



Legislative & Regulatory Affairs Bulletin

RE: Legislative Activities

DATE: February 5, 2011

FROM: Chris Bitner, Legislative & Regulatory Affairs Committee

NYSVARA has set its Legislative Day for Monday May 2, 2011. Please mark your calendars and plan to join us in Albany as we educate our legislative representatives about the issues and needs of New York's community ambulance corps.

Legislative Member Initiatives, more commonly referred to as "Member Items", are an important source of funding to our member agencies. Please take a moment and read the attached article which describes them and the role they play in supporting non-profit organizations. This could prove to be a useful tool in your discussions with your representatives in government.

Sometimes, pork spending is kosher

Wholesale elimination of member items from state budget hurts worthy efforts

BY GAYLE BERG

Today's release of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's budget proposal for 2011-12 brings budget season — and all its wheeling and dealing — to New York. When the public thinks that lawmakers horse-trade deals for favorite hometown projects, they become incensed. Who can blame them? When state governments like New York's are facing such big deficits, it seems slimy to allow "pork barrel" spending to continue.

Such "member items" weren't included in the state's 2010-11 budget, and there likely isn't much public appetite for them this year, either. But traditionally, member items have totaled around \$180 million per year. That's a lot of pork — but is any of it ever kosher?

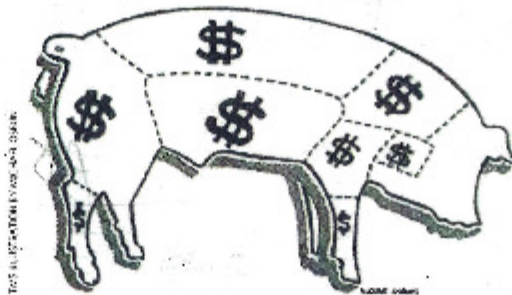
The answer is simply yes and no. Member-item money is designed to go to nonprofit groups or local governments in a legislator's home community for worthwhile projects

that provide needed services. And that's where most of it does go. When this happens, the items fulfill important funding needs in a given community.

The problem comes if lawmakers use the power of this purse to curry favor in their districts by providing big checks to small community groups, to fund pet projects that may or may not meet a community need, or as a means for power-brokering on various issues.

But if the spigot is totally turned off, what will happen to those nonprofits that have legitimately used and relied on this money to run their needed services and programs?

Right in our own backyard, a variety of services and nonprofit programs that provide essential services will be hurt by the loss of member items. As a volunteer with UJA-Federation of New York — which funds human services and community agencies in the metropolitan area, Israel and 60 other countries — I've seen the impact of cuts in programs funded by member items



not just at one agency in one town, but in programs at UJA-Federation's Long Island beneficiary agencies, which serve people in need across Nassau and Suffolk counties.

Here are just a few examples of the important, legitimate programs that will be affected by decreased funding. The Jewish Association for Services for the Aged in Long Beach will experience cutbacks in its ability to provide services to our most elderly — in particular, those seniors who are aging at home but require assistance with personal care, light housekeeping, grocery shopping, laundry or transportation to medical appointments. A cut in funding

for a staff member to provide these services in southern Nassau County means some individuals will no longer receive them at all.

The Jewish Community Center of the Greater Five Towns had been receiving member-item funding for Camp Friendship, a camp for children with special needs, as well as for its community food pantry. This year the member-item money was cut unexpectedly. As a result, Camp Friendship has had to make dramatic changes in programming. The food pantry has had to reduce staff hours and provide less food, meaning the community has less ac-

cess to nutritional assistance.

The Suffolk-based Family Service League, headquartered in Huntington, received member-item funding for many of its programs, including those that support low-income children at risk of getting into behavioral or academic trouble. Recent cuts mean that one-third to one-half fewer kids now receive after-school homework help. The league's EAST program — Families and Schools Together — shows at-risk kids and their parents how to work together in the evenings on skills to create stronger families. A cut in funding resulted in 30 fewer families receiving this crucial support.

These are just a few of the Long Island nonprofits that will suffer cutbacks as a result of the loss of member items. But they make clear the point that not all pork-barrel spending is bad. And in difficult economic times, when support from individual donors wanes, these small grants are all the more important.



Gayle Berg is chair of UJA-Federation of New York's Long Island Government Relations Committee.