



State of New York County of Broome Government Offices

Office of the Broome County Executive
Jason T. Garnar, Executive

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2020 Executive Budget Address

Good evening and thank you. Thank you to Anna Bruce and to GiGi's Playhouse for hosting us here tonight.

I remember the first time I walked in here. It was in May. It was their grand opening. This place was packed with standing room only. Everyone was happy and supportive and thankful to be welcoming this new organization to Broome County. It was probably one of the best events I've ever been a part of. Just a few weeks later, I began working on my 2020 budget. I couldn't stop thinking about what GiGi's Playhouse brings to our community. I wanted Broome County to be a part of that, to support that.

Anna Bruce saw a need in Broome County. A need for a place for her 8-year-old son Camden and other people with Down Syndrome to come to enjoy free programs. A need to make Broome County a place where people with Down syndrome are accepted and embraced in their families, in our schools, and in our entire community. She is working every day to meet that need.

You see it around you. You've heard it with Anna speaking about all the services that GiGi's Playhouse is bringing to our county and what she hopes to add in the future to serve our community. Like Anna and her dedicated staff at GiGi's Playhouse, so much of what Broome County does is provide services.

The county provides major services that touch every single taxpayer in one way or another. Major services that 200,000 people count on 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

Every single year we fix, maintain and plow more than 300 miles of roads, 2.2 million people ride our buses, we take nearly half a million calls to 9-1-1 at the dispatch center, thousands of people visit the eight senior centers that we run, we are a sponsor of SUNY Broome Community College and its 50,000 alumni, we fund major events that bring thousands of tourists into our community like LUMA, the DICKs Sporting Goods Open, and Spiedie Fest, we dispose of all the county's garbage, recycling and hazardous materials and more.

Over 40 different county departments provide services every single day to you, the taxpayers. My goal as County Executive is to meet the needs of our residents and provide those quality services that we all need at the lowest cost to you.

Tonight's budget once again shows it. My team is committed to continuing to provide those services in a fiscally responsible manner. Since I took office in 2017, my number one goal has

been to fix Broome County's finances. When I walked in the door as County Executive our fund balance was nearly gone at just \$250 thousand dollars. Guess what it is now? Over \$6.5 million. That's 25 times larger than it was when I took office in 2017.

It's because we are building good budgets. Budgets that grow our fund balance, that will reduce short term debt by millions of dollars, that do not take any sales tax revenue from our municipalities to balance the budget, that have gotten us off the New York State Comptroller's significant fiscal stress list, that have our creditors giving us an A+ (plus) bond rating, and that are fixing the fiscal house of Broome County. All the while we are still providing the same, quality services that the people of Broome County expect and deserve. It needs to be said that I couldn't do this without the strong support of the County Legislature. Thank you for working with me. The majority of you aren't in the same party as me, but that didn't stop us from working together to develop really good budgets that cut taxes and have improved services for our constituents.

It's a great example of how people from different political parties can learn how to trust each other, put aside political differences and focus on what's best for their community. It may not happen in Washington D.C., but it sure does happen right here in Broome County. I think a lot of county legislators will be happy to hear tonight that for the second straight year, I am proposing we cut taxes in Broome County.

This is two Broome County budgets in a row with a proposed tax cut. Last year, it had been 14 years since a County Executive stood before you and proposed a tax cut. Now we do it two years in a row. My 2020 budget is one in which we provide more, but we do it with less of your hard-earned money.

From our biggest departments, Willow Point, Emergency Services, Public Works, that's our nursing home, our first responders, dispatchers and fire investigators and those who pave and plow your roads, to the smallest departments, Weights and Measures, they make sure you are actually getting the amount of gas at the gas pump that you think you are.

All of these people and everyone in between, more than 2,000 amazing and dedicated employees, all of them are working for you. All of the great quality services you've come to expect from Broome County, are included in my recommended budget for next year. My administration has worked diligently to increase efficiency and minimize costs while at the same time providing new services.

