

POT IN NASSAU

Executive's suit generated nearly \$60G in legal bills

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County Executive Laura Curran's eight-day lawsuit against the Nassau Legislature, in which she argued unsuccessfully that lawmakers had not given proper public notice about emergency budget amendments, has left the county on the hook for nearly \$60,000.

County Attorney Jared Kasschau filed the lawsuit in November on Curran's behalf. But because the county attorney also represents the legislature, he authorized Republican and Democratic legislators, as well as legislative clerk Michael Pulitzer, to hire their own attorneys.

Their legal bill: \$57,564.83

Dino Amoroso, a Democratic attorney who served as Nassau Off Track Betting Corp. president when his party controlled the legislature in the early 2000s, represented the Democratic legislative minority. He submitted a bill of \$6,500, records show.

Berkman, Henoch, Peterson, Peddy & Fenchel, the law firm that includes former Republican Hempstead Supervisor Greg Peterson and had employed former Nassau Republican chairman Joseph Mondello until he stepped down to become U.S. ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago, represented Pulitzer, a Republican. The firm billed \$11,160.

Attorney Ronald J. Rosenberg, of Rosenberg, Calica & Birney, represented the Republican legislative majority. Rosenberg served as lead counsel for all the defendants and also tried to remove Kasschau from the case for conflicts of interest. The law firm billed \$39,904.83.

After the legislature in Oc-

tober unanimously approved this year's budget, which included a number of amendments, Kasschau notified lawmakers he intended to file suit on Nov. 5. A state Supreme Court justice that day denied his motion for a temporary restraining order. By Nov. 12, Kasschau had dropped the lawsuit after Curran reached a budget agreement with Democratic lawmakers.

One of the budget amendments approved by the legislature was to include \$1.6 million in funding to reopen two county police precincts. Curran had called the move "irresponsible" — estimating the reopening cost at \$5 million — and vetoed the county budget.

But the weekend before the legislature was expected to override her veto, Curran made an agreement with Democratic lawmakers to fund their initiatives, including the precinct reopenings. Democrats then voted against overriding her veto of the budget, which they had unanimously voted in favor of two weeks earlier.

Curran said she would reopen the precincts some time this year. Asked when the reopenings would occur, Curran spokeswoman Christine Geed said, "promotions have been made and renovations are underway. This is just another . . . distraction," by the Police Benevolent Association, the county's largest police union.

Nassau PBA President James McDermott responded, "What is she talking about? We bring to light there's a problem with the [police] cars," that need replacement. "We challenge [Curran] on her decision to move ICE out of Nassau County. So everything is our fault moving forward? I don't understand."

Plan to aid homeowners

NY Senate: Tax credits would offset Nassau reassessments

BY YANCEY ROY
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ALBANY — The State Senate is proposing to compensate Nassau County homeowners who see their taxes rise under a new property reassessment program.

Qualifying homeowners would be able to claim a tax credit to offset any tax increases implemented in the first year of County Executive Laura Curran's proposed five-year phase-in for new assessments of residential properties. Over the next seven years, the tax credit would continue, but at gradually decreasing rates. Homeowners with more than \$500,000 annual income wouldn't be eligible.

Curran's idea of a five-year phase-in of the tax impact of reassessment appears almost certain to be approved by state lawmakers, since the Senate, the Assembly and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo all have included it as part of their versions of a state budget. A key question now is whether the Senate's idea for tax credits to accompany the phase-in wins approval.

The tax-credit initiative was driven by Long Island Democrats, whose victories in November were key to the party winning control of the Senate from Republicans.

"The Democratic Senators from Long Island made it clear we will always stand up for our constituents and communities, and we are proving that with this budget resolution," Sen. Anna Kaplan (D-North Hempstead) said in a statement. "We worked tirelessly to ensure our Senate Majority colleagues understood the situation Nassau County property owners are facing."

Nassau County would have to opt into the program and contribute nearly \$70 million through sales tax it collects — the state would spend \$3 for every \$1 the county contributes. Senate officials estimated it would cost about \$27 million



State Sen. Anna Kaplan (D-North Hempstead) said the plan seeks to alleviate potential tax increases "Nassau property owners are facing."

in state funds the first year and more than \$200 million overall.

The bottom line of the program, backers said, is that a Nassau homeowner who would be facing, say, a \$4,000 tax-bill hike during the first year of the reassessment wouldn't be paying the full increase until the eighth year of the program.

A Nassau Republican said the idea sounded like an "election-year ploy" to benefit Curran when she would be up for re-election in 2021.

"It sounds good, the five-year phase-in — but let's see the details," said Donald Clavin Jr., the Hempstead Town receiver of taxes and the GOP's candidate for town supervisor. "It's also curious that the biggest tax credit seems to come in the election year of the county executive and, after that, we're back to reality."

The Democratic-led Senate tucked the initiative into a state budget proposal it unveiled Tuesday. It would have to be approved by the Democratic-led Assembly and Gov. Cuomo as

part of New York's overall spending plan, which is supposed to be adopted by April 1.

A spokesman for Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie (D-Bronx) said the proposal would be considered in budget negotiations. Cuomo's office didn't immediately comment.

Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) called the plan a "wise investment" and said the \$200 million or so spent over the seven years would be a small fraction of the \$1 trillion the state will spend as a whole over that time period.

"Certainly, it's not the fault of the homeowner that the assessment system has been out of whack for so long and people are going to see increases," he said. "If the state is able to provide tax relief in the form of credits . . . I think it's a wise investment in protecting over-taxed Long Islanders."

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