

# Focus Lesson 2

## State Government

**What does New York State government do?**

### VOCABULARY

- democracy
- checks and balances
- budget
- legislative branch
- bill
- veto
- executive branch
- judicial branch

### VOCABULARY STRATEGY

**Root Words** The root words of **democracy** mean "rule of or by the people." Why do people call the United States government a democracy?

### READING STRATEGY

**Summarize** Use the chart below to list the three branches of government and the jobs each branch does.


**S**ome day soon, you will be a New York State voter! This is one of a citizen's most important responsibilities. You will have to decide who will get your vote to represent you on your city council and in Albany. What qualities would a person need to earn your vote?

### Making New York Work

The first New York State constitution was approved in 1777. The state constitution in use today was written in 1938 and changed in 2002. Our state government is a **democracy**, a system in which citizens vote for their government representatives.

The state government is made up of three parts. Each part, or branch, has different duties and powers. No branch has all the power. This system is called **checks and balances**. The power of each branch of government is checked, or stopped, and balanced by the powers of the other parts.

### How State Government Works

The state government provides services to all people in New York. For example, a driver's license comes from the state

New York voters protest during a political convention in New York City.



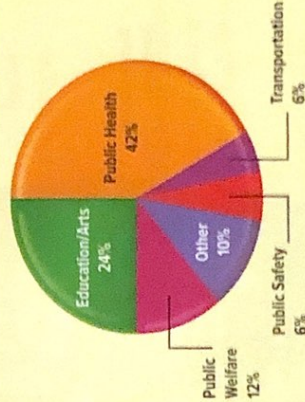
government. The main offices of all state services are located in Albany, the state capital. However, most state offices have branches in every county and in large cities.

In 2014 New York State spent more than 130 billion dollars. This money paid for services, programs, workers, parks, highways, and other state expenses. Most of the money comes from taxes paid by New Yorkers. The government makes a **budget** (BUJ it), or plan for spending its money. The chart below shows you how New York spent some of its budget in 2014.

### QUICK CHECK

Why must the state government be careful about the amount of money it spends? *Make Inferences*

### Total Cost of New York State Services



Source: Office of the State Comptroller, 2014

### CHART Skill

Which state service costs the most?

## ● The Three Branches of State Government

Three branches of government in New York work together to run the state. One branch makes the laws, another branch carries out the laws, and the third branch interprets, or makes decisions about which laws fit within the state constitution.

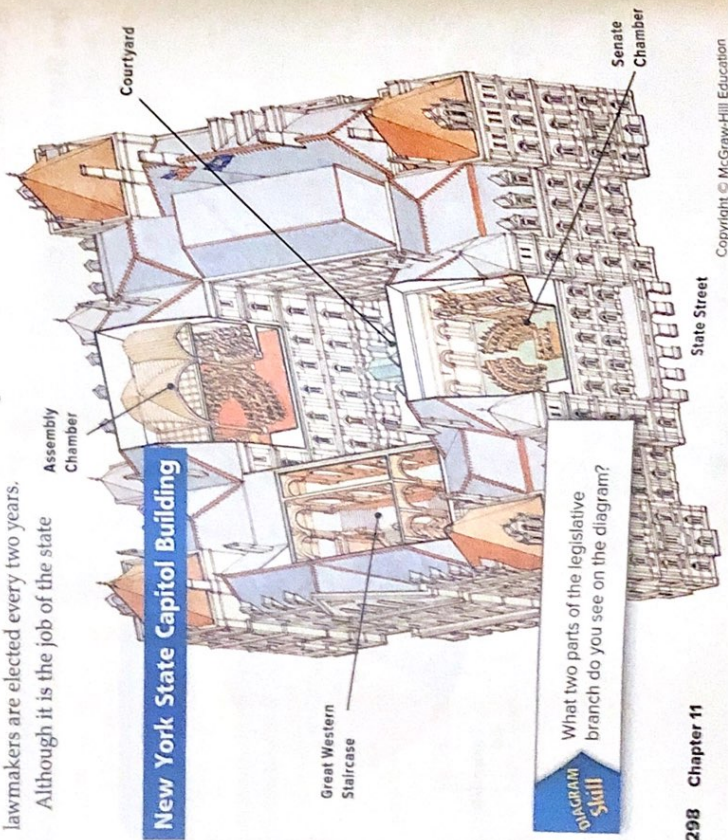
### Making Laws

The **legislative** (LEJ is lay tiv) **branch** makes the laws. It is made up of two parts: the State Senate, which has 62 members; and the State Assembly, which has 150 members. Voters elect both state senators and assembly members. All state lawmakers are elected every two years.