In my last two budgets, I've introduced new initiatives to serve even more of our residents, including our youngest. These successful initiatives will continue to be included in my budget. Book for Babies has been a huge success. That continues in 2020. Every child born in Broome County gets their very first book at the hospital when they are born. So far, we've given out 3,600 books. That's 3,600 more kids in Broome County introduced to the importance of literacy right when they are born.

I'm also continuing my investment in our smaller communities. My \$150,000 Small Community Fund is helping projects grow throughout Broome County and for the third year in a row it will

be included in my budget. Over the past two years we have made big investments in our towns and villages, improving parks, demolishing blight, fixing community centers, and investing in emergency services in great communities like Windsor, Deposit, Maine, and Dickinson, and Conklin.

Parks, riverbanks, and many other places throughout Broome County are getting spruced up thanks to a new budget initiative from last year, our Clean Sweep program. They've completed more than 150 projects so far this year including everything from helping community gardens with VINES to volunteering at the LG&T Tennis Challenger. I implemented the Clean Sweep program in my budget last year. Our Clean Sweep Coordinator, John Mitchell is a retired air force veteran with a new mission, helping people who can work, get to work and get full-time jobs. He puts his heart and his soul into his job. You can hear it every time he shares his success stories. I recently met Rex, one of the graduates of the Clean Sweep program. He went on to do the Opportunity Impact Program through our Office of Employment and Training. He completed the 6-week manufacturing training program and is now working full-time in Kirkwood.

These new investments in workforce development through our department are giving people in Broome County the skills and experience they need to get and keep a full-time job. They will be funded in this budget because in Broome County our most important mission over the next five years will be getting people back to work. This mission will have a new base of operations, the Oakdale Mall. In just a few months we will be moving our Office of Employment and Training into a brand-new Workforce Development center into the former Sears building at the Oakdale Mall. Getting the 3,000 open jobs in Broome County filled is our most important mission over the next five years, and a brand-new workforce development center will be the key to doing it. I've heard a lot of politicians talk about wanting to get more jobs, but in Broome County we are taking action and the data shows our efforts have been paying off. New York State Department of Labor statistics show that the unemployment rate in Broome County has been cut in half of where it was eight years ago. We have more work to do but this is great progress! There will be more of that progress in 2020.

With my 2020 budget, I am taking on some big brand-new initiatives. I want to focus on two of them tonight, infrastructure and public safety. The District Attorney announced earlier this year, that Broome's crime rate has dropped 20%. That's because of the hard work of the District Attorney's office, our Sheriff's Office, Broome Security, and our local police departments. Still, more needs to be done. Our deputies are keeping our streets safe, our DA investigators are fighting the opioid epidemic, our 9-1-1 dispatchers are taking your emergency calls and our security officers are watching over our buildings. My goal of making Broome County the safest county in New York State is moving in the right direction, but we can and will do more in 2020.

I am adding two new full-time security positions to be stationed at the Broome County Intermodal in the City of Binghamton. This will create a full-time security presence and will make the intermodal one of the safest bus stations in upstate NY. In my 2020 budget, I am adding three new deputies for the Sheriff's Office. That means more deputies on the roads and in our communities, protecting you. I am also looking out for those people who take those

emergency 9-1-1 calls, our dispatchers. They work long hours in an emotionally draining job. When they get a call, they don't know what to expect on the other line. We need to do a better job of supporting our dispatchers, so they can do the best job possible to help you in an emergency situation. In my budget, I have proposed adding new dispatchers and reducing the shift schedule from 12-hour days to 8-hour days.

Since I've been County Executive, six State of Emergencies have been declared due to snow, or flooding. I've been in the 9-1-1 dispatch center and sat with our dispatchers as they handle each of your calls with calmness, ease and confidence. The best way to thank them is to invest in more staff and better working hours.

We've already begun one of the county's largest public safety initiatives in history, a complete replacement of our entire emergency communications network for our police, fire, and emergency services agencies. That means new towers, computers, and radios for every department. 1970's technology is finally being upgraded to modern 2020 technology. This is a huge initiative that will greatly improve emergency response and most importantly save lives.

Speaking of Investment in infrastructure, you will see that we have budgeted more money for road improvements, bridges, and snow removal. We're also investing more money into our beautiful county parks.

