

# Liz Krueger

New York State Senate | 28th District



April 2014

## Message from Liz...

Another budget season has come to a close, which in terms of the process, resembled so many that have come before. Key decisions were made behind closed doors by the governor and majority leaders of both the Senate and Assembly, followed by a marathon session to pass the results of those secret negotiations. As you might expect from such a process, there are some real problems with a number of the pieces in the final product, but the good news is that this budget did include a number of very positive things for New Yorkers as well.

I'll start with the positive. Some of the most important issues addressed in the budget include:

- \$300 million in funding for **universal pre-kindergarten** in New York City, and an additional overall increase of \$1.1 billion, or 5.35 percent, in statewide school aid, with the option of using a portion of that funding for afterschool programs. Mayor de Blasio has indicated that this funding will allow him to go forward with both his universal pre-K initiative and an expansion of middle-school afterschool programs.
- An increase in the **Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE)** income eligibility limit to \$50,000. I have carried legislation to do this since I first entered the Senate, so I'm extremely happy that it has finally happened. The budget language requires the New York City council to sign off on this change, and only authorizes this expansion for the next two years, but I am hopeful that this change will be made permanent in the future. It will make a huge difference for many seniors in my district and throughout New York City who are at risk of losing their homes due to high rental costs. While I can't overstate how pleased I am with this change, unfortunately the Disabled Rent Increase Exemption was not similarly expanded. I am working with advocates to rectify this oversight. If you want to know more about SCRIE, see the section below in the "Community Spotlight" section, which offers additional details.

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- An increase in the income eligibility limit for the **Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC)** program to \$75,000 for individuals and \$100,000 for couples. This change will help many seniors address their high prescription drug costs.
- Creation of a **Basic Health Plan** which will provide additional low-cost health insurance options for low and moderate income New Yorkers. This program will actually save New York State money, since most of the funding will come from the federal government.
- New rules governing the handling of **out-of-network insurance claims** that will protect patients from receiving surprise medical bills and require that when there is a dispute over out-of-network charges, that dispute will be resolved between the insurer and the doctor, without putting the patient in the middle.
- An agreement to ensure New York City is able to offer **housing subsidies to move homeless New Yorkers into permanent housing**.
- A **2% cost of living increase for direct care workers** who provide care to vulnerable seniors and adults and children with disabilities. This increase has been promised for years, but each year was taken out of the budget to save money. We rely on these relatively low-wage workers to care for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and I am glad that they will finally get this well-deserved pay increase.
- A change in policy **allowing people on public assistance to seek bachelor's degrees** and have their education count as their work/training activity. College is still, by far, the most successful model for moving whole families up and out of poverty.

There were also many problems with the final budget, but I will highlight only three here.

The first, the **failure to pass meaningful campaign finance reform or create a full public campaign financing system**, is discussed in greater detail in the Policy Spotlight later in this newsletter. For now I'd just note that while there are a few new provisions in the budget that strengthen the investigatory powers of the Board of Elections and enhance penalties for corruption, these changes are undermined by the unwarranted dismantling of the Moreland Commission to Investigate Public Corruption. I am deeply concerned that the work the commission was doing will now be ended without proper follow-up on its investigations. Disturbingly, the Governor's weak ethics reform deal may actually send us backward rather than forward, certainly many good-government groups feel this way. I spoke out against this package on the floor of the Senate. You can watch the video at: <http://www.nysenate.gov/video/2014/apr/02/sen-krueger-failure-pass-real-campaign-finance-reform-2014-budget>.

Another major policy debacle is the **language undermining mayoral and local control over New York City schools** by imposing new rules and privileges advantaging charter schools. New York City will now be required to co-locate or pay the rent for charter schools it may not even have a role in approving in the first place. While the details are somewhat vague, it appears the city will have little ability to reject co-location requests by charters even when they will damage existing public schools. Community School District 2, which includes my Senate District, faces severe overcrowding, with more than half of middle and elementary schools at more than 100 percent of capacity, and these problems are hardly unique to my district. The language in the budget will upset the balance between charters

and other public schools and undermine education for the 95 percent of public school students who do not attend charters.

