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Shown is New York Gov. Kathy Hochul at a labor rally on March 8 in Albany connected to a push to reform New York's pension system. PROVIDED BY THE OFFICE OF NEW YORK GOVERNOR

Pension reform plan could cost NY taxpayers billions

Emily Barnes
New York State Team
USA TODAY NETWORK

Several local government groups are warning that New York property taxpayers could face tax rate hikes or service cuts due to pension reform proposals being debated as part of this year's now-late state budget.

In a recent statement aimed at Gov. Kathy Hochul and Legislature leadership, the groups said the state budget needs to include sufficient funding for any public employees' pension changes that get approved. They urged Hochul and lawmakers to "resist the impulse to pass those costs on to local property taxpayers," citing state law intended to ensure state government shoulders the financial responsibility for pension benefit enhancements.

"Counties, cities, towns, and villages already operate under severe fiscal constraints — the property tax cap, rising costs for essential services, and the growing burden of unfunded state mandates," the groups said.

"Any increase in employer pension contribution rates resulting from Tier 6 (pension) amendments would force local governments to make impossible choices: cutting essential services, eliminating positions, or seeking property tax increases that local taxpayers cannot afford," they added.

The groups also asserted local governments will soon take a hefty financial hit as pension fund returns previously projected to stabilize employer contributions for 2027 have been altered due to recent stock market unpredictability. Nearly 60% of county, city, town and village employees currently participate in Tier 6, they noted.

It's not the first red flag being raised about the push for pension reform. The Citizens Budget Commission also said last month that changes could increase taxes and destabilize budgets.



New York State Budget Director Blake Washington spoke with reporters inside the New York State Capitol on April 1, as the state legislature faces another late budget. EMILY BARNES/USA TODAY NETWORK-NEW YORK

What Hochul, state lawmakers say about NY pension reform

Hochul and several state lawmakers have publicly supported state public employees' push for lower retirement ages and reduced penalties for those under the state's Tier 6 pension system, which has been in place since 2012.

"Governor Hochul is proud to support New York's state and municipal employees and has enacted significant reforms to enhance the retirement benefits for Tier 6 members," a spokesperson for Hochul's office said. "Governor Hochul will continue to negotiate in good faith with the Legislature to pass a budget that makes New York safer and more affordable."

Here's a look inside the ongoing Tier 6 reforms fight.

How much could pension reform cost New York taxpayers?

Taxpayers could be facing a \$1.5 billion annual price tag under a proposal set forth by labor unions seeking Tier 6 changes, Newsday and Gothamist reported.

The plan would add an additional \$242 million to the \$3.4 billion the state already projects it will spend on pensions next year. On the local level, New York City's pension costs would increase by \$328 million, school districts would have to pay \$480 million more and local governments would have to pay \$407 million, according to Gothamist.

New York State Budget Director

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Cops arrest man after gun drawn in traffic

Casey Pritchard
Utica Observer Dispatch
USA TODAY NETWORK

A Prospect man was arrested and charged after allegedly pointing a gun at another driver who had two children in the car, according to a statement from the Utica Police Department.

At around 1:05 p.m. on April 7, Utica police were dispatched to the area near Albany Street and Kossuth Avenue in Utica regarding a menacing investigation in which the driver of a vehicle pointed a long gun at another driver who had two small children in the vehicle with them.

It was further relayed that the victim had last witnessed the suspect vehicle near the intersection of Mary Street and Tilden Avenue. An officer arrived in the area and located the vehicle occupied, parked on the side of the road.

As they approached, police say they ordered the man from the vehicle and immediately detained him.

When approaching the vehicle, police were able to see an AR style rifle in plain view in the front seat. The weapon was secured and several boxes of ammunition and magazines.

The suspect, Justin Dawes, 36 of Prospect, was then transported to the Utica Police Department.

At the conclusion of the investigation, Dawes was charged with second-degree criminal possession of a weapon, third-degree criminal possession of a weapon, criminal possession of a firearm, second-degree menacing, and two counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Artemis II recovery will be a team effort

Mission set to end with April 10 splashdown

Brooke Edwards
Florida Today
USA TODAY NETWORK

After a 10-day mission of venturing deeper into space than any humans in history, the Artemis II crew is set to return to Earth on April 10, triggering a full-scale recovery operation that will involve a U.S. Navy ship and four helicopters.

The Orion spacecraft is expected to descend under parachutes before splashing down off the California coast near San Diego at approximately 5:07 p.m. PT.

Jason Endsley is the lead ground instrumentation engineer with Amemut, NASA's advanced engineering

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