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New York State Senate | 28th District



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## Message from Liz...

The charges filed against now former Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver are yet another demonstration of the desperate need for more meaningful ethics reforms in Albany. It seems like every few years there is a new ethics law or a new investigatory body, yet the indictments and convictions just keep coming. Given the failure of Albany to reform itself, we are very fortunate to have U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara focusing so intensely on goings on in the Capital. Perhaps this external attention can make the difference in changing the behavior of so many of our elected officials.

Like anyone accused of a crime, Shelly Silver is innocent until proven guilty. But I have long held that anyone facing criminal charges should step down or be removed from leadership posts until the allegations are resolved, so I was pleased that Silver agreed to resign as Speaker. Particularly in a legislature such as ours, where power is concentrated so heavily with leadership, it is not appropriate for those accused of violating the public trust to continue to serve in leadership positions. I feel the same way about Senator Tom Libous, who is under federal indictment, but has not stepped down as the Deputy Leader under Dean Skelos, Majority Leader of the Senate.

The Silver case highlights one of the ethically problematic practices of our legislature – allowing legislators’ outside income to go unreported. I have never understood how being a State Senator could be anything but a full-time job. Yet many legislators do have other jobs, which can create both the appearance and the reality of conflicts of interest. One of the primary allegations against Silver is that he received compensation for directing clients to his law firm, and then used his legislative office to benefit those same clients. I believe that, like for Congress, there should be strict rules about sources of outside income for legislators, and I cosponsor a bill (S.34) to address this issue.

Another significant problem in Albany is an election system where the primary qualification for holding elected office seems to be raising huge amounts of money. In such a system, perhaps we should not be surprised that many of those who succeed are more concerned with money and the interests of large donors than with the public good. That’s why we need public financing of elections, to restore the ideal of “one person, one vote,” and ensure that the needs of everyday New Yorkers are the primary concern of our elected officials.

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Of course, there will always be some “bad apples” who are going to act unethically and break the law for personal gain regardless of what the rules are. But that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t create laws that minimize the opportunities for such behavior. Half the problem in our State capital is how many behaviors that can’t pass a reasonable person’s “smell test” are defined as legal.

Up to now, reforms have failed in part because the same people targeted by reform measures are the ones making the rules; reform proposals get watered down as they move through the legislative process, and investigative bodies set up to enforce rules are left toothless. When we finally did get an aggressive body to investigate ethics - the Moreland Commission - the Governor and legislative leaders decided to disband it as part of last year’s budget process. I spoke out against that decision at the time and voted against the budget bill that defunded Moreland. However, thanks again to Preet Bharara, it appears that much of the Commission’s work is continuing in the US Attorney’s office. Even the NYS Joint Commission on Public Ethics (JCOPE), created by the Governor and leaders just a few years back, has this week had to propose reform of itself.

Governor Cuomo has now said he will not approve a budget unless it includes ethics reforms, which is a positive step. Unfortunately, the reforms he is calling for, while important, do not go far enough. He should use this moment of crisis to demand fundamental changes, including strict limits on types of outside income for legislators and the creation of a public campaign financing system similar to that used by New York City. If he is not willing to fully use his power in the budget process, I fear we will let this crisis go to waste, and we’ll have to continue to rely the U.S. Attorney to clean up our mess.

## **COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**

### **Roundtable for Boomers and Seniors on February 19<sup>th</sup>:**

Senator Krueger’s Roundtable for Boomers & Seniors is a 5-part program that provides an opportunity for constituents to come together to explore life issues that are relevant across the age span.

This year we are looking at Caregiving and all its aspects. The third session of this popular program will discuss aging in place and affordable senior housing options. It will take place on Thursday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street. The program runs from 8:30 am – 10:30 am. Bagels and coffee will be served.

For more information, contact Alice Fisher by email at [alicefisher37@gmail.com](mailto:alicefisher37@gmail.com) or call 212-490-9535. RSVPs are required for this event.

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

The New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation has not yet announced the dates of the 30-day public comment period on renewal of the operating and construction permits previously approved for the East 91st St. Marine Transfer Station. My office remains in constant contact with the DEC regarding the comment period and will inform my constituents as soon as it is announced. Once the comment period is open, I plan to make my concerns over air quality, flood risk and traffic safety (especially for the children utilizing Asphalt Green’s recreation facilities) heard loud and clear, and I urge my friends, neighbors and fellow activists to write individual letters of testimony to the DEC as well. Please also feel free to submit your testimony directly to my office and I will deliver your

submissions to the DEC. Please take a minute to review some of the concerns below. We need to pressure DEC to hold a public hearing on these permits. An onslaught of written testimony from the impacted community is essential to apply that needed pressure.

