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**SUPPORT REFORM OF THE “MEMBER ITEM” SYSTEM  
(S.7007-A/A.10116-A) OR ELIMINATE THEM FROM THE  
2010-2011 BUDGET**

As budget discussions continue, our organizations are concerned that a final agreement may include community projects funds, known as “member items” without reforms. The Assembly has already passed legislation, A.9700D and A.9705-D, without reform to the current system and has reapportioned past member items to fund community groups rather than address the budget deficit. **We collectively urge you to either support reform of the member item system (see: S.7007-A/A.10116-A) or oppose their inclusion in the budget.**

The overwhelming majority of New Yorkers live in Senate or Assembly legislative districts that lose out in the state’s member item system. Under the current system, 43 of 62 Senators received less than the average amount and in the Assembly, 114 members of the 141 received less than the “fair share” or average amount of the \$170 million typically spent on member items. The “ideal” is calculated by taking the amount of member item spending distributed by individual legislators in each house (\$85 million) then dividing this number by the number of legislators who participate in the program.

Member items have consistently been allocated in a disturbing fashion. The majorities in both houses receive an indefensibly excessive portion of funds. Districts represented by minority members and “back benchers” receive far less than the most powerful members. As a result, taxpayers’ dollars are used to benefit the politically powerful or “marginal” members who are given funds to help boost their reelection prospects. Former Senate Majority Leader Bruno’s recent federal court trial laid bare some of the abuses in this system. In addition, former legislators – most notably Assemblyman Brian McLaughlin – have been embroiled in controversy or scandal due to the problems in the member item system.

This session our organizations have urged reforming the current member item system by passing Senate bill S.7007-A and Assembly bill A.10116-A. **However, if no reform action is taken, it is our view that member items should not be retained in New York’s budgeting process.**

The changes contained in the reform legislation will ensure that public funds distributed as members items are not only properly accounted for, but also allocated in a more equitable manner. While our groups have differing views on whether member items should continue to be budgeted, we all agree that, if there are to be member items, the current unfair system must be changed.

**In summary, our groups urge the legislature to OPPOSE inclusion of “member items” in the final budget agreement, unless coupled with the necessary reforms proposed in S.7007A/A.10116A.**