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**FEDERAL LEVEL:** Rep. Peter King will hold Congressional Hearings on gang violence and the roles of major gangs, such as MS-13, within the next 4-6 weeks. Here on Long Island. Recently, there were four young people found dead in a Central Islip park and those deaths very much appear to be gang related. Two of the deceased were high school students from Bellport. There are about a half dozen other deaths that may be traced back to MS-13 within recent months, as well. In addition to getting federal attention, Governor Cuomo is offering the resources of the New York State Police to help deal with this problem.

**STATE LEVEL:** While a week late, New York State now has a budget for the next fiscal year. Long Island schools did well in this record state aid increase with an additional \$129 million dollars in State Aid coming to Nassau & Suffolk. This translates into an increase of 4.3% which compares very favorably with a 2.7% increase in inflation. For the first time, all Long Island School Districts are putting forth budgets that are within the tax cap. State wide, the increase was \$1.1 billion. The financial assistance for 2017-18 includes a \$700 million increase (statewide) in Foundation Aid, which is meant to provide greater equity in dollar distribution, depending on a district's wealth. Many educators feared that this program was being eliminated and were relieved hearing that it would continue. There is however, a serious "catch" in the budget deal that we all need to be aware of. Governor Cuomo has warned that the State faces the possible loss of federal dollars, the amount which will not be made known by the fed until after our May 16<sup>th</sup> School Budget votes. The State budget deal that was agreed upon includes language authorizing the state to make reductions in spending, including school funding, should the federal cuts exceed \$850 million dollars to NYS. For this reason, the Governor in a recent address urged school districts to proceed with "cautious planning" for the coming school year. Three of our school districts (Amityville, Central Islip & Wyandanch) also received further unwelcome news in that they did not receive renewal of their 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Grants. These grants helped these districts with funding after school and summer programs. There were also a couple of laws/revisions that were included as part of the budget deal. One law revision is that 16 & 17-year olds would no longer be treated as adults for most criminal offenses. While this brings New York in line with the vast majority of the other states, it did face some stiff opposition, as a number of Long Island legislators referred to this change in the law as the "Gang Recruitment Act", as it would be beneficial for gangs such as MS-13 to recruit 16 & 17-year olds to commit crimes on their behalf, knowing these younger gang members would now get much more lenient treatment within the criminal justice system.

Another new law of interest is that students in families under a certain income threshold (\$125K within a couple of years) would be eligible for free tuition if they went to a SUNY school or Community College. There is of course some “fine print” that comes along with this program. Courses must be completed within a given period, students would be required to stay within the state of New York for four years after graduating a four-year University (this to help stem the “brain drain” here in New York) and of course, only the tuition would be free (books, room & board would still be the responsibility of the student). We also need to remember that nothing is truly free, as someone needs to pick up the cost. In this case, the cost is transferred from the individual student to the taxpayers in general.

In closing, while it appears that we did “ok” this year, there is still the possibility, (albeit slight at this time) of mid-year funding cuts and we still need to diligently to plan for a future where state aid increases may not always be as generous as they were for 2017-18.