

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

00:00:06 Speaker 1

The New York State budget process plays a significant role in supporting services for the disability community.

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So that means that New York State budget season is a busy time of year for Western New York Independent Living's Policy Office.

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Joining us today to tell us more about the state budget process and its impact on WNYIL is Chief Policy Officer Todd Vaarwerk.

00:00:28 Speaker 1

Welcome to the program, Todd.

00:00:30 Speaker 2

Always good to be here.

00:00:32 Speaker 1

It's our pleasure.

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First, let's start with the budget process.

00:00:35 Speaker 1

Can you educate our listeners about how New York State budget is built?

00:00:41 Speaker 2

Well, not a lot of people realize that the budget being built actually starts in like November of the previous year, right?

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That's when the Governor gets the request from the departmental budgets and starts putting the framework together.

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In January, she'll do a State of the State and then a budget address and then announce her budget.

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That starts the process for the Legislature, both the Senate and the Assembly, to develop their own budgets.

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They'll do a set of hearings from the public about, you know, what needs to be

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in those budgets, right?

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And they'll develop their own.

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At one time, they were called the yellow budget and the white budget.

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And then at a certain point in the negotiation process, it turns into three people in a room.

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And the job is to reconcile those three budgets into one that the Legislature ultimately passes and that the Governor signs, hopefully by April 1st.

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All right, and the question that's important to us

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How does the New York State budget impact WNYIL?

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Well, Western New York Independent Living is funded by state programming that's aligned in the budget.

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So, the operation of our core services is affected by what happens with regard to the state budget.

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But in a broader sense, for the listening community, pretty much

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every disability service that you might want to count on as an element in the state budget, whether that be OMH or OPWDD or things from the Department of Health or things from OASIS.

00:02:28 Speaker 1

Oh, and for things that are particularly important this year, what are the hot button items that your team is working on?

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Well, we're definitely talking about housing since the Governor is making housing a priority in her budget address.

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But housing is a big deal because it's not just about like rent-controlled apartments in New York City.

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We're talking about appropriately supporting disability services in New York.

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We're talking about making sure that people have access to the services that they need to be able to stay in the community.

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Recent changes to some of the waivers now have caps for enrollment.

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So, this is the kind of thing

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that sometimes gets resolved as policy issues in the state budget.

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We're talking about transportation, specifically paratransit expansion.

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We're asking for money to put aside \$25 million for pilot testing on paratransit expansion because any of our loyal listeners who use paratransit already know kind of how small the paratransit service area is, and the pilot testing money would be used

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to see what life would be like if we were to double or quadruple that number.

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And the last thing is something small kind of related to housing called the Access to Home program, which is the home modification program for people that want to stay in their homes.

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These are the hot button issues that we'll be moving forward on.

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But you know, at the last minute there could be additions, you know?

00:04:03 Speaker 1

We've got less than a minute remaining.

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If someone wants more information on the budget, what resources can you recommend?

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I recommend that they go to the Governor's website and the Comptroller's website for New York State.

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That's a really great place to start if you're looking for stuff on the budget.

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If our listeners want to get involved and support our work, what should they do?

00:04:25 Speaker 2

They can absolutely call my office on any matters relating to advocating on the state budget or e-mail me

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at tvaarwerk@wnyil.org

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And the number, of course, is 716-836-0822, extension 101.

00:04:44 Speaker 1

Thanks for being with us, Todd.

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 Western New York Independent Living.

00:04:53 Speaker 1

Our guest today has been Chief Policy Officer Todd Vaarwerk, and I've been your host, Ernie Churchwell.