We're investing in our veterans, too, with a new one stop shop for veterans' services. We are putting all veterans' programs and services under one roof at the former Vestal Hills Country Club in the Town of Binghamton. Our veterans deserve to have a facility that shows we care, a place they feel comfortable, welcomed, safe and taken care of. That become a reality next year. It will be a model for communities around New York State and be the gold standard on how a community should take care of its veterans.

My recommended budget also makes new investments in the places where we serve our seniors. Nearly four-thousand senior citizens use our senior centers every single year, so we are including capital improvements to those centers.

I'm also putting money into making building improvements at Willow Point Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. New in 2020, I am adding a lift system at Willow Point. This new equipment will cut down on the number of patient handling injuries. Not only will it improve the safety of the nursing home residents, it will make it easier for our nurses and staff to provide care.

It's important that we make these investments in infrastructure to serve our community. This includes higher education and SUNY Broome which we sponsor. We are proud to be home to SUNY Broome and I'm working to make SUNY Broome the best community college in New York State by making major investments in the buildings on and off campus. Modern facilities to attract new students, to educate and train them so they can work and live in our community. Later this year we will be opening SUNY Broome's Culinary and Event Center at the formerly empty Carnegie Library in downtown Binghamton. It's another big county investment in Binghamton and it will help make Broome County the dining destination in upstate New York.

I'm also proposing a major rehabilitation of the Health Science building at SUNY Broome which will allow us to expand their great nursing program. We all know about the 3,000 plus open jobs in Broome County. Many of those are in healthcare. We need health care workers-especially nurses. This investment will allow for a larger student health science program to train those future health care employees to fill those hundreds of open health jobs we have in Broome County.

It doesn't stop there. I am making a huge investment in fixing two of the oldest buildings on campus. The old Science building and the Student Services building. This renovation will create a new one-stop shop student services building, renovating 15 offices. With this major renovation, the entire campus at Broome Community College will be modernized for the 21st century.

More jobs, lower crime, quality services, new roads and modern buildings are what makes Broome County a great place to live, work, and raise a family in. I am doing everything possible to make it even better at the lowest cost to you, the taxpayers.

Lastly tonight, I want to thank Anna Bruce and the team at GiGi's Playhouse for hosting us for my budget address. I continue to be blown away by what you're bringing to Broome County and the lives you are touching and changing. Tonight, all of these people here, who may have not known exactly what GiGi's Playhouse does or offers now do. I have no doubt that in this room you have plenty of people ready to embrace and support this non-profit just like I do. I believe in GiGi's Playhouse. I believe that you are making Broome County a better place to live. I want to help you with that.

In my 2020 budget, I have a line for you allocating money for you to grow, for you to bring more people in, for you to provide more services. \$10,000, remember that number. This summer, at the start of budget season, I knew we didn't have a lot of money, but I decided to give GiGi's Playhouse 10,000 dollars. I set up a meeting here with Anna and her team. They didn't know why I was coming to meet with them. Anna will tell you that she had no idea why I wanted to meet with them and said she was nervous. I sat down with them and got right to the chase. I said I loved what they are doing here, and I wanted to help. I wanted to give them \$10,000 in my proposed 2020 budget. Anna started to cry. I didn't know what to think. It was quiet for a minute then she pointed to a sign on that wall right over there. They still have that sign up: Future Learning Lab, \$10,000. A coincidence? I don't think so. I'm honored to make this investment at GiGi's Playhouse because of what they are investing in Broome County.

This is one of the many reasons I'm proud of the budget that I am handing over to the Legislature tonight. A tax cut for the second year in a row, less taxes, more investment in services and programs for you, increased funding for public safety, improved infrastructure and a balanced budget that supports our county departments and supports our municipalities.

I look forward to working with the Legislature, answering questions, being open and transparent and adopting this budget to protect our taxpayers. This plan I present to you tonight will continue to move Broome County in the right direction with less burden on the taxpayers, more investment in the programs and services we need and deserve. It is a true win-win for the residents of Broome County.

Thank you and God Bless.