

Liz Krueger



New York State Senate | 28th District

June 2013

Message from Liz...

It's been a very tough couple of months to be a public servant in New York State. Not because of the challenges of the work to be done, or even the recognition that I will continue to lose more battles than I win on behalf of the people of our great state.

With a wave of new indictments, including four state legislators and several municipal officials, and the revelation that federal authorities have had legislators wearing wires and recording conversations with their fellow members, the fantasy that Albany had magically turned over a new leaf has been dispelled.

As if that wasn't enough, we're now all poring over some very heavy reading -- the Joint Commission on Public Ethics ("JCOPE") report describing disgraced (and now resigned) Assemblyman Vito Lopez's disgusting, predatory conduct toward his female staff and interns -- and how the Assembly leadership knowingly failed to protect those women.

As encouraging as it's sometimes been to see Governor Cuomo corral and herd legislators into passing on-time budgets and a handful of important progressive statutes through political skill and sheer force of will, the fact is that his successes have come through sidestepping and at times managing the dysfunction and corruption endemic to our state government -- not by changing the laws or the culture that allow this behavior to continue.

So, as tremendously disheartening as it can be to see these arrests, and this new, horrendous report on Assemblyman Lopez, perhaps it can serve to refocus everyone back on the original, foundational goal that was the reason I ran for this office in the first place: changing the culture in Albany and fixing the broken system that produces these scandals.

I believe in and fight for change and progress on many key issues, from public education to environmental protection, from affordable housing to progressive reform and rationalization of our tax policy, and from healthcare accessibility to civil rights. But I believe that on all of these issues we will be better served by a legislature that is more small-'d' democratic, more resistant to the corrupting influence of special interest campaign dollars, and more accountable to the voters and attuned to the interests of all 19.5 million New Yorkers.

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That means stronger ethics laws, that means fair district lines, and, most of all, that means campaign finance reform. And while these corruption scandals should motivate us to clean up Albany, they should not distract from what a comprehensive cleanup really needs to entail.

Don't get me wrong -- I am outraged at legislators who break the law. No one holds a gun to our heads and says we have to run for office -- we volunteer ourselves as public servants and hold ourselves out as examples. We have to live up to the highest standards.

But the brazen lawbreaking recounted in the recent indictments is only the beginning. The real problem in Albany is that so much of the day-to-day corruption is legal. Read through the Times, the Daily News, or the Post in any given week since the start of the year and there's probably been a story in each paper about some legislator sponsoring a bill right before or right after receiving tens of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from a lobby supporting it. I even caught a company that lost a legal case in the state's highest court attempting to get a carve out exempting their business from the law inserted into the "revenue" section of this year's state budget after they distributed checks totaling several hundred thousand dollars to key elected officials and lobbyists. Luckily a little sunlight prevented this from happening -- this time.

Under our current ethics and campaign finance laws, this is all more or less legal. And because of how loose our campaign finance laws are, once it's received this money can be invested in speculative financial instruments, spent on vacations, cars, meals, and more...and our campaign accounts can live on beyond our time in office, or even beyond the grave!

But here's the good news: with the fantasy that Albany had turned over a new leaf dispelled, and with the public outraged once more, we have a fresh opportunity to push for reforms.

Already, a massive coalition of good government organizations, labor, philanthropists, and business leaders is putting more muscle than ever before behind the cause of campaign finance reform. Republicans felt compelled to hold a hearing on the proposal -- so they could try to bash it -- and then actually tried to lock the experts and the public out of the room.

The middle of a spring filled with indictments may seem an odd time to express hope for reform -- and I can't even describe the burn I feel when someone looks at me and says "you are all crooks, you just haven't been caught yet" -- but I see lots of opportunities for progress. The winds of change are blowing harder than they have in years, and they are blowing toward reform.

I hope you do not give up on your belief in the importance of good government! If the good guys give up, we all know who wins.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Upcoming Events

*State Senator Liz Krueger and Lenox Hill Neighborhood House
Present*

Making Health Care Decisions

A Two-Part Series

Session I - Thursday, June 13, 2013, 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

**“Understanding Medicaid Eligibility and Securing Home Care in this New Era of Managed
Long Term Care.”**

Mia Kandel, Esq.

