

Letters to the Editor

Suffolk's Fiscal Stress Unsustainable

It's official: For the second year in a row, Suffolk County has been rated the most fiscally stressed county in the state. This is not from some think tank, this is directly from the New York State Comptroller's Office, and the report shows what I have been saying all along: Suffolk is in a fiscal crisis.

To say that the county is showing "significant" fiscal stress, like the report said, is a gross understatement. According to the state comptroller's office, the county's general fund balance is running a deficit of over \$91 million. That is more than three times the figure from three years ago. It also shows that, since 2016, expenditures have outpaced revenues. That is because our current county executive, Steve Bellone (D), is spending more than the county is taking in and continues to borrow against our future. And because of our junk bond status, he will borrow at higher interest rates, burdening the county's taxpayers.

This is not a problem that can be solved by increasing taxes. The truth of the matter is, unlike what County Executive Steve Bellone would have you be-

lieve, most county taxpayers in its five western towns have experienced annual tax increases averaging about 4 percent per year over the past several years, well above the 2 percent tax cap. County residents are simply taxed too much and can no longer afford to live here.

We are in a fiscal free fall, with insufficient cash flow, making it difficult to pay the county's bills. We are now in a position where we are having difficulty meeting our financial obligations from week to week. Many of our vendors are receiving delayed payments, putting significant financial stress on them as well. It means these companies will not meet payroll, employees will not be paid on time, jobs will be in jeopardy and, in many cases, a reduction in services to the taxpayers.

How has this affected Suffolk's fiscal crisis? The comptroller's report goes on to say that, from 2017 to 2018, Suffolk's population decreased by 1.28 percent, home values declined by 12.52 percent and more than 17.5 percent of the county's population rely on state and federal aid just to live here.

But who can afford to live here? Since

Steve Bellone took office in 2012, Suffolk residents have been burdened with \$200 million in new taxes and fees, a 22.4 percent hike in the property tax levy and a 15 percent budget increase — along with nearly \$900 million in debt, seven bond downgrades and seven fiscal emergencies — and we have seen over 16,000 residents flee Suffolk. Our younger generation cannot afford to live here, and our seniors can no longer afford to stay here.

The tax-and-spend policies of this administration have created this fiscal crisis and have hurt Suffolk County taxpayers. This has to end. Our finances are on the brink of disaster and, if we are hit with another recession or an economic slowdown, sales tax revenues, which the county heavily relies on, will be reduced. This is what keeps comptrollers up at night, and I worry about the impact it will have on our county, its taxpayers, employees and those who rely on it for vital services.

John Kennedy
Suffolk County Comptroller
Republican candidate for Suffolk
County Executive