

## Hein signs \$329M Ulster County budget for 2019

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KINGSTON, N.Y. — Ulster County Executive Michael Hein on Thursday signed the county's \$329 million budget for 2019 that he says will reduce property taxes to their lowest level since 2009 while “providing the most socially responsible budget in Ulster County’s history.”

The budget totals \$329,256,289 and is \$356,959, or 0.1 percent, larger than spending plan Hein proposed in October. Much of the additional spending, put in place by the county Legislature, will be offset by grants and other revenues.

In a press release Thursday, Hein said the budget provides for innovative solutions to some of the most significant issues facing the county, including restorative justice programs that he has said will help end the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

Hein commended county lawmakers for “avoiding the lure of political revenue projections over those rooted in sound budgetary practices,” a reference to the Legislature's decision not to adopt any major budget recommendations from The Benjamin Center for Public Policy at SUNY New Paltz, which had suggested, among other things, that the county could increase the amount of anticipated sales tax revenue and reduce the property tax levy by an additional \$1 million.

The Legislature embraced a recommendation by the center, which headed by former Legislature Chairman Gerald Benjamin, to increase slightly the amount of revenue the county anticipated through its hotel/motel tax, an increase supported by the Hein administration.

The Legislature unanimously approved the 2019 county budget after making only modest changes to the spending plan. None of the changes affected the bottom line of the budget or changed the amount to be raised through property taxes.

The adopted budget is about \$5.5 million, or 1.7 percent, larger than the \$323.8 million county budget adopted for 2018. The property tax levy is dropping by 0.2 percent.

"I'm proud that our proposed budgets have been adopted in bipartisan votes, with changes totaling less than one-tenth of one percent, for the tenth straight year," Hein said.

Among changes the Legislature made to Hein's proposed budget were ones that would put back into the hands of lawmakers decisions about how arts programs in the county will be funded; give pay raises for two longtime assistant district attorneys and some legislative staff members; and add a second fiscal analyst to the Legislature's offices.

Lawmakers also voted to provide funding to a number of not-for-profit agencies that provide programs for the county, including \$12,500 to AWARENESS, a drug and alcohol peer counseling program, and \$5,000 for an anti-bullying program. They also added \$46,000 to hire an external contractor to help coordinate the county's Green Business program and \$100,000 for the county's Restorative Justice Center.