The final major issue I have with this year's budget has to do with tax policy. Once again, **the changes in taxes included in this budget are primarily regressive**. Changes to the corporate and bank tax will cost the state over \$1.5 billion in revenue over the next five years, with much of the benefit going to the largest banks in the state. I would not be opposed to across-the-board tax relief if it was linked to elimination of some of the more than \$7 billion annual revenue loss from targeted corporate tax breaks, incentives, and handouts which distort our current tax system so much. Unfortunately, none of those changes were included in the budget.

Furthermore, while there is property tax relief in the budget, the final budget structures this relief in a way that will ensure that the wealthiest residents outside New York City receive the greatest benefit, rather than targeting it to those with the highest tax costs relative to their income. And finally, the renter's tax credit included in the final budget is too small to provide meaningful relief to those struggling to pay their rent, with most people who are eligible for the benefit receiving an average annual benefit of just over \$50.

Overall, I would describe this budget as a fairly typical election-year product, where there is a little something for everyone, from seniors to parents to large corporate political donors. Because the state is in relatively good fiscal health, there were more resources to spread around than in recent years, and I am gratified that some extremely important programs were funded in this budget. I just wish we had done more to reform both our political system and our tax structure, as I fear that the failure to address these two areas will continue to have serious consequences for the state in the coming years.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

### **Update on Efforts to Fight the Proposed Marine Transfer Station:**

East Side elected officials and our new Borough President have held meetings with the de Blasio administration regarding our strong objections to the East 91st Street MTS, and recently penned a follow up letter to the de Blasio administration expressing our continued objections to any plans to proceed with the construction of this facility. In the letter, we outlined a series of questions regarding the proposed operation of the facility and its impact on the surrounding community, none of which have been adequately addressed by either this or the previous mayoral administration. We believe that the failure to address these questions is illustrative of the lack of appropriate review of the proposed operation of the MTS.

Last month I also wrote to the New York State Department of Environmental Protection, urging them to require a revised Environmental Impact Statement for the MTS before they consider renewal of the permit for the facility. Material conditions at the site have changed since the first permit was issued, particularly with regard to revised flood plain maps and the potential risks of storm surge demonstrated by Superstorm Sandy. The design of the facility has also been modified significantly. These changes must be subject to a full environmental review.

I will continue to work with the community and my colleagues to oppose the East 91st Street MTS, as it would not solve the waste problems for our city, but would create extremely dangerous and unhealthy conditions for the surrounding community. If you have not seen the “Talking Trash” report, please take a look to learn more about the issue and what you can do to help: [http://pledge2protectnyc.org/P2P\\_report-talking\\_trash.pdf](http://pledge2protectnyc.org/P2P_report-talking_trash.pdf).

### **Report on Senator Liz Krueger's Roundtable for Boomers & Seniors:**

One hundred boomers and seniors attended my March Roundtable for Boomers and Seniors on the topic of Ageism & Advocacy. When attendees sat down at their respective tables, coffee and bagels in hand, they found a note waiting for them that read: “What Has Been Your Experience With Ageism?” Responses began slowly, but soon there were hands up throughout the room

Those attending then heard from two experienced “aging advocates”; Alice Fisher, MSW, my office’s Director of Community Outreach, and Bobbie Sackman, MSW, the Director of Public Policy for the Council of Senior Centers and Services. Alice spoke about the sociological and cultural implications of ageism; while Bobbie was able to demonstrate how ageism is at the heart of policy decisions that affect older adults.

With the aging tsunami upon us, it is imperative that NYC and state develop an age equality agenda – both in funding and public policy. Bobbie discussed the impact of ageism

on public policy decisions and city and state budgets for aging services. While some legislators are supportive of aging services and other aging issues, older New Yorkers are often left out of city and state priorities. For example, there are 7000 elderly people statewide on waiting lists for case management, meals-on-wheels and other services because state funding hasn't been increased in over a decade, while the city's Department for the Aging has suffered \$55 million in cuts over the past seven years.