Supervising Attorney

Health Care Access Project, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

Alexis J. Carter, LMSW, CGCM

Director , Senior Source

Selfhelp Community Services

Session II - Thursday, June 27, 2013, 8:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

“What You Need to Know About End-of-Life Planning and Care”

Mia Kandel, Esq.

Supervising Attorney

Health Care Access Project, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

Bernard Lee, M.D.

Associate Chief Medical Officer

MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care

Moderator: Alice Fisher, M.S.W.,

Director of Community Outreach, Office of Senator Liz Krueger

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House

330 East 70th Street (between 1st and 2nd Avenues)

A Light Breakfast Will be Served

To R.S.V.P. or for further information,

contact RSVP@Lenoxhill.org or Kristen Ramos at (212) 744-5022, ext. 1372

Upcoming Rent Guidelines Board Meetings:

The Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearing on proposed rent increases will take place at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, June 13, at the Emigrant Savings Bank Building, 49-51 Chambers Street (between Broadway and Centre Street).

Last month, the NYC Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) adopted a proposed range of increases for NYC rent-stabilized apartments between 3.25% and 6.25% for 1-year leases and between 5% and 9.5% for 2-year leases. If approved, these increases will negatively impact millions of low- and middle-income New Yorkers, many of whom are still recovering from Hurricane Sandy and pay more than 50% of their income in rent. I will be submitting testimony in opposition to these increases.

Pre-registration of speakers is now being accepted and is advised. Those who wish to pre-register for the June 13 hearing may call (212) 385-2934 until 1:00 P.M. on Wednesday, June 12, 2013. You can also submit your views in writing instead of speaking at the hearing by addressing them to the Chairman, or any Board member, c/o the NYC Rent Guidelines Board, 51 Chambers St., Suite 202, New York, NY 10007 or via email to this address: chair@nycrgb.org.

The final vote on proposed increases will take place on June 20 at 5:30 p.m. at the Great Hall at Cooper Union, 7 East 7th Street.

Manhattan VA Campus Services Restored:

I am very glad to report that the recovery effort at VA New York Harbor Healthcare System's Manhattan facility is now complete, after the hospital was temporarily closed for repairs in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. Over the past seven months, the facility has undergone extensive work and replacement of major utilities, including steam, electrical, elevator systems, fire suppression and alarms, medical gas and oxygen to make it safe to serve Veteran patients.

Located at 423 East 23rd Street, the VA Medical Center sustained extensive flood damage during the storm. Flooding from the storm resulted in the catastrophic failure of all major utility systems servicing the building, including electrical, heating, fire protection, elevators, water pumping, and information technology support infrastructure. More than 150,000 square feet of outpatient and support areas were destroyed, as well as the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) unit and other clinical equipment. The recovery effort includes restoring utilities to the building and setting up outpatient clinics. The potential for mold has been mitigated due to intense cleaning and removal of damaged walls, floors, ceilings and insulation.

Veterans are being contacted to make appointments. If a veteran needs to make an appointment, please call Centralized Scheduling at 1-877-877-9267.

Health Assistance Available for World Trade Center Responders:

You may be eligible for FREE WTC Health Program benefits if you worked or volunteered to provide rescue, recovery, demolition, debris cleanup, and support services related to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center (including NYPD and FDNY responders) in the following locations: Lower Manhattan (south of Canal Street), Ground Zero, Staten Island Landfill, NYC Chief Medical Examiner's Office and the barge loading piers.

Benefits of this program include:

Annual medical examinations

- Treatment services for approved health conditions that cause problems like:
 - Trouble breathing with wheezing, like asthma
 - Being less able to do what you normally do without becoming short of breath
 - Frequent sinus problems or a constant cough
 - Frequent nose and throat irritation
 - Stress related illness, anxiety, and depression

- Medications for WTC-related health conditions

To apply for the program call 1-888-982-4748 or visit www.cdc.gov/wtc.

