that by formula, but in addition there are other things that we need to care about in this year's budget. We're talking about restoring funding to the Access to Home program to help ensure that people can stay in their homes by being able to afford disability modifications.

Paratransit expansion, which talks about doubling the paratransit service area so that more people with disabilities who have trouble with fixed transit can be served and monies to support medical issues for people with disabilities, whether that be direct service professionals, which isn't entirely medical or consumer personal assistance, or prescriber prevails, or any number of things in the Medicaid program.

00:03:28 Speaker 1

And to clarify for people when you say doubling the paratransit you're talking about instead of being within 3/4 of a mile of fixed route system, it would be much further than that?

00:03:40 Speaker 2

It would be a mile and 1/2, right.

00:03:43 Speaker 1

Wonderful. Alright we're running somewhat low on time. Any other key issues you'd like to bring up?

00:03:52 Speaker 2

Well, we always want to make sure that the services that we count on get funding as costs rise.

You might also hear something about people being placed on the permanent cola list, whether that's the agency that might provide you with aid service or your DSP agency or your local independent living center, they all want to be on the permanent CCOLA list.

00:04:16 Speaker 1

And we're not talking soft drinks here, you're talking.

00:04:19 Speaker 2

Cost of living allowance.

Think of it like a mandatory raise to cover inflation.

00:04:26 Speaker 1

We're about out of time. I'm sure people will have questions. How can they reach you?

00:04:30 Speaker 2

They can always give me a call 716-836-0822, ext. 101.

Or send me an email at tvaarwerk@wnyil.org.

00:04:44 Speaker 1

Thanks for being with us tonight.

00:04:46 Speaker 2

Always a pleasure.

00:04:47 Speaker 1

You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of WNYIL.

Our guest today has been Todd Vaarwerk, chief policy officer of WNYIL, and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.