

Liz Krueger



New York State Senate | 26th District

November 2012

Message from Liz...

First, let me re-check in with you all Post-Sandy. During and immediately after the storm we sent out daily updates to try and provide the most timely information (of course if you were “in the dark,” you might not have been getting these).

I have also compiled a list of resources and information regarding recovery on my websites at <http://krueger.nysenate.gov> and www.lizkrueger.com, and there is also information included below in the text of this Community Bulletin. If there are problems you are still facing as a result of the storm, please reach out to my office and let us know how we can be helpful.

Second, let me again thank the more than one thousand of you from here in my district who responded to our calls for volunteers to help those in need throughout Manhattan and the rest of the city following Sandy. The emails and calls my office has received from people who were helped can bring tears to your eyes – really. It also goes without saying that while life in most of Manhattan has returning to a (relative) state of normalcy, there is still a tremendous need for volunteers and donations in the outer boroughs’ hardest-hit areas. There is information in the Post-Sandy Updates section of this community bulletin on how to get involved.

Let me also publicly thank my amazing staff and interns who put in unbelievable hours answering phones, coordinating emergency responses with other government agencies, and running food and water up to the apartments of elderly and disabled people – whose family would call us in panic that they had not heard anything for days and could not get here to check on them.

I know that everyone can name the things that went wrong, the ways government and utilities were not prepared, and the frustrations that continue to this day. Clearly, we must reevaluate our city’s and our state’s emergency preparedness, in light of the changing weather patterns and the increase in extreme weather. But we should also take a minute to pat ourselves on the back for holding together as interdependent neighbors who were there for each other, both in heroic life-saving ways and through small acts of kindness that mattered.

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One of my post-Sandy frustrations (which might not even have much to do with the storm) is the recognition of how abominable the election process was in our district – people waited in line for hours at poll sites, many of which were without working scanners or enough poll workers to handle the flow of voters. See the Policy Spotlight section at the end of this bulletin for more thoughts on this problem.

Obviously, I am not angry about the outcome of the election. I thank the people of my district for electing me to serve another term as your State Senator. It is an honor to represent you, and I will continue my efforts to make New York State government more responsive to your needs. . While the final dust hasn't settled on several State Senate races, it is clear that the Senate Democrats have picked up seats and are in a position to potentially be in the majority, which will open new opportunities for advancing important legislation.

And of course, congratulations to President Obama on his reelection, which was so critically important to ensuring continued progress on healthcare reform and economic recovery at the national level. And if I might add one more observation on the Election Day results...women candidates and women voters had an excellent election cycle from a national perspective! Let's hope we put this recent strange and disturbing "war on women as political strategy" far behind us.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Senator Liz Krueger's Roundtable for Boomers & Seniors:

In the past century, U.S. life expectancy at birth has climbed from 47 to 77 years, and according to some statistics the average life span today may be as high as 85 years. America's 78 million baby boomers began turning 65 last year at a rate of one every 10 seconds (3 million to 4 million per year). By the middle of the next decade, the U.S. will become a society with more Americans over age 60 than under age 15.

This year's Roundtable will be devoted to discussions around "**The Challenges of Longevity.**" Our guest speakers will be introducing such topics as: Longevity and Its Impact on Society, Health Care Challenges, Work Place Challenges, and Aging as a Community Experience, including Family Challenges and The Role of Technology.

The Roundtable meets once a month over a five-month period. **The first session, "Longevity and Its Impact on Society," will take place on Thursday, November 15th, 8:00 am – 10:00 am at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street.**

To RSVP or for additional information, contact Rebekah Glushefski, rglushefski.nyc@gmail.com, or call our office at 212-490-9535.

If you can't make this Thursday's session, stay on the lookout for the invitation to our second session, which is planned for December 13th at the same time and location.

New Online Tool for Reporting Hazardous Apartment Conditions:

New York State Homes and Community Renewal's Office of Rent Administration (ORA) launched an online application to report conditions that require emergency repairs or that have forced residents to vacate their homes. The application is available at <http://www.nyshcr.org/Apps/DecreasedServices/>. Reports will receive priority handling by ORA staff and you do not need to notify your landlord to file a complaint.

If the report is related to conditions caused by Hurricane Sandy, when completing the application please indicate FEMA or Hurricane Sandy in the section stating "Other Agency Issuing Vacate Order".

You can also call the Rent Infoline at (718) 739-6400 or visit the Upper Manhattan Borough Rent Office at the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Bldg. 163 West 125th Street, 5th Floor New York, New York 10027. Due to Hurricane Sandy, the 25 Beaver Street Office location is closed at the present time, and is not expected to reopen until mid-to-late November.

Free Legal Help with Access-A-Ride Issues:

New York Foundation for Senior Citizens has recently established the New Freedom Van Program, a free transportation program available for seniors 60 and older and the disabled of any age in Manhattan.

