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News Coverage on Private Participation in Public Pensions

Mayors to state: Don't let us drown

[Jimmy Vielkind](#) ^[1] ^[2] ^[2] ^[2] ^[2]

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<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Mayors-to-state-Don-t-let-us-drown-42187...> ^[3]

ALBANY — Mayors of some fiscally stressed upstate cities worry that relief proposals Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) ^[4] included in his budget proposal won't go far enough.

"They're life preservers. Life preservers are good when you don't want to die, but they're still life preservers," said Yonkers Mayor [Mike Spano](#) ^[5], a Democrat. "I'm very happy that the governor is recognizing the plights of the cities, and I find some of the proposals very constructive. But there are still long roads ahead of us."

Spano will join other officials in testifying at a budget hearing Monday. He'll ask for more unrestricted aid money — Yonkers currently receives \$114 million, which will be held flat in the fiscal year that begins in April — to help him bridge a \$100 million gap in the \$1 billion budget that covers services for the city and its school district.

Cuomo proposed three items in the budget aimed at fiscally stressed cities: the ability to lock in a constant rate for contributions to the state pension fund — costs that municipal leaders say are strangling their annual budgets — for 25 years; a clarification of "ability-to-pay" provisions in binding arbitration with municipal unions; and a new advisory working group with representatives from the offices of the Comptroller and Attorney General as well as the state's Budget Division.

Cuomo's top aide, [Larry Schwartz](#) ^[6], said this working group would provide a blueprint for beleaguered municipalities to find solid footing, but "there's no carrots or sticks — just good, sound advice."

Spano said such an advisory group was laudable, but he had hoped for a bolder plan.

"The model which has led cities to drive New York state's economy does not work anymore," he said. "The way we can fix that is not by having five state agencies baby-sit, but to have a new deal for New York's cities."

Syracuse Mayor [Stephanie Miner](#) [7], who was last year named co-chair of the [Democratic State Committee](#) [8], told the [Post-Standard](#) [9] she had "more questions than answers" regarding Cuomo's provisions.

"Clearly I would love to say to you that this solves or starts to solve Syracuse's problems, but I can't say that," Miner told the [New York Times](#) [10]. She was not available for a Wednesday interview.

Last year, Miner directed city lawyers to examine whether Syracuse could declare bankruptcy.

Schwartz said Cuomo was committed to helping cities, but "it's not one-size-fits-all."

[Peter Baynes](#) [11], executive director of the New York Conference of Mayors, praised Cuomo's plan to lock in pension rate increases and to provide relief in binding arbitration. Mayors have long complained that they cannot effectively negotiate with union leaders who believe they'll win bigger concessions if a neutral arbitrator is brought in.

"No governor has ever been willing to take on what most neutral observers would say is an expensive mandate on local governments," Baynes said. "We're pleased the governor has tackled the problem. We think it could make a meaningful difference."

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