Older adults must be able to create their own space to talk about the impact of ageism on their lives without being accused of taking resources away from young people. As our society adapts to longer lifespans and shifting demographics, these are issues of fundamental fairness, equity, and justice that will not go away and must be addressed.

*If you are interested in starting your own or participating in a Consciousness Raising Group to share and explore your feelings about ageism, please contact Alice Fisher or Sheila Roher at [confrontingageism@gmail.com](mailto:confrontingageism@gmail.com).*

### **Pre-K Seat List Now Available:**

New full-day, public school pre-kindergarten (pre-K) programs will be available this September. For a list of these new full-day options, please see the New York City Schools Pre-K Expansion Guide, which is available at <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/0A11B651-FEDC-4317-9DEC-57ED5024EB77/0/PreKExpansionGuideFINALfullwebversion.pdf>.

The deadline to submit your public school pre-k application is Wednesday, April 23. If you already submitted an application and want to apply for one of these new programs, you can update your program choices through your online application account or by submitting a new paper application at an Enrollment Office.

If you have any questions, please contact [ES\\_Enrollment@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:ES_Enrollment@schools.nyc.gov) or visit the pre-k website at <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/PreK/>.

### **Medicare Broadens Coverage of Skilled Care:**

As of January 2014, Medicare recipients will not have to show improvement in order to receive coverage for skilled care. That means Medicare now will pay for physical therapy, occupational and speech therapy, nursing care and other services for beneficiaries with chronic diseases like multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's or Alzheimer's disease in order to maintain their condition and prevent deterioration. This change may have the most far-reaching impact on seniors who want to avoid institutional care. People with chronic conditions may be able to get the care they need to living in their own homes for as long as they need it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, please see the New York Times New Old Age Blog, dated March 25, 2014, by Susan Jaffe, titled "A Quiet 'Sea Change' in Medicare." <http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/03/25/a-quiet-sea-change-in-medicare>.

**SCRIE Income Eligibility Limit Increases to \$50,000 as of July 1, 2014:**

As mentioned above, the final budget included an expansion of the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) to cover seniors with incomes of up to \$50,000 as of July 1, 2014, pending City Council approval. If you are 62 years or older, live in a rent-regulated apartment, and have an annual household income of \$50,000 or less, you may be eligible for SCRIE, which will exempt you from most future rent increases. If you need assistance with your SCRIE application or have questions about eligibility, Lenox Hill Neighborhood offers a SCRIE Assistance Project that serves seniors citywide. If you currently have SCRIE, remember that you must recertify for SCRIE every one to two years. To find out if you are eligible, or for assistance applying or recertifying for SCRIE, please call (212) 744-5022 ext. 1392.

**Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Monthly Workshops:**

The Legal Advocacy and Organizing Project at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House is sponsoring monthly workshops on a variety of issues. The May workshops will deal with Tenants' Rights. Dates for the workshops are as follows:

- Thursday, May 1, 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. at the Center at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 343 East 70th Street.
- Monday, May 5, 11:00 a.m. to Noon at the Senior Center at St Peter's Church, 619 Lexington Avenue at 54th Street.

**New Bereavement Support Group Sponsored by SPOP:**

Service Program for Older People (SPOP) is now accepting participants for a Bereavement Support Group starting in April. The group meets on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and will convene for ten 90-minute sessions. SPOP offers bereavement support groups for adults (55+) who have lost a spouse or partner. The peer-led groups are offered free of charge and are supervised by a clinical social worker. For information or referrals, please call Carola Chase, LCSW at 212-787-7120 x506.

