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New York State Senate | 28th District



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Message from Liz...

As we approach the final weeks of a particularly unproductive session, there is a lot that should be on our agenda. Issues such as campaign finance reform, medical marijuana, the Dream Act, and the Women’s Equality Act are constant topics of conversations with my constituents in the district, with my colleagues in the halls of the Capitol and in the press. But each day the Senate majority coalition sends out the list of legislation that’s up for consideration on the floor, and somehow no bills dealing with these issues appear. Instead, we get legislation renaming various sections of roads, creating new crimes for activities that are already clearly illegal under existing law, or making yogurt the official state snack.

This has been the most abbreviated session we have had since I joined the Senate. After completing the budget, the Senate leadership changed the calendar so there was not session for almost the entire month of April. That might make sense if we had actually addressed all the issues before us, but we hadn’t. Now as the session nears its end, all those days off seem designed to make it easier for leadership to run out the clock, with the session scheduled to end June 19th.

When the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) formed an alliance with the Senate Republicans to ensure continued control of the chamber’s legislative agenda by Republican leader Dean Skelos, the IDC claimed that this would help them advance a progressive agenda, and they specifically pointed to campaign finance reform, medical marijuana, the Dream Act, and the Women’s Equality Act as critical pieces of that agenda. Yet they have failed to pass any of these bills. The Assembly is on board. The governor is on board. It is well past time for the Senate leadership to get on board.

I believe we still have an opportunity to pass meaningful legislation before the session ends, and I am working with my colleagues in the Democratic conference and with advocates on these critical issues to keep the pressure on for action. If the majority coalition continues to try to run out the clock, I and my colleagues are ready to debate every bill they do bring to the floor, and highlight how many critical issues they are ignoring. There is simply no excuse for not passing these critical bills this year.

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A sad PS: Senator Roy Matz Goodman passed away on June 3rd. He was known to many of us as “The Statesman of the State Senate” and was the last of the Rockefeller Republicans. His final campaign for office was also my first, and his graciousness and good humor were on full display from that campaign's beginning to its end, when, victorious after a six-week recount, he jokingly dubbed himself 'Landslide Goodman.' Senator Goodman's personal warmth, his deep knowledge, and his commitment to the public were unwavering, and our entire community has benefited from his legacy of more than three decades of distinguished service.

My condolences go out to Senator Goodman's children, grandchildren, friends, and the countless East Side residents who knew and appreciated him.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Vision Zero Town Hall on June 24th:

On Tuesday June 24th, I will be hosting a Vision Zero Town Hall Presentation and Discussion on improving street safety in our community, along with Councilmembers Dan Garodnick and Ben Kallos and the New York City Department of Transportation. Additional participants will include the Office of the Mayor, the NYPD, local community boards, and Transportation Alternatives. In New York City, approximately 4000 New Yorkers are seriously injured and more than 250 are killed each year in traffic accidents. The Vision Zero Action Plan is the City's foundation for ending traffic deaths and injuries on the streets. Join us and share your ideas about how to improve street safety, and help us identify dangerous locations. The Town Hall will take place from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Lang Recital Hall, Hunter College, Room 224, Hunter North Building East 69th Street between Lexington and Park Avenues.

East River Esplanade Community Visioning Session:

CIVITAS invites you to the second in a series of community meetings to discuss improvements to the East River Esplanade (60th – 125th Streets) with Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects. In this second event, Landscape Architect Signe Nielsen will be presenting design concepts for the esplanade based on opinions and ideas expressed at our first meeting. Materials from the first meeting are available at http://reimaginethewaterfront-civitas.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/05-06_Powerpointv4.pdf

The second session will take place on Tuesday, June 24 at the Bonifacio Senior Center, 7 East 116th Street, beginning at 6:30 pm. Please RSVP to info@civitasnyc.org or by calling [212-996-0745](tel:212-996-0745) if you are able to join us for this meeting.

Attendance at the first community discussion is not required to participate in this second event.

SCRIE Income Eligibility Limit Increases to \$50,000 on July 1st:

Great news for seniors who live in rent-regulated apartments: after years of fighting to increase the income eligibility limit for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program, this year's state budget gave New York City the authority to raise the SCRIE income eligibility cap to \$50,000. Late last month, the mayor signed a bill the City Council passed to raise the SCRIE eligibility limit from \$29,000 to \$50,000, effective July 1, 2014.

The SCRIE program, administered by the New York City Department of Finance, exempts eligible tenants from future rent increases and provides landlords tax credits equal to the increases tenants otherwise would have paid. To qualify for SCRIE, you meet ALL the following criteria:

- Be at least 62 years old
- Live in an apartment that is rent stabilized or rent controlled
- Spend more than one-third of your monthly income on rent
- Have a household income of less than \$50,000 in the previous calendar year (as of July 1)

I am delighted that so many more seniors who are struggling in today's economy will finally get some concrete relief from the soaring rents in our city. Figures show that only a fraction of seniors eligible for SCRIE have actually applied. If you, or someone you know may be eligible for SCRIE, I strongly encourage you to learn more and consider applying.

You can obtain additional SCRIE information and applications by calling 311, by reaching out to my district office, or on the Department of Finance website at:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/html/property/property_tax_reduc_drie_sc_te.shtml

I expect that the Department of Finance will soon be circulating an updated SCRIE application that reflects the income eligibility changes, but this has not yet taken place. There is some updated information available at the Department of Finance website above, however.

The Department of Finance has asked residents with incomes over \$29,000 not to send in their applications until July 1st, when the new rules take effect. Applications submitted before that date will likely be denied based on the current regulations.

Many senior centers and other community organizations organize regular SCRIE clinics to help seniors determine if they are eligible and fill out applications. In my district, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, located at 331 East 70th Street, offers SCRIE clinics each month. Call Lenox Hill Neighborhood House's Legal Advocacy Department at [212-218-0509](tel:212-218-0509) to find out the dates of upcoming clinics and schedule an appointment.

Unfortunately, this year's state budget failed to also increase the income eligibility limit for the Disabled Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program, but I am working with advocates to try to remedy this oversight before the end of the legislative session. I cosponsor S. 7640, legislation which would accomplish this goal.

Please feel free to call my office at [\(212\) 490-9535](tel:212-490-9535) if you have any questions or concerns regarding the SCRIE program. You can also access information on the new eligibility rules at http://www.nyc.gov/html/dof/downloads/pdf/translations/scrie_faq.pdf.

Update on Efforts to Fight the Proposed Marine Transfer Station:

Last month I joined fellow elected officials and community advocates at a protest at the site of the proposed Marine Transfer Station at East 91st Street over the removal of several

thirty year old pear trees at Asphalt Green. The Department of Sanitation removed these beautiful trees in preparation for construction of a garbage truck ramp through Asphalt Green, despite the fact that they informed the public that they'd retained engineers to examine alternative options for the Marine Transfer Station ramp. They also informed the public that the engineers' study is ongoing, and they told the public that they would engage with the community to explore the options both for mitigation and alternatives. Now the Department of Sanitation is going to the trouble and the expense of beginning demolition and construction, starting with the uprooting of these trees, before any of that is done. We have just begun the busiest time of year for children using the playing fields at this site. Given all these unresolved issues, certainly the trees did not need to be bulldozed at this exact time.

Of course the far bigger issue is that the City of New York continues down a path of wasting a billion dollars on a project with negligible impact on the environment and ZERO impact on decreasing residential waste in the other boroughs. The existing system, at one third the cost, moves the garbage intended for this MTS to New Jersey and Yonkers without travelling through residential streets in any low-income or minority neighborhoods. If built, this MTS will negatively impact more people, parks and schools than any other MTS in New York City, and it will be built in one of the few remaining poor air quality (SO₂) hot spots in NYC.

It should be obvious to anyone who looks at this plan without prejudice or politics that the entire city would be better off if instead of dumping a billion dollars or more into this needless project, we instead actually put it into things that actually address environmental damage in low-income and minority communities. I will continue to push both city and state officials to stop this ill-advised project.

Glick Park Clean-Up June 14th:

Join members of Kips Bay Neighborhood Alliance (KNBA) and help clean up one of our precious neighborhood parks. On the morning of June 14th KNBA will be meeting at Glick Park – East River from 37th to 35th St. to do some much needed maintenance. We will be picking up trash, weeding, painting, and other light ground work, and we could use your help. Gloves, rakes, paint, brushes, etc. will be provided, so just bring yourself and a friend or two, and dress for getting a little dirty. Please RSVP at kbna.info@gmail.com.

Additional Pre-K Slots Available:

New York City will open 10,400 additional full-day pre-kindergarten seats in Community-Based Early Childhood Centers by September 2014. The new programs bring the number of full-day seats at community-based sites to 25,000, over 20,000 more community-based full-day seats than in the current school year. The new sites are posted online and the mayor urged parents to apply by June 26th to find the best option for their child. The City has built an online tool to help parents find high-quality programs in their community at <http://nyc.gov/prek>. Additional seats will continue to be made available throughout the

summer.

Disability Benefits Workshop:

The Legal Aid Society is hosting a workshop on applying for SSI and Social Security Disability. At the workshop, representative from the Legal Aid Society will assist you with your application for disability benefits, explain to you the disability benefit rules, assist you in obtaining information and records from your doctors, hospitals and clinics, and assist you with an appeal. If you have already been denied, you should immediately file an appeal with your local Social Security Administration office.

The workshop will take place at the Harlem Community Law Office, 230 East 106th Street on Wednesday, June 11th from Noon to 2:00 p.m. For more information, contact the Legal Aid Society at [\(212\) 426-3000](tel:2124263000).

Bereavement Support Group:

SPOP the Service Program for Older People, is starting a Bereavement Support Group this month. 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. Sessions are Tuesdays 5:30 – 7:00 pm at SPOP,302 West 91st Street. For information or referrals, please call Carola Chase, LCSW at 212-787-7120 x506.

LGBT Law Project at NYLAG:

The LGBT Law Project provides high-quality, free legal services. They also engage in systemic advocacy efforts to reform to city and state-wide policies and work to ensure that LGBTQ communities have equal access to critical services, benefits and legal protections. The Law Project offers free advice and/or representation in the following areas:

- Legal Name and Document Change
- Employment Discrimination
- Unemployment Benefits
- Relationship Dissolution/Divorce
- Advanced Directives and Wills
- Homeless Rights for LGBTQ Families
- Immigration Issues
- Orders of Protection
- Public Benefits (Public Assistance/SNAP/SSI/SSD)
- Health care
- Housing matters
- Divorce, Custody and Visitation
- Second Parent or Joint Adoption

The LGBT Law Project of NYLAG, founded in 2008, exists to protect and expand the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community and to provide services that meet the unique legal needs of low-income LGBTQ communities in New York

City. For more information call [\(212\) 613-5000 x5107](tel:(212)613-5000x5107), email LGBTlaw@nylag.com or visit www.nylag.org/LGBT on the web.

Affordable Housing Opportunities in Manhattan:

El Barrio's Artspace PS 109 is now accepting applications for 89 affordable studio, 1-, and 2-bedroom apartments under construction at 215 East 99 Street in the East Harlem neighborhood in Manhattan. Rents for these apartments range from \$4914 to \$1022 depending on income, family size and unit size. To be eligible, applicants must have incomes between \$19,150 and \$50,340, depending on unit and family size.

Applicants who are artists and who live in New York City will be given a general preference for apartments. 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. A full description of the building and application process is available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/downloads/pdf/artspace.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 and select "Apply for Housing." If you are an artist, please be sure to indicate this in your profile before applying. To request an application by mail, mail a self-addressed envelope to: El Barrio's Operation Fightback, 413 East 120th Street, Room 403, 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 July 14, 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:

- June 10, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 10, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 10, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 18, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- June 18, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus

- June 18, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- June 19, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- June 19, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
- June 24, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 24, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- June 24, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
- July 1, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- July 1, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 1, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 2, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus
- July 2, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 2, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
- July 3, 9 - 10 am, 57 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
- July 3, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 Street and 3 Avenue – Van
- July 3, 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>.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Casinos

I have been very skeptical of the wisdom of relying on casinos as a source of state revenue and an engine for economic development, and my concerns have only deepened with the release of a report by New York State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, as well as recent press stories about the saturation of the gambling market.

The DiNapoli report highlights the issue that the revenues and jobs created by casinos often come at the expense of revenue from other sectors. As the report puts it:

“While new casinos may attract non-New Yorkers, much of the betting and revenue will come from in-State residents. In terms of the State’s economy, such activity primarily represents substitution of gambling losses for other consumer purchases (entertainment or retail sales, for example) rather than net new business. In addition to potential impacts on racinos and racetracks, new casinos could affect existing OTB centers and the revenues they generate for local governments in some regions of the State.” (The full report is available at http://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/economic/trends_nys_lottery_gaming.pdf.)

Thus, while casinos may generate significant revenue for the state, they may also cause a drop-off in revenue for retail, restaurants, cultural and sporting activities, and even other forms of gambling. Furthermore, casinos will also absorb dollars that would otherwise be spent at other community businesses in the same towns. This may be beneficial to the state, in that casino revenues are likely to be more highly taxed than sales to local businesses, but such a transfer of resources can also be very damaging to small community businesses and detrimental to the health and resilience of the local economy of the area around a casino site.

Evidence from the establishment of the Resorts World “racino” at the Aqueduct racetrack in Queens also demonstrates the potential negative impact of casino development on local communities. While the casino did little for surrounding local businesses, it did bring four new pawnshops into the neighborhood, according to a Wall Street Journal article. This highlights another major issue with casinos – they will attract problem gamblers, whose need for money to fuel their gambling – despite any cost to themselves or their family – can have devastating effects.

A final problem with relying on gambling as a solution to our revenue or economic problems is saturation, a problem other states are already beginning to face. The comptroller’s report indicates that state revenues from casinos are declining in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, a trend that will no doubt be exacerbated by the opening of casinos in New York. Just this weekend, a Harrah’s Casino in Mississippi announced it was closing, as competition from other forms of gambling undermined their profitability. While New York has clearly made the decision to go down this road, it is important to be realistic in our budgeting assumptions about both the amount of likely revenue, and the fact that it is likely to decline over time.

Despite these concerns, I am pleased that the Gaming Facility Location Board has taken action to ensure that localities will, at least for now, only be eligible to have a casino license granted within their borders if they express, through a vote of the local government, support for one. I had previously introduced legislation to guarantee basic home rule for municipalities on casino siting, as well as requiring respect for local zoning and environmental laws in the casino siting process.

This is a critically important protection for local communities, and gives me increased confidence that the Gaming Commission and Gaming Facility Location Board will operate as fair and independent regulators. Remember, this is not just an Upstate issue. Just a few years from now, current state law allows three more casinos apply to open right here in New York City and/or our suburbs. Let me know: do you want a casino on 42nd, 57th, or 86th Street?