

Preserve Services, Jobs Before Cutting Taxes, Labor Says

By MARK TOOR | Posted: Monday, October 7, 2013 5:00 pm

Further cuts in education, public health care, infrastructure, public safety and other government services will harm New York's families, New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento told a State Senate hearing Oct. 4.

'Sustain Needed Services'

"Given that we have had to endure and fight against cuts to education, aid to local governments, state operations and we are fighting health-care cuts and closures of hospitals like SUNY Downstate or mental-health facilities, we need to start talking about how we sustain services that people need, before we consider tax cuts," he told legislators attending the hearing, held jointly by the Finance Committee and the Committee on Investigations and Government Operations.

The committees said the hearing was one of a series being held to "review existing tax policy and discuss reform initiatives." The hearings come at a time when Gov. Cuomo plans a package of tax cuts for 2014, the year he is running for re-election. He has appointed a commission to look for ways to reduce property taxes and cut other taxes that affect business and the middle class.

But Mr. Cilento said, "We must first question the effect of any tax reform on the ability of the state to provide the capital needs that we all rely on as well as the vital public services that we all need.

"Needs are growing, not shrinking, meaning we will need more state dollars, not less, at a time when we clearly cannot rely on the Federal government for more funds.

"We must also remember that we have already reduced pension benefits, increased health-care costs and made changes to collective-bargaining rights of public workers. For some that is not enough, but for those who argue for more attacks against worker protections, you will never reduce benefits or worker rights enough. The truth is that reductions in the rights and benefits of workers have not improved the short-term outlook, and further reductions will not improve the long-term outlook because it is not the workers who have caused problems in the first place.

"The fact is, we cannot afford shortsighted tax cuts at this time."