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THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026

State lawmakers begin passing bills in \$268B budget

Funding approved for education, labor, family assistance

ROBERT GAVIN
Albany Bureau Chief

ALBANY — Lawmakers began passing parts of a \$268 billion state budget on Wednesday, including aid for school districts across Western New York.

Seven weeks after the spending plan's April 1 deadline, the Assembly approved funding for education, labor and family assistance — the first of the nine budget bills expected to be finalized by the end of next week. The Senate was expected to follow suit by late Wednesday afternoon.

The bill included more than \$1 billion for Buffalo city schools, an increase of nearly \$43.7 million from last year; nearly \$172 million for Niagara Falls city schools, an increase of \$4.3 million; \$101.5 million for Jamestown schools, an increase of nearly \$2.7 million; \$79.8 million for Lockport schools, an increase of \$32.6 million; \$74.5 million for Williamsville schools, an increase of \$2.4 million; and nearly \$68.5 million for Lackawanna schools, an increase of more than \$1.8 million, officials said.

The Lackawanna figure was based on preliminary data.

The budget included \$81.8 million for Kenmore schools, an increase of \$30,400; nearly \$78 million for West Seneca schools, an increase of nearly \$3.8 million; \$49 million for Dunkirk schools, an increase of nearly \$850,000; \$42.2 million for Olean schools, an increase of \$1.3 million; \$41.6 million for Sweet Home schools, an increase of \$1.5 million; \$41.3 million for Cheektowaga schools, an increase of more than \$2 million; more than \$39 million for Batavia schools, an increase of \$2.2 million; more than \$39.1 million for Albion schools, an increase of more than \$1 million; nearly \$36.3 million for Hamburg schools, an increase of \$1.4 million; and \$32.3 million for Amherst schools, an increase of nearly \$856,000.

The budget bill will delay the implementation of mandated electric buses by five years. In 2022, state leaders passed a budget to require school districts to buy or lease the new zero-emission fleets by July 1, 2027, and have an entirely electric fleet by July 1, 2035. The new deadlines for districts are expected to be July 1, 2032, to acquire the buses, and July 1, 2040, to have an entirely electric fleet.

Retired prosecutor urges county to nix settlements

DAN HERBECK
News Staff Reporter

A former prosecutor who helped put John H. Walker and the late Darryl A. Boyd in prison after a 1976 homicide is now urging Erie County not to pay settlements of more than \$21 million to Walker and to Boyd's estate.

Walker and Boyd, arrested at age 16, each spent more than two decades in state prison before a judge set aside their murder convictions on legal grounds in 2021.

After federal trials in Rochester last year, juries found that both men had been wrongfully prosecuted for murder by the Erie County District Attorney's Office. In April, one jury awarded \$28 million to Walker.

In November, a different jury awarded \$80 million to the family of Boyd, who died of cancer in February 2025.

Rather than fight an appeal, the county agreed to pay Walker \$21 million in a settlement, which has

not been paid yet and would use up most of the county's year-end surplus for 2025. No settlement has been reached with Boyd's estate.

If the county pays the \$21 million, it will be the largest lawsuit settlement ever paid in the county's history. And the Boyd settlement — based on the jury's \$80 million verdict — could potentially be much higher.

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LIBBY MARCH, BUFFALO NEWS

Norine Dunnigan checks her election ballot during the School Board and budget vote on Tuesday at Williamsville North High School.

School budgets fail in five WNY districts

Leaders reassessing outcome, considering their next steps

BEN TSUJIMOTO AND STEPHEN T. WATSON
News Staff Reporters

On Grand Island, an apparent backlash to rising taxes and household costs, combined with a campaign to bring opponents to the polls, led to the defeat of the proposed school budget.

In Randolph, a "perfect storm" of circumstances — including the reassessment of land in Allegany State Park — put the district in a precarious position, and a day-of-recruitment of the Amish community put the nail in the budget's coffin.

In Cuba-Rushford, a parent who voted no on the budget and recruited dozens of others said her decision was driven by dissatisfaction with district spending, including substantial raises to administrators.

In Lyndonville, there's no obvious reason why the budget failed, the district superintendent said, citing a broader issue at play.

