
Testa Bill Package Seeks to Restore Integrity, Fairness to NJ State Spending

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Measures Target Massive Christmas Tree Payments that Escape Appropriate Scrutiny

Christmas came early for a small group of hand-picked recipients who shared in hundreds of millions of dollars of pork in Governor Murphy's State budget passed in June. Now, with the holiday season fast approaching, Senator Michael Testa has introduced a legislative package to counteract the politically motivated gift-giving and restore integrity and balance to the distribution of taxpayer money.



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"Enigmatic Christmas tree items have long been a feature of government budgets in the State, but as the cost of this Governor's budgets have skyrocketed in recent years, so too has the list of pork projects receiving payments," said Testa (R-1). "Santa Murphy has established a new standard in gifting, handing out multi-million-dollar packages to friends, mostly in North Jersey, like candy canes. Taxpayers, and those without direct connections to the front office in Trenton, have had to settle for stockings full of coal."

The FY2023 spending spree included a \$300 million [handout to Rutgers](#) University in the form of an “additional appropriation.” It includes \$100 million to renovate the basketball facility and to start work on an indoor football practice facility.

Other high-end items include: \$7 million for the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC); \$5 million for the Cherry Blossom Center in Branch Brook; \$4.6 million for a park in North Bergen; \$4 million for Union County’s Clark Reservoir; \$3.6 million for the visiting Lambert Castle Visitors Center in Patterson; and \$3 million for the Brick City Peace Collective in Newark.

“Many of these payouts may be for very worthy causes. Without a doubt, the State needs to provide funding for higher education,” said Testa. “These awards should be transparent, competitive and merit based, but what we’ve seen out of Trenton is secretive, arbitrary and unfair.”

A Republican member of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, Testa noted the existence of countless more deserving projects across the state that have been excluded without consideration.

“Just a sliver of that huge pool of money could make all the difference for commendable museums and facilities in the rest of the state,” Testa said. “In my legislative district, for example, two noteworthy institutions are facing severe fiscal pressures after attendance and revenue numbers slumped during the pandemic. They may well be every bit as deserving of help and they should be given a chance to apply.”

The Senator emphasized that these payments are arranged in back rooms, far removed from the scrutiny of New Jersey’s comprehensive budget process.

“The legislature is locked out of it and New Jersey residents, who ultimately end up paying the bill for these partisan plums often have no idea where the money is going or what it is being used for,” Testa said.

“This is blatant favoritism based on how influential the recipients are and not on any fair or balanced process which governors of both parties traditionally advocate,” the Senator continued. “This is no way to allocate state spending, and the legislation I have introduced are designed to bring the procedure out in the open so everybody can have a fair shot at the money, regardless of politics or geographic preferences.”

To level the playing field, Testa introduced the following bills:

- **S-3388** - Redirects a \$300 million special line item for undisclosed capital projects at Rutgers (believed to include \$100 million Rutgers sports facilities) awarded without an open or fair application process to a grant program run by the Commission on Higher Education that would be open to all public and private higher education institutions as well as vocational schools. Funding allocations would be based on merit with a regional Statewide balance.
- **S-3386** - Would redirect approximately \$356 million in special local government line items to named recipients awarded without an open or fair application process to a grant program run by the Commissioner of DCA that would be open to all local governments. Funding allocations would be based on merit with a regional Statewide balance.

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- **S-3387** - Would redirect approximately \$22 million of eight line-items awarded to arts and cultural organizations without an open or fair application process to a grant program run by the Secretary of State that would be open to all arts and cultural organizations. Funding allocation would be based on merit with a regional Statewide balance.