

SUFFOLK COUNTY

# Rainy day fund safe for now

Bellone drops plan to use it to plug a 2018 budget hole

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Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone has withdrawn his resolution to take \$32 million from the county's rainy day fund to plug a hole of that size in the 2018 budget, and repay the money next year.

Bellone withdrew the resolution two days after the county legislature deadlocked 9-9 on amending his \$3.11 billion operating budget for 2019, leaving his proposed spending package intact. It was the first time in 34 years an executive budget was left unchanged.

Bellone's spokesman, Jason Elan, said the legislation "was withdrawn because we are working with the legislature to develop alternative solutions."

He declined to say what was under consideration or with whom the county executive has consulted.

Legis. Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore), head of the minority caucus, said he hadn't "heard a peep" from Bellone about a different solution.

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copiague) said of Bellone's retreat: "They just didn't have the votes."

Gregory said he had received an email asking for a meeting Wednesday with Bellone's chief deputy, Dennis Cohen, and top legislative aide Amy Keyes.

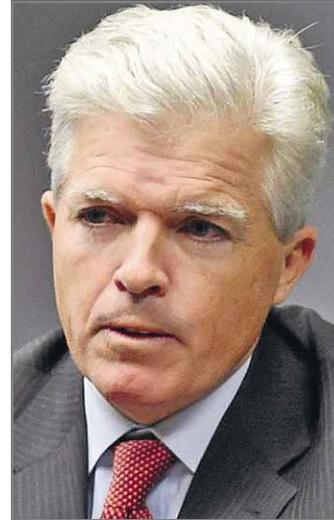
"I'm interested in what they have to say and what alternatives there might be," Gregory said.

The transfer from the tax stabilization reserve fund remains in the budget. But legislative of-

ficials say the law authorizing use of the reserve fund also requires a separate resolution, approved by a two-thirds majority, to tap the fund, which contains \$49.5 million.

During the budget process, the seven-member GOP caucus opposed use of the rainy day fund. So did seven Democrats on a budget working group who voted to remove the proposal from the budget in an amendment that made three dozen changes to the budget.

Earlier, the legislature's Office of Budget Review had recommended that lawmakers drop the use of the rainy day fund because it artificially created a \$1.2 million surplus when the county is facing a \$31 million deficit by year's end because of unexpected increases in sheriff's de-



JAMES CARBONE

Steve Bellone

partment overtime and less than expected state aid for low-income housing.

Bellone aides said the

process was legal and had been used in the past.

Also Tuesday, the legislature's finance committee shelved a GOP proposal to mandate that money raised from fees for specific services be kept in a separate account, and any excess revenue over the cost of providing the service be returned to taxpayers.

In a party line 4-2 vote, the measure was tabled subject to call, blocking it from going to the full legislature for vote Tuesday. Legis. Robert Trotta, the bill's sponsor, said he was considering circulating a discharge petition, requiring 10 signatures, to get the measure before the full legislature for a vote.

"I want taxpayers to understand what's going on," said Trotta (R-Fort Salonga). "I don't want the shell games to be used to hide the fiscal problems of this county."

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