

## NASW-NYS Political Post

### January 9, 2009

Karin Moran, MSW

Jeremy Darman, MSW, MA

**Here we go...**The official start to the 2009 legislative session was filled with high drama. Governor Patterson delivered his first State of the State address Wednesday, a ritual in New York politics that usually proceeds and hints at the forthcoming Executive budget proposal. However, in an unprecedented move, Governor Paterson released his budget proposal three weeks ago on December 16<sup>th</sup> with the purpose of expediting the process...a move that sounds logical in theory right? Well not so fast folks, this is, after all New York and the early budget was released to a Legislature in flux; specifically a Senate whose majority hung in the balance and remained tangled in a tug of war among Democrats until only one hour prior to the State of the State address when Senator Malcolm Smith took the reigns as the Senate's new majority leader. However, I digress, the Governor's Executive Budget proposal was rife with deep cuts to health and education (3.3%, or \$698 million reduction in school aid, \$3.5 billion in health care savings, including reductions in payments to hospitals and nursing homes) while also proposing 88 new fees and taxes in an effort to close the States ballooning deficit, which currently sits at \$15.4 billion. Also embedded within the Governors proposal is an extension of the social work licensure exemption for social workers employed by OMH, OMRDD, OASAS, and OCFS licensed or operated facilities. (Additional information on this will be forthcoming under separate cover)

**The State of the State** is "perilous" said Governor Patterson. While his address hardly contained any surprises given the early budget release, he did highlight a number of his key policy proposals some of which were not mentioned in his budget proposal including Reform of the Rockefeller drug laws, a plan to have 45 percent of New York's electricity produced through more efficient or renewable sources by 2015, creation of an upstate research consortium focused on the development of hybrid batteries, battling childhood obesity and fighting hate crimes- an initiative said to be in response to recent crimes against Latin American immigrants in Long Island, Brooklyn and Syracuse. A number of critics though, question how such new initiatives will come to fruition under such difficult fiscal constraints, especially his call to increase healthcare to all of New York's children. Key legislative leaders attempted to keep the tone light immediately following the address but did foreshadow a number of potential sticking points..." Assembly Democratic Speaker Sheldon Silver said he realized the fiscal crisis will require tough choices. "There is no way to sugarcoat it. Inevitably there will be fewer resources," while former Senate Majority Leader. Dean Skelos, suggested the governor would face a fractious Senate, even though it is now under a 32-30 Democratic majority. "I can guarantee you there are more factions within the Democratic conference than within the Republican conference," Skelos said." It looks like we're in for a rough ride people. To view a copy of the Governor's address log onto <http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/dailypolitics/2009/01/read-the-whole-thing.html#more>