Although it is the job of the state

legislature to make laws, anyone can suggest a law—the governor, members of the state legislature, or citizens of New York. Each suggestion must be turned into a **bill**, or a written idea for a law. The bill is introduced to the state legislature. Only members of the Senate or the Assembly can introduce a bill. After a bill is introduced and discussed, the Senate and the Assembly vote. If the bill is passed by both parts of the legislative branch, it goes to the governor. The governor can sign the bill and make it a law. The governor can also **veto** the law. Veto means to refuse to approve a bill. Two-thirds of the members of both houses of the legislature would have to pass the law again to overcome the governor's veto.

## New York State Capitol Building



What two parts of the legislative branch do you see on the diagram?

## PRIMARY SOURCES

from the speech by Nancy Calhoun • August 1, 2005

### Preserving Our History, Ensuring Our Future

“... New York has a rich and diverse history... Our local governments and communities are the backbone of this system, and the grants announced today ensure our history will be properly saved and stored for use by future generations.”

**preserve** to keep  
**ensure** to make sure of

### Write About It!

Why does Nancy Calhoun think it is important to protect local records in New York State?

Look at the Primary Source above.

Assembly member Nancy Calhoun explains her bill to help local governments protect their records, which became a state law in 2005.

### Carrying out Laws

The **executive** (eg ZEK yoo tiv) **branch** is the part of government that makes sure that laws are followed. It also plans the state's budget. The executive branch has different departments. The Department of Education licenses teachers, tests students, and decides where to open new schools.

The head of the executive branch is the governor, who is elected every four years. Being governor is hard work. Mario

Cuomo served as governor of New York from 1983 until 1994, had in his first seven days in office:

“... given two major speeches, met personally with record numbers of visitors and legislators... appointed a Court of Appeals judge... and began the hard process of preparing a budget....”

### Interpreting the Laws

The **judicial** (joo DI shul) **branch** decides whether someone has broken the law. It also interprets the laws of New York State.

**QUICK CHECK** What are the three branches of government and what does each one do? *Summarize*

## Explaining the Law

The judicial branch works for justice. This means that judges uphold the law and try to be fair in the way people are treated and decisions are made.

### State Courts

The most powerful court in New York is the Court of Appeals. It is made up of seven judges who serve for fourteen years. Decisions made by a judge in a lower court, can be reviewed by the Court of Appeals. Judges in the Court of Appeals decide whether decisions made in lower courts are correct.

The Court of Appeals judges are picked by the governor and approved by the Senate. This is a good example of the system of checks and balances. If the Senate doesn't approve the governor's selection, he or she must choose again.

Lower court judges are elected to their positions.

Courts often reach decisions with the help of a **jury**. A jury is a group of twelve ordinary citizens who are chosen to decide on a case in a court of law. More than 600,000 people serve as jurors each year in New York. The jury system is one of the important traditions of American democracy.

**QUICK CHECK** What is one example of the system of checks and balances in action? *Main Idea and Details*

### What You Learned

- A** New York State has three branches of government in Albany.
- B** The three branches of state government are the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.
- C** The courts and juries work for justice.

## Focus Lesson Review

- 1. Focus Question** What does New York State government do?
- 2. Vocabulary** Write about the job of the governor of New York using the vocabulary terms below.
  - bill
  - executive branch
  - budget
  - veto
- 3. Citizenship** What are two ways citizens can help their state government?
- 4. Critical Thinking Make Inferences** Why might it be difficult for state leaders to make a budget?

- 5. Reading Strategy Summarize**

Describe three powers of the New York State governor.

- 6. Write About THE BIG IDEA**

Write a paragraph describing how state government can help a state to grow.

- 7. Reading Primary Sources**

*"Should things go wrong at any time, the people will set them to rights by the peaceable exercise of their elective rights."*

— Thomas Jefferson

Who does Jefferson believe will direct the government?

## BIOGRAPHY

Focus on Justice

# Oscar Garcia Rivera 1900–1969

Oscar Garcia Rivera was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. He was the top student at his junior high school and was the president of his high school class.

Although Rivera had a comfortable life in Puerto Rico, he moved to New York in 1926 to become a lawyer. He wanted to bring justice to poor people.

He graduated from St. John's University School of Law in Queens, New York. He opened three law firms in New York City, including one that offered free legal services. Rivera helped Spanish-speaking employees of the City Hall Post Office to join their union. He spent his life defending the rights of New York workers.

Rivera became the first Puerto Rican elected to public office in the United States. He was elected to the New York State Assembly in 1937. He got government services for an area of New York City called Spanish Harlem, which other representatives had ignored.

*"History is our best teacher. We have no way of foreseeing [knowing] the future except by studying the events of the past."*

### Write About It!

Why did Oscar Garcia Rivera want to move to New York?

## The Life of Oscar Garcia Rivera