"School budgets are the only budgets that

New York State taxpayers get to vote on," said Heather Lyon, Lyndonville's leader. "So when there might be things taking place at a state level, at a national level, or even closer to home at a local level — that really are not coming from the school — people can express their feelings about that in a school budget vote."

In short, there was no specific reason why five school budgets in Western New York were voted down, but there were similarities among the quintet.

With the exception of Grand Island, the only district budget among 38 in Erie and Niagara counties to fail, the others came from small, rural communities.

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■ **INSIDE:** A breakdown of each district's votes / **Page A6**

ANALYSIS

IRS 'forever barred' from auditing Trump, family in new deal

AARON BLAKE
CNN

President Trump is a studied beneficiary of the Overton window. That is, the many extreme and norm-busting things he does, over time, make things that would once be scandalous appear more mundane and unremarkable.

Such is the case with Trump's wrangling of billions of dollars from the federal government for an "anti-weaponization" fund. The president tried to get the federal government he controls to pay him \$10 billion, but he's ultimately settling for \$1.776 billion for people (read: Trump's allies) who

claim they were unfairly targeted by the previous administration.

The agreement explicitly says none of the money will go to Trump or his family personally. So, it might not seem like an especially big deal. The government pays parties it has wronged all the time.

But it is a big deal — and highly problematic, for a number of reasons.

New details quietly released Tuesday reinforce why.

The government, without any fanfare or even announcement, quietly added some very serious terms to the settlement that

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Partly sunny and cool. High 59, low 41. Details on Page B8



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Settlements

From A1

Timothy J. Drury, a former assistant district attorney who worked on the prosecutions of Boyd and Walker in the 1970s, strongly criticized the county's handling of the cases during two interviews with The Buffalo News.

Drury, who became a state judge until his retirement, alleged that Buffalo lawyers from Lippes Mathias, a prominent law firm that was hired by the county to fight the two lawsuits, "badly mishandled" the federal trials.

"Based on what I saw when I testified as a witness, and based on reading the transcripts twice, I think the trial lawyers were incompetent," Drury said. "They did a poor job, and now the county taxpayers are paying for it."

In a statement to The Buffalo News, Lippes Mathias defended the law firm's work.

"While we understand that Mr. Drury is frustrated with the outcome," the statement said, in part, "it is unfortunate that he feels the need to disparage the reputations of others in an effort to protect his own."

Meanwhile, the high financial burden of recent judgments against the county was questioned earlier this month by County Legislator Jeanne Vinal. County Attorney Jeremy Toth told her initial jury verdicts and attorneys' fees for Walker and Boyd, prior to settlements, have amounted to roughly \$115 million.

Vinal also said she was troubled that the county's outside lawyers called no expert witnesses in the Boyd case, in which the jury returned an \$80 million judgment against the county.

"It's frustrating to me, as a legislator, that we don't seem to have control over the contract for hiring the law firm that's going to be defending, the price of hiring the law firm, and other things," she said.

Sharp words on all sides

Drury has both given and received harsh words regarding the handling of the Walker and Boyd cases.

"In my opinion, the attorneys the county hired were in over their heads," said Drury, who made similar comments in an earlier interview with WGRZ. "I still believe that the murder cases in 1976 were handled properly and that the county shouldn't be paying anything."

Drury sent a letter to Toth, urging him not to pay any settlements to Walker or the Boyd estate and to resume litigation on both cases.

The county so far has paid Lippes Mathias almost \$2.1 million for the firm's work on the Walker and Boyd cases, according to information provided by the Comptroller's Office to The News. Over the past five years, the same records show, the law firm has received about \$16 million in legal business from Erie County, mostly for work on foreclosure cases.

The Lippes Mathias law firm and Joel B. Rudin, lead attorney for Walker and the Boyd estate, reacted with criticism aimed at Drury. Toth said the Lippes Mathias firm has worked for the county on many cases over the years and "has saved the county several hundred million dollars in the past 15 years."

Lippes Mathias said in its statement, "Mr. Drury's presence at



LIBBY MARCH, NEWS FILE PHOTO

Retired State Supreme Court Judge Timothy J. Drury at his home in Amherst in 2022. Drury, a former assistant district attorney who worked on the prosecutions of John H. Walker and Darryl A. Boyd in the 1970s, strongly criticized the county's handling of the cases.

the trial was limited to those times he was testifying after being called as a witness by the plaintiff. He did not participate in or observe the balance of either trial."

If Drury is looking for someone to blame for the two verdicts against the county, "he should look in the mirror," said Rudin in reaction to the former judge's remarks.

"Two juries spent many hours listening to Mr. Drury testify. Both juries unanimously found him entirely unworthy of belief, and concluded that he so pervasively violated John Walker's and Darryl Boyd's constitutional rights, and so destroyed their lives, that they are entitled to \$108 million in damages," Rudin said. Rudin added that Drury's testimony was "disastrous" for the county.

Drury responded: "I served as a judge for 36 years, and I know good and bad lawyering when I see it. I was not there for the whole trials, but I read those transcripts very carefully."

Drury disagreed with claims that he was a bad witness for the county.

"I still believe very strongly that the actions we took in prosecuting these two defendants were proper under the law," Drury said.

Winding legal history

Homicide detectives from the Buffalo police arrested Boyd, Walker and two other teenagers in the robbery and killing of William Crawford, 62, outside his Fillmore Avenue home on a snowy night in January 1976. A fifth teen, also an alleged accomplice, was given immunity by prosecutors in exchange for his testimony against the others.

Three of the teens were convicted of murder in separate trials in 1977: Boyd, Walker and the late Darryn Gibson. A fourth teenager, Floyd Martin, was acquitted.

Walker spent 22 years in prison; Boyd 28 years; and Gibson, who died of an illness in 2009, 32 years.

Boyd told a News reporter that he and his friends were "easy targets" for police because they had been in trouble before. But he and



DEREK GEE, NEWS FILE PHOTO

Darryl A. Boyd, left, and John H. Walker Sr. each served more than two decades in state prison after being wrongly convicted as 16-year-olds for a 1976 robbery and murder. Boyd died last year. Walker is due to receive a \$21 million settlement.

Walker vehemently denied that their friends had anything to do with Crawford's death.

Buffalo defense lawyer Paul J. Cambria took on their case in 2020 and convinced State Supreme Court Justice Christopher J. Burns to set aside the convictions.

After the DA's Office decided not to retry the decades-old case, Rudin - assisted by the Buffalo law firm of Hoover & Durland - became the attorney for Walker and Boyd. They filed lawsuits in 2022, seeking a total of \$224 million from Erie County and the City of Buffalo.

Buffalo police "fabricated evidence" against the teenagers, ignoring much stronger evidence against an adult suspect who had been drinking with Crawford that night, Rudin alleged in court papers. The lawsuits accused the DA's Office - headed by the late Edward C. Cosgrove at the time of the Crawford murder - of knowingly prosecuting the teens with faulty evidence.

In late 2024, the City of Buffalo agreed to pay \$4.35 million each to

Boyd and Walker to settle their lawsuits. But county officials refused to settle, instead hiring Lippes Mathias to take the cases to trial.

"At one point, the county could have settled both of our lawsuits for \$18 million each," Rudin told The News. "Despite the very strong evidence we had, they decided to go to trial against us."

Retired Buffalo attorney David G. Henry is another former assistant DA who worked on the prosecutions of the teenagers. He also testified in the two federal wrongful prosecution trials in Rochester's federal court. Henry said he was in the courtroom for most of the Boyd trial.

Henry said he agrees with Drury that Walker and Boyd were properly convicted of murder. He said he disagreed with Burns' decision overturning the verdicts and disagreed with the jury verdicts and awards in the two Rochester cases.

But Henry declined to say whether he agrees or disagrees with Drury's criticism of the trial attorneys from Lippes Mathias.

Lippes Mathias was founded in 1965 and has attorneys in 17 cities. According to its website, the law firm has many highly rated attorneys with a wide range of expertise, including government and corporate work.

Toth, the county attorney, called the law firm "one of the finest law firms in the state." Despite the outcome of the Rochester cases, he said Lippes Mathias, in recent years, has done excellent work for the county.

"I tell people that a defense law firm is like an offensive lineman with the Bills," Toth said. "Nobody notices them unless something goes wrong."

News staff reporter Sandra Tan contributed to this article.



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