The van seats up to 10 passengers or 8 passengers and 2 wheelchairs. It is available for group and individual trips. The van transports passengers to and from medical appointments, hospitals, shopping centers and recreational activities. Call the program at

[\(212\) 956-0840](tel:2129560840), Monday-Friday between 9 am and 5 pm, to schedule a trip or should you have any questions.

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 MetroCard and Pay-Per-Ride MetroCard, and refill MetroCards and Reduced-Fare MetroCards. Buses and vans will be in my district on the following dates and locations:

- November 15, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 St & 2 Ave – Van
- November 15, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 St & 2 Ave – Van
- November 20, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 69 St & Lexington Ave – Bus
- November 26, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 St & Lexington Ave – Bus
- November 26, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 St & Lexington Ave – Bus
- December 5, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 St & 3 Ave – Bus
- December 5, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 St & York Ave – Bus
- December 5, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 St & York Ave – Bus
- December 6, 7 - 9:30 am, 90 St & York Ave – Van
- December 6, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 St & 2 Ave – Van
- December 6, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 St & 2 Ave – Van
- December 7, 9 - 10 am, 57 St and 1 Ave – Van
- December 7, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 St and 3 Ave – Van
- December 7, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 St and 3 Ave – Van
- December 10, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 St & Lexington Ave – Bus
- December 10, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 St & Lexington Ave – Bus

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.

POST-SANDY UPDATES

Thank you again to everyone who volunteered to check on and distribute emergency supplies to storm victims. Your work has made a huge difference in the lives of New Yorkers during this extremely difficult time. While power, heat, and elevator service have now been restored to the overwhelming majority of residents in Manhattan, significant needs still exist throughout much of the city.

Volunteering:

There are many government agencies and nonprofit organizations that are seeking volunteers for various types of relief work around the City. See <http://www.nycservice.org>, <http://www.foodbanknyc.org>, <http://www.foodsystemsny.org/announcement/updated-post-hurricane-sandy-volunteer-donation-opportunities>, and <http://newyorkcares.org> for the latest details on where volunteers and donations are needed.

A number of legal services organizations, including the New York Legal Assistance Group, the Legal Aid Society, and the New York State Bar Association, are seeking attorneys to help provide pro-bono legal assistance to storm victims. Details about how to help are available at http://www.probono.net/ny/hurricane_sandy/.

Donations:

Monetary Donations: Countless nonprofit organizations across New York City are providing essential services to New Yorkers directly impacted by the storm. The [Mayor's Fund to Advance New York](#) is soliciting contributions to support both residents' immediate aid needs – including water, food, and hygiene supplies – as well as long-term relief and restoration efforts. One hundred percent of donations are being dispersed to relief organizations and their efforts. You can also [donate to the Food Bank for New York City's Emergency Fund](#) to contribute directly to the Food Bank's post-Sandy relief efforts.

Blood Donations: Blood supplies were critically affected by the storm, as the same outages that affect our region also affect many donation sites. The New York Blood Center's Upper East Side location at 310 East 67th Street is open and operating, and if you can, please consider donating blood. Blood donations can be scheduled by calling 800-933-2566 or by visiting <http://www.nybloodcenter.org>.

Other Donations: New York Cares, Goodwill, the New York Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, Catholic Charities, and many religious institutions are collecting donations of flashlights, batteries, cleaning supplies, diapers, baby formula, blankets, and other critical supplies. City Harvest and the Food Bank for New York City are accepting food donations. Please contact each organization for details on their needs and drop-off locations. The Salvation Army is collecting and distributing clothing to residents in the hardest-hit areas of the City. However, due to the complex logistics and expense of collecting and transporting clothing, clothing donations are less valuable than other types of donations.

Accessing Benefits and Services for Storm Victims:

Many of New York's federal elected officials have created detailed guides to federal services and benefits available to New Yorkers affected by Hurricane Sandy. See Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's [Guide to Disaster Assistance and Relief Funding](#), Senator Charles

Schumer's [Hurricane Sandy recovery website](#), and Congressman Jerrold Nadler's [Guide to FEMA & Federal Resources Following Hurricane Sandy](#).

The office of **U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney** is hosting an information session on disaster relief for small businesses at Baruch College. The session will take place in the **Newman Vertical Campus**, 55 Lexington Avenue (14th Floor) on Monday, November 19, from 9 AM to 10:30 AM. Speakers will include representatives of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.S. Small Business Administration, the NYC Department of Small Business Services, the NYS Department of Financial Services, and the Baruch College Small Business Development Center. For more information, please call 212-860-0606.

The **Community Service Society of NY** has put together a helpful spreadsheet of many of the federal, state, and city benefits available to those impacted by the storm. It is available at http://b.3cdn.net/nycss/354295295686796458_3km6ivkoq.pdf.