- Air quality on the Upper East Side and Southern Harlem is among the worst in the City. Traffic congestion and the continued use of #6 heating oil contribute to these unacceptable conditions. Adding noxious waste and hundreds of diesel burning garbage trucks every day will further aggravate the poor air quality in an community already over burdened with contaminants. While air monitoring for particulate matter (PM 10) is ongoing at the site, health threats from PM 2.5, which is considered to be more dangerous, remain unaddressed.

- Superstorm Sandy has fundamentally changed the way we must approach construction along our waterfront. During Sandy, the area surrounding the MTS site was flooded as far as four blocks in from the East River. Following Sandy, FEMA issued new flood maps indicating apparent danger to the MTS location and situation. According to the new FEMA flood maps, the 91<sup>st</sup> St. MTS platform will sit more than five feet below the estimated 100 year floodplain, effectively placing the structure in danger and exposing the surrounding community and river to potentially polluted waters. While the first floor of the MTS and its mechanicals have been "waterproofed," DEC needs to examine the fact that nothing has been changed *structurally* in the MTS plans to protect against such a scenario.

- The surrounding area has seen a sharp upturn in population grown in addition to a significant number of construction projects currently underway, which will further exacerbate the negative effects of the MTS.

- The immediate ten block radius surrounding the site is home to *five* new schools that opened since the original permit was approved.

- First and Second Avenues have seen the implementation of Select Bus Service, which occupy an entire lane, and First Avenue is also now home to a protected bike lane. These changes in the streetscape have altered traffic patterns in the area in the time since the original Environmental Impact Statement was conducted.

#### **Bikeshare Community Planning Workshop:**

On Thursday, February 12, the NYC Department of Transportation is holding community planning workshops on the expansion of Bike Share to the Upper East Side. These workshops will provide an opportunity for community feedback on issues related to implementation of Bike Share. The workshops will begin at 6:00 pm and 7:00 pm, and will be held at Christ Church, 524 Park Avenue (at 60th Street). For more information contact Josh Orzeck at [jorzeck@dot.nyc.gov](mailto:jorzeck@dot.nyc.gov) or 212-839-6218.

#### **Expanded Bus Service on the M1, M2, M3 and M4:**

Recently, my fellow East Side elected officials and I requested a meeting with New York City Transit (NYCT) President Carmen Bianco and his staff to discuss many of the bus route challenges facing my constituents. I was recently informed that additional buses will be added to the M1, M2, M3 and M4 bus route weekend schedules to take effect in April. This is good news considering the reports I'd been receiving from constituents that the schedules along those routes had become sporadic and unreliable. Because of similar routes and scheduling overlap, "bus bunching" had become a common occurrence ("bus bunching" is the official term used to describe clustering of many buses along the same route, resulting in too many arriving at the same stops or large gaps between arrivals). I am very hopeful that the revised schedule and influx of additional buses along these routes will improve

reliability and speed. I continue to work with my fellow elected officials and colleagues in government to address issues facing other routes as well. I regularly correspond with NYCT on an array of bus route issues including similar delays and overcrowding on the M31, slow speed and reliability issues on the M79, and restoration of the M15 SBS flashing indicators. Please contact my office with additional concerns.

### **City Council Hearing on Illegal Hotels:**

Last month I testified before a city council hearing examining the impact of illegal hotels on affordable housing. I have been working for a decade to understand and address the exponential growth of residential apartments being illegally converted into short-term transient units for visitors, commonly referred to as “illegal hotels.” After years of collaboration with a large task force of elected officials, neighborhood organizations, housing advocates, and city agencies, Assemblymember Dick Gottfried and I passed legislation in 2010 clarifying ambiguities in city and state laws that had made it difficult for city enforcement agencies to take action against illegal hotels.

The costs illegal hotel activity imposes on our city’s housing market, residents, and neighborhoods dramatically outweigh any personal monetary gains the activity may generate for individuals who operate illegal hotel units. When an affordable apartment is taken off the market in New York City, it costs the city at minimum \$500,000 to replace it.

The short-term rental of even a single residential unit in a multiple-unit dwelling for part of the year can have extremely detrimental impacts on all the residents in the building. Even in cases where an apartment has a full-time resident who is only occasionally renting his or her apartment for less than 30 days at a time, the fact remains that unvetted, unsupervised strangers wandering the halls of a residential building create major safety and security concerns, as well as nuisances, for the residents who