City Limits Offers Online “How to NYC” Guide:

City Limits is a New York City-based non-profit and publishes investigative reporting, commentary and new media on civic & economic issues. They have added a wonderful new guide to their website called “How to NYC,” an ongoing series to assist New Yorkers in accessing resources and learning about programs available in the city. They currently offer information on how to apply for benefits, how to join a community emergency response team or a community board, how to dispose of hazardous materials, how to file a complaint against the police, and many other subjects. I encourage you to explore this great new resource: www.citylimits.org/topics/392/how-to-nyc.

New Proposed Division of Housing and Community Renewal Regulations:

The New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) has released a set of proposed new rules and regulations for the enforcement of the rent regulation system. The June 2011 legislation renewing New York’s rent regulation laws included a provision requiring DHCR to “promulgate rules and regulations to implement and enforce all provisions of this act and any law renewed or continued by this act.” By requiring greater transparency, clarifying questions about rent setting, increasing the amount of information available to tenants, and expanding tenants' ability to challenge illegal rents, the proposed amendments fulfill the much of the mandate of the 2011 law.

The implementation of the proposed regulations will begin to restore fairness to the enforcement of the rent laws, repeal several of the damaging regulations implemented in previous decades, and help prevent some of the most rampant violations of the rent regulation system. While I believe a number of the proposed regulations could be improved, and provide suggestions for additional regulatory changes to increase tenant protections throughout my testimony, there is no question that regulations under consideration are an extremely important step in the right direction.

My testimony on the proposed regulations is available at:

<http://www.nysenate.gov/testimony/testimony-dhcr-proposed-rent-regulation-amendments>

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:

- June 11, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 11, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 11, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 69 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 19, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- June 19, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- June 19, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- June 20, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- June 20, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- June 25, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 25, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 25, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 69 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus

- July 3, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- July 3, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 3, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 5, 9 - 10 am, 57 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
- July 5, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 Street and 3 Avenue – Van
- July 5, 12:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street and 1 Avenue – Van

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

Affordable Housing Opportunities in Manhattan:

Harlem River Point North LLC is now accepting applications for 172 affordable studio, 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom apartments under construction at 1951 Park Avenue and 121 East 131st Street in the East Harlem Section of Manhattan. Rents for these apartments range from \$474 to \$1127 depending on income and unit size. To be eligible, applicants must have incomes between \$18,172 and \$59,820, depending on unit and family size. Preference will be given to Community Board 11 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. Applicants who can document displacement by Hurricane Sandy and/or its related storms will receive preference for 25% of units. Preference for all units will go to New York City residents.

Applications may be requested by visiting the website www.HRPNorth.com or by regular mail to: Harlem River Point North LLC, c/o P.O. Box 387, Triborough Station, New York, NY 10035. Please include a self-addressed envelope with your request.

Completed applications must be returned by regular mail only to a post office box that will be listed on the application and must be postmarked by June 27, 2013. Applicants who submit more than one application will be disqualified.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Women's Equality Act

On June 4th, Governor Cuomo introduced his Women's Equality Act, which he first announced during his State of the State address in January. I am extremely pleased that he has now given the Legislature this bill. If enacted, the Women's Equality Act would make dramatic strides forward for achieving pay equity, stopping sexual harassment, preventing discrimination against pregnant employees in all workplaces, strengthening efforts to end human trafficking laws and protect domestic violence victims, ending family status discrimination, and protecting a woman's freedom of choice. I will be working closely with advocates, the governor, and my colleagues to move the Women's Equality Act forward and demand the Senate leadership bring this legislation to the floor before the end of the legislative session later this month.

More on the ten issues addressed by the Women's Equality Act:

Pay Equity: The bill would finally shatter the glass ceiling by eliminating the ability of employers to point to "any other factor other than sex" to justify pay disparities and instead requiring that their pay decisions be based on legitimate reasons. In addition, the legislation would protect an employee's right to share wage information with other employees without being retaliated against, and it would increase damages to successful plaintiffs in pay equity discrimination cases. Currently in New York, women earn 84% of what men earn, and over a lifetime will earn an average of \$500,000 less than men. Jobs that are traditionally held by women pay significantly less than jobs predominately employing men. And a woman working full-time in New York paid \$42,113 per year on average, while a man is paid \$50,388 per year. In 2013, this is both inexcusable and absurd.

Sexual Harassment: The new law would ban sexual harassment in every workplace, regardless of the number of employees, so all workers are protected. Currently, New York State law only prohibits sexual harassment in workplaces with four or more employees – which excludes more than 60% of employers in New York State. In 2011, women accounted for 75% of all sexual harassment complaints filed with the NYS Division of Human Rights and 83% of those filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Recovery of Attorney's Fees in Discrimination Cases: The legislation would allow successful plaintiffs to recover attorney's fees in employment or credit discrimination cases based on sex. This will enable victims, most of whom are women, to have the opportunity to vindicate their rights and be made whole in cases where they prevail. Currently, plaintiffs cannot recover attorney fees at trial for employment discrimination cases, making it costly to bring a case. Approximately 77% of sex-based employment discrimination cases filed with New York State are brought by women.

Family Status Discrimination: The bill would prohibit employers from denying work or promotions to workers simply because they have children. By enacting this legislation, New York would be just the fifth state in the nation to protect against family status discrimination. Currently, New York State law only prohibits discrimination based on "familial status" in areas of housing and credit. Discrimination on the basis of family status adversely affects women with children, particularly women in poor or low-income households.

Housing Discrimination for Victims of Domestic Violence: The new law would prohibit landlords from discriminating against victims of domestic violence. Under the current state law, victims of domestic violence are not protected from discrimination in housing, allowing landlords to reject those most in need of housing. Discrimination against victims of domestic violence is almost always discrimination against women, since 85% of domestic violence victims are women.

Source-of-Income Discrimination: This legislation would prohibit landlords from discriminating against tenants based on a lawful source of income, and therefore maximizes a family's ability to secure safe and decent housing. Since women account for 76% of all housing choice voucher recipients, including Section 8 vouchers, many of the landlords who refuse to rent to recipients of Section 8 or other public housing assistance recipients are discriminating against women.

Orders of Protection for Victims of Domestic Violence: The legislation creates a pilot program to allow domestic violence victims to seek temporary orders of protection through electronic means rather than having to appear in person. In addition, this bill would ensure that orders of protection are translated, when needed, and makes clear that a victim of domestic violence who has an order of protection against her abuser cannot be accused of violating her own order of protection. Currently, domestic violence victims face too many obstacles in securing much-needed protection from their abusers. This bill would remove many of those obstacles, and ensure that domestic violence victims get the protection they need.

Human Trafficking: This legislation would strengthen New York's existing human trafficking laws. It would, in part, eliminate the requirement that "coercion" be proven in a sex trafficking prosecution when the victims of sex trafficking are minors. In addition, the bill would increase the penalties for trafficking and create an affirmative defense in prostitution prosecutions if the defendant was herself a sex trafficking victim. This bill seeks to address the massive underground trafficking industry by holding traffickers accountable, making prosecution and enforcement more effective, and giving greater protections to victims.

Pregnancy Discrimination: The legislation would create a specific protection that requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for pregnant employees. The current protections for working, pregnant women are confusing and have been misinterpreted. Some pregnancies can result in medical conditions requiring reasonable accommodations in the workplace, and this measure will help ensure that no woman is needlessly forced out of her job because an employer is unwilling to make a reasonable accommodation for her pregnancy.

Reproductive Choice: This bill would codify existing Supreme Court law to protect a woman's right to obtain an abortion prior to viability or when it is necessary to protect her life or health. The law will ensure that New York's laws are consistent with the law of the land. Currently, New York State's law that protects a women's freedom of choice is outdated and does not conform to protections outlined in *Roe v. Wade* and current state practice.

I am pleased that this important bill has been introduced, but getting it passed this session will not be easy. It will take continued, relentless pressure from Governor Cuomo, advocates, and New Yorkers to force the Senate majority leadership to bring the bill to the floor for a vote. Republican leader Dean Skelos has already stated his opposition, and the renegade Democrats who have supported his leadership in the "majority coalition" seem focused on watering down the bill and making excuses for why it should not receive an open vote, despite their public support for all ten pieces of the Women's Equality Act.

I firmly believe that if we can force a vote, the Women's Equality Act will pass. If you would like to help, or would like more information on the bill, please visit <http://nywomensequality.org>.