**Free Tax Preparation Assistance:**

I encourage you to take advantage of these services, which can save you money and ensure you avoid getting caught in "Refund Anticipation Loan" scams that many for-profit tax preparers engage in. AARP is sponsoring a number of locations on the East Side, and there are no age or income restrictions to receive this assistance. Here are some sites in the 28th Senate District where you can get free assistance with your taxes:

58th Street Library, 127 East 58th Street

Telephone: [212-759-7358](tel:212-759-7358)

Site Hours: Wednesday 11:00am to 3:00pm and Saturday, 10:30am-2:30pm

67th Street Library, 328 East 67th Street

Telephone: [212-734-1717](tel:212-734-1717)

Site Hours: Friday, 10:30am-2:30pm

96th Street Library, 328 East 67th Street  
Telephone: [212-289-0908](tel:212-289-0908)  
Site Hours: Monday, 10:00am-2:00pm

Community Church of New York, 40 East 35th Street  
Telephone: [212-683-4988](tel:212-683-4988)  
Site Hours: Thursday, 10:00am-2:00pm

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street  
Telephone: [212-744-5022](tel:212-744-5022)  
Site Hours: Wednesday, 10:30am-2:30pm

Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL), 188 Madison Ave @ 42nd Street  
Telephone: [646-315-7703](tel:646-315-7703)  
Site Hours: Wednesday, 9:30am-2:30pm.

Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center, 415 East 93rd Street  
Telephone: [212-360-7620](tel:212-360-7620)  
Site Hours: Friday, 10:30am-3:00pm

Stein Senior Center, 204415 East 23rd Street  
Telephone: [646-395-8083](tel:646-395-8083)  
Site Hours: Thursday, 9:30am-2:30pm

Webster Branch Library, 1465 York Avenue  
Telephone: [212-288-5049](tel:212-288-5049)  
Site Hours: Monday, 11:30am-3:00pm

### **Filing Complaints Against Tax Preparers:**

New York State is one of only four states that regulates tax preparers. The State Department of Taxation and Finance Office of Professional Responsibility oversees tax preparers, and will investigate complaints about misleading advertising, fees, or fraudulent practices. To file a complaint, call 518-530-HELP or visit <http://www.tax.ny.gov/tp/reg/opr.htm>.

### **Affordable Housing Opportunities in Manhattan:**

**Harlem West 117** is now accepting applications for 99 affordable studio, 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom apartments under construction at 24 West 117th Street in the Central Harlem neighborhood in Manhattan. Rents for these apartments range from \$491 to \$1163 depending on income, family size and unit size. To be eligible, applicants must have incomes between \$19,637 and \$58,440, depending on unit and family size. Preference will be given to Community Board 10 residents for 50% of units, mobility-impaired persons for

5% of units, visual- and/or hearing-impaired units for 2% of units, and City of New York municipal employees for 5% of units. A full description of the building and application process is available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/downloads/pdf/harlem-117-street.pdf>.

Households may elect to submit an application by one of two methods: EITHER Online OR by mail. To submit your application online now, please visit NYC Housing Connect at [www.nyc.gov/housingconnect](http://www.nyc.gov/housingconnect) and select “Apply for Housing.” To request an application by mail, mail a self-addressed envelope to: Harlem West 117th Street, PO Box 2015, New York, NY 10035.

**Completed applications must be submitted online or returned by regular mail only the post office box that will be listed on the application.** Applications must be submitted online or postmarked by May 5, 2014. Applicants who submit more than one application will be disqualified.

**Metrocard Bus and Van Schedule:**

The MTA offers Metrocard-related services throughout New York City through mobile buses and vans. Buses provide a full range of services, including applying for or refilling a Reduced-Fare MetroCard, buying or refilling a regular MetroCard, or getting answers to a MetroCard-related question. Vans sell Unlimited Ride MetroCards and Pay-Per-Ride MetroCards, and they refill MetroCards and Reduced-Fare MetroCards.

Buses and vans will be in my district on the following dates and locations:

- April 8, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- April 8, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- April 8, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- April 16, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- April 16, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- April 16, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- April 17, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- April 17, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- April 22, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- April 22, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- April 22, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- May 1, 9 - 10 am, 57 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
- May 1, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 Street and 3 Avenue – Van
- May 1, 12:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
- May 6, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- May 6, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- May 6, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus

- May 7, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- May 7, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- May 7, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus

The full mobile MetroCard schedule is available at <http://mta.info/metrocard/mms.htm>.

**Heat Season Rules:**

The City Housing Maintenance Code and State Multiple Dwelling Law require building owners to provide heat and hot water to all tenants. Building owners are required to provide hot water 365 days a year at a constant minimum temperature of 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

Between October 1st and May 31st, a period designated as “Heat Season,” building owners are also required to provide tenants with heat under the following conditions:

- Between the hours of 6AM and 10PM, if the outside temperature falls below 55 degrees, the inside temperature is required to be at least 68 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Between the hours of 10PM and 6AM, if the temperature outside falls below 40 degrees, the inside temperature is required to be at least 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Tenants who are cold in their apartments should first attempt to notify the building owner, managing agent or superintendent. If heat is not restored, the tenant should call the City’s Citizen Service Center at 311. For the hearing-impaired, the TTY number is [\(212\) 504-4115](tel:2125044115). The Center is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## **POLICY SPOTLIGHT**

### **Public Financing of Elections**

One of the biggest failures of this year's budget was the removal of a proposal that would have created a comprehensive small-donor matching funds system for state elections. I spoke out on this issue on the floor, and voted against the budget bill that dealt with campaign finance because it failed to include any meaningful public financing system and failed even to close loopholes in the existing law or lower our sky-high donation limits. Instead of a comprehensive matching-funds system or even a real compromise that fell somewhat short but could be pointed to as progress, the final budget included no significant reforms, just a phony proposal for a "pilot program" for one year and one office only that is likely to set back the fight for real reform because it will be literally impossible for the Board of Elections to implement or for candidates to participate in.

I have long been an advocate of ending the use of "soft money" and implementing a system of public financing for campaigns. Interest in reforming the processes of government is a large part of what brought me to Albany. Dating back to my early years in office, I have sponsored and cosponsored bills intended to make our state government more transparent and more truly democratic, including campaign finance reform legislation. Public financing, more frequent reporting of contributions, and stronger penalties for violating campaign finance rules are critical to ensure government that is free of undue influence by the rich and well-connected. We need a government focused on delivering policies that help all New Yorkers, not just the individuals and businesses with the means and the motivation to write big checks.

Fair elections legislation would have substantially reduced the influence of big money on political campaigns in New York State. The system proposed has already been thoroughly tested here in New York City, and has proven to be a useful reform. While it does not resolve all problems with the influence of money on elections or erase every single advantage of incumbency, it did help to open up the New York City electoral process to a range of new voices from communities often excluded from politics. Such a reform should be adopted at the state level as well.

Unfortunately, rather than implementing a public financing system like the one that operates in New York City, the final budget offers a phony "pilot program" for only one office, state comptroller, that is designed to fail. It is beyond cynical for the legislature and governor to create a public financing system but refuse to apply it to their own elections.

The comptroller-only plan would be implemented for the 2014 election, and not for any future elections. An even greater problem is that there is simply not enough time to get such a program up and running—it's already April, and with primary elections less than six months away, the Board of Elections hasn't made a single plan or written a single regulation for this entirely new program. When New York City implemented its campaign financing system, it allowed 19 months to get the program set up!

Furthermore, the State Board of Elections has a demonstrated record of failing to meet deadlines when promulgating regulations. The last time the legislature passed a significant change in campaign finance rules, it took the Board of Elections ten months past the deadline to promulgate regulations, and those changes, pertaining to independent expenditures, were much simpler than the creation of an entirely new public financing system, requiring disbursements, audits, and a range of new procedures and responsibilities. If the Board has the same issues this time around, we won't have new regulations until mid 2015, which is a little late for the 2014 elections.

I am deeply concerned that this "pilot" has been designed to crash – to the detriment of the broader, real reforms I've been fighting for.