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Sun Sets on Legislative Winter Break

The Legislature returns next week to continue to work through legislative priorities as the two houses work to develop their respective responses to the Governor's Executive Budget proposal. This week, the Department of Health backed away from a healthcare worker booster mandate; Governor Hochul announced a cyber security effort in the wake of the Russia/Ukraine conflict and signed an important piece of cannabis legislation into law; and another legislator announced he would not seek re-election as the New York State Republicans prepare for next week's nominating convention.

Booster Mandate Suspended: The Department of Health [suspended](#) enforcement of a COVID booster mandate for health care workers that had been set for February 21. The move follows effective advocacy efforts - on the part of Park Strategies and our health care clients - at the highest levels of the administration to share impacts on staffing retention, and potential quality of care issues associated with the mandate. The Department plans to re-assess health care worker booster status in the three months.

Governor Hochul Forms Joint Security Operation: In response to the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, and subsequent heightened cyber security threat risk, Governor Hochul [announced](#) the formation of the Joint Security Operations Center (JSOC) to oversee cybersecurity across New York State. Based in Brooklyn, the Center will serve as a command center, coordinating efforts between local, state and federal cyber efforts.

Cannabis Bill Signed into Law: [Governor Hochul signed legislation](#) creating a new Conditional Adult-use Cannabis Cultivator license, which was approved by the legislature last week. The new law, which was an advocacy priority of the Park Strategies Cannabis Practice, creates a pathway for hemp farmers to obtain conditional licenses for cultivation and processing to ensure market ready product is available when adult-use retail licenses are issued (expected later this year).

Member of Assembly Cusick to Retire: Assemblyman Cusick, representing the 63rd Assembly District based in Staten Island since 2003 and current Chair of the Energy Committee, [announced](#) this week that he does not plan on seeking re-election.

EO 4 Status: [Executive Order 4](#), which provides staffing relief to the healthcare industry by easing regulations and restrictions on healthcare professionals eligible to work in NYS, is set to expire March 1, 2022 but is expected to be extended for another 30 days.

NYS Republican Convention: [Businessman Harry Wilson](#) has entered the race vying for the Republican nomination for governor. Congressman Lee Zeldin also announced his running mate this week, [choosing to support Alison Esposito](#), a member of the NYPD.



Legislative News

Legislative Activity

The Legislature will be in session the 28th, 1st, 2nd, 3rd next week (the *2022 Legislative Calendar* can be accessed [here](#)). There was no legislative session this week.

Budget / Public Hearings

On March 1, 2022, the Senate Committees on Banks, Finance, and Environmental Conservation will explore the financial risks on banking posed by climate change.

On March 3, 2022, the Senate Committees on Crime Victims, Crime and Correction; Ethics and Internal Governance will discuss “the impact of sexual assault in the prison system.”

On March 4, 2022 the Senate Committees on New York City Education, Education as well as the Assembly Committee on Education will discuss Mayoral Control of the New York City School District.

The public hearing calendar can be accessed [here](#).

From the Governor

Investments to Improve Psychiatric Support for Those in Crisis

Governor Hochul [announced](#) investments intended to help improve access to acute mental health care and hospital psychiatric beds across New York State. The initiatives are part of a plan to provide supports and services for people with serious mental illness experiencing homelessness, as well as others in crisis.

Executive Orders:

There were no new COVID-19 related Executive Order’s this week. However, an extension of Executive Order 4 is anticipated.

State Agencies

From the New York Office of the NYS Attorney General

AG Sues to Block UnitedHealth Group's Proposed Acquisition of Change Healthcare

New York Attorney General Letitia James filed an [antitrust lawsuit](#) with the U.S. Department of Justice and the State of Minnesota to stop the proposed acquisition of Change Healthcare (Change) by UnitedHealth Group (United).

The lawsuit alleges that the acquisition would give United, one of the nation's largest health insurers, an unparalleled competitive advantage – allowing it to use Change's enormous repository of claims data to raise costs for its competitors, hobble their ability to compete with United, and deny them access to innovations.

From the New York Office of the NYS Comptroller

Comptroller: Statement on MTA Financial Plan

"Better-than-expected tax revenues will allow one-time federal aid to be stretched further and reduce expected reliance on deficit financing during the financial plan. Despite this, the plan still relies on an average of \$1.8 billion in one-time funds used annually through 2025, clouding a structural budgetary imbalance that will remain even after federal aid is exhausted." [Full Statement here.](#)

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