

**Daily News, Tuesday, September 7, 1999**

## **NEW YORKERS NEED A BETTER SALES TAX BREAK**

While New York City and New York State enjoy surpluses in their annual budgets, the average New York working family struggles to make ends meet in one of the world's most expensive locales.

Escalating rents and increasing prices on just about everything else make the financial solvency of New Yorkers a daily challenge, even in this era of two-income families. Rather than simply making a philosophic statement, however, let's talk about what can actually be done to give a real break to the working man and woman.

Now, there's not much that government can do about things like the ever-increasing cost of movie tickets. However, when it comes to the basic purchases we have no choice but to make, our legislators, mayor, and governor can provide significant help with a few strokes of the pen.

Let's eliminate the sales tax on all those necessities we have to buy for personal hygiene and essential household maintenance. In fact, it is really difficult to justify the ongoing imposition of sales taxes on items such as soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, home cleaning products, laundry detergent, paper towels, napkins, toilet paper, tampons, sanitary napkins, deodorant, diapers, sheets and mattresses. Each and every time we check out of a supermarket, we pay taxes on these items. Most of the time, however, we don't immediately realize how much tax we paid on them until we get home and review our receipt.

This week, a temporary exemption provides relief from most sales taxes on clothing under \$500. Next March, a permanent elimination of the sales tax on clothing under \$110 will go into effect. Unfortunately, neither adequately addresses the fiscal needs of most New York families.

As any mother purchasing a winter coat for her child will note, even a modest garment can cost over \$110. That amount should be increased--to \$500 for both shoes and clothes. Why that figure? Not only does it provide a safety margin for common purchases, but it will prevent the hemorrhaging of retail sales--and the jobs they provide-- from our city to New Jersey.

But clothing is only one of life's necessities. Now that there is increased recognition of the problems resulting from sales taxes on clothes, it is clearly time to stop the burden placed on modest budgets by the sales taxes on life's other necessities.

The distribution of that burden is completely inequitable. Shoppers of limited means will spend a greater percentage of their whole salary on the necessities than the well-to-do; therefore, the burden placed on them by the tax is far greater. Federal, state and local

income tax codes seek to deal with problems of equity by providing mechanisms such as personal exemptions and graduated rates.

New York's hard working families are the foundation of our city's strength. Is it fair to tax them each time they wash their dishes, brush their teeth, or take a bath? That's just plain silly, and it's time for the practice to end. I urge City Hall and Albany to give them a much-deserved break by eliminating the regressive sales taxes on life's necessities.