Legal Services NYC, a nonprofit legal services provider, has attorneys and advocates who can help storm victims with FEMA applications, emergency public benefits, unemployment applications and lost wages, foreclosure prevention, and other civil legal services. **If you are in need of assistance, you can call their Citywide Sandy Recovery Hotline: (347) 592-2411. The hotline will be staffed from 10am-3pm beginning on Tuesday, November 6th.**

Please see www.lizkrueger.com for additional city and state resources available to residents and businesses impacted by the storm.

Disaster Assistance Centers:

The New York City Human Resources Administration has set up sites with information and referrals for those applying for emergency social and economic assistance. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is co-located at these centers and is providing application points for home owners, home renters and those that have lost their businesses through federal small business administration.

A list of the sites and hours of operation can be found here:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/misc/html/2012/dasc.html>. Additional locations throughout the City may open.

FEMA has opened a number of Disaster Recovery Center locations in the metropolitan area to help residents and business owners apply for federal benefits. You can find the one nearest you by entering your address at: <http://asd.fema.gov/inter/locator/home.htm>.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Board of Elections Reform

While I was obviously personally pleased with the outcome of the 2012 elections and am honored to have been reelected to continue representing Manhattan's Midtown and East Side communities, **I am deeply disturbed by the chaos that occurred at poll sites both in my district and throughout the city.**

Long lines, broken machines, poorly-trained workers, and a shortage of necessary materials such as affidavit ballots made voting at many sites an extremely frustrating experience for too many New Yorkers – and few of these issues bear any direct link to the effects of the recent hurricane. I observed many of these problems firsthand at sites in my district, and I have also heard directly from more than 40 voters who experienced serious problems with voting and took the time to contact my office. I have compared notes with other colleagues from Manhattan and the rest of the city, as well as some counties outside the five boroughs, and can confirm that jurisdictions throughout the state reported similar election-day issues, although none seemed to reach the frustrating heights of our problems here in Manhattan.

It is clear that we need to fundamentally change the Board of Elections system and overhaul the process of election administration in our city. There are certainly many obstacles on the road to reform – but it is time to clear them. This election must be the wakeup call that pushes us to consider every option and demand deliberate but decisive reforms to improve our election process. Below are a number of possible changes that I will be exploring. Some of these ideas may be controversial, but everything should be discussed and everything should be on the table.

A nonpartisan Board of Elections: The State Constitution currently establishes the board as bipartisan in an effort to ensure it is not biased against either of the two major parties. Minor parties have long complained about this arrangement, but my major concern with it is that it has resulted in a system where officials and employees are chosen on the basis of party loyalty rather than administrative competence. It may be time to scrap the current system, a holdover from a bygone era, in favor of a nonpartisan, professionalized election administration agency. Many jurisdictions in other states around the country are quite capable of this – we should be, too.

The major obstacle to such a change is that it would require an amendment to the New York State Constitution, which would need to pass in two successive sessions of the legislature and then receive the voters' approval in a referendum. But it is time to start considering such changes, which could be implemented before the next presidential election if we start right now.

Civil Service requirements for election officials: Another way to address the issue of competence would be to establish some basic standards for board officials. This would also be likely to require a constitutional amendment, and one has been proposed by Senator Daniel Squadron and Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh (S. 90 / A. 10757). This amendment would allow the legislature to establish additional requirements for election

officials. A competitive civil service examination system would go a long way toward ensuring that board officials have the skills they need to do their jobs.

Direct accountability to elected officials: Another possible direction to go would be to make Boards of Elections into agencies of counties or of New York City. The current structure leaves no elected official accountable for the failures of the Board of Elections. Mayor Bloomberg successfully fought for legislation changing the Board of Education into a mayoral department. While mayoral control has not solved every problem, and indeed has problems of its own, it does have the virtue of making one elected official – the mayor – answerable and accountable for those problems. The current Boards of Elections frequently act as if they are answerable to no one, and, to be fair, that is not too far from the truth.

Early voting / mail-in voting: Another possible way to address problems at poll sites is to reduce our dependence on them in the first place by pursuing additional, alternative methods of registering votes. By eliminating state constitutional restrictions on early voting, or by allowing vote-by-mail or other methods, more people could cast ballots without going to poll sites. A diverse group of states have implemented variations on this theme, and New York should explore them. I carry legislation (S. 424) which would establish a feasibility study of mail, telephone, and internet voting, and Assemblymember James Brennan sponsors a constitutional amendment to allow early voting (A. 5202). I remain concerned, however, that without addressing the fundamental problems with the Boards of Elections, they would have similar problems effectively administering high levels of early voting or alternative voting methods.

While all of these proposals have benefits and risks, my underlying point is that we simply must not accept the status quo. **Our election administration system failed us on November 6th.** I will be pressing state and city officials to engage on this issue and seriously explore how we protect our democracy by reforming our election process.