

## **New year brings new New York laws**

### **Battling opioids, raising minimum wage**

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ALBANY - A new year brings new laws in New York, including stronger treatment options for opioid addiction and increasing the state's minimum wage.

Many of the state's new laws each year are pegged to the start of the calendar year, and in the case of the higher minimum wage, it began Saturday, Dec. 31.

The state's minimum wage is increasing from \$9 an hour to \$11 an hour in New York City, and to \$10.50 for businesses in the city with fewer than 10 employees.

On Long Island and in Westchester County, the increase is from \$9 to \$10 per hour; while the rest of the state's minimum wage is rising from \$9 to \$9.70 per hour.

"No one who works full time should be condemned to a life of poverty," Gov. Andrew Cuomo said in a statement Thursday.

Here's a look at the key new laws:

### **Heroin-fighting laws**

The state has passed a series of new laws in recent years to fight a surge in heroin and opioid addiction, and several of them take effect Jan. 1.

"We have removed artificial barriers that prevented New Yorkers from receiving the help they need and put into place new safeguards to get these drugs off the street," Cuomo said in a statement.

A law will end the requirement of needing prior insurance authorization in order to go immediately into an inpatient treatment facility — something lawmakers and health care advocates said was an impediment to getting immediate care for people in need.

There are other laws associated with medical treatment for opioid addiction that also go into effect, such as requiring insurers to pay for medicine to treat substance abuse in emergency situations and expanding access to naloxone — a drug that can reverse the effects of an overdose.

"This legislative package removes many of the burdensome insurance coverage barriers keeping people from treatment," Sen. Terrence Murphy,

RYorktown, Westchester County, who sponsored many of the bills, said in a statement.

### **Health care laws**

The state's public health law is being updated so newborns are covered retroactively under the Child Health Plus program.

The state-run program had not made newborns eligible for as much as 30 days, creating a insurance gap. The new law will make newborns covered starting on the first day of the month they were born.

Cuomo has pushed for efforts to promote breast-cancer screenings after his partner, TV chef Sandra Lee, was diagnosed with the disease in 2015.

A new law will require 210 hospitals and hospital extension clinics to add four additional morning, evening or weekend hours each week for screenings. Insurers will be prohibited from charging copays for mammograms.

Another component will allow New York City public employees to take up to four hours of excused leave per year for breast cancer screening, consistent with a law on the books for public employees in the rest of the state.

"I can't tell you how many women have said, 'I just can't get there because I have to work, I have to take care of the kids,'" Cuomo told reporters in June.

In another law taking effect on New Year's Day, the state is encouraging New Yorkers to become organ donors.

All applicants for health insurance through the state's exchange will be provided space on the application to sign up for the Donate Life Registry.

### **Support for veterans, farmers**

A tax credit is being extended until Jan. 1, 2019, for businesses who hire a veteran returning home from military service for a full-time job for at least one year.

The credit is equal to 10 percent of wages paid, with a maximum of \$5,000 per veteran. The credit grows to 15 percent if the veteran is also disabled, to a maximum of \$15,000.

Another law will require local socialservice agencies and nonprofits that receive state funding to inquire as to whether an applicant for programs is a veteran, ensuring the person is aware of state benefits available.

As for farmers, they will get a tax credit for each employee that works 500 or more hours each year. The credit is \$250 per employee.

In a tax credit for businesses, the capital base calculation rate for manufacturers will be reduced to 0.085 percent, and other corporate franchise taxpayers' rate will drop to 0.1 percent.

## **Government transparency**

There are a few steps that the Legislature took to increase openness to the public.

One law requires the state Board of Regents, which oversees education policy, to give further notice of its meetings — at least seven days beforehand.

State agencies will also be required to post any proposed or revised regulations on their websites; no posting for changes are currently required.

## **Consumer protections**

The state budget approved April 1 included a provision that goes into effect Jan. 1 that allows homeowners to get a reduction on their homeowners' insurance if they take a course in natural disaster preparedness or home safety.

Also, a law that takes effect Jan. 17 will require insurance companies to include a disclosure in repair estimates that informs “insured motorists of the right to have their vehicle repaired in a shop of their choice,” the state Senate said in a statement.

There are also new laws to protect police.

Starting Jan. 17, the “Move-Over Law” — which requires drivers to slow down and move away from an emergency vehicles on the side of the road — is being expanded to include more vehicles.

The law will soon extend to any vehicle displaying a blue or green light, such as volunteer firefighters and volunteer ambulance workers who are assisting people.

Also, a law Jan. 1 will require vehicles' window tint to be part of the annual vehicle inspection.

The glass can't be beyond 30 percent of light transmittance to pass inspection.

And the state is making it easier to save for college.

Taxpayers can, starting Jan. 1, elect to shift a portion or all of their state income- tax refunds to a 529 college savings account.

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**GOV. ANDREW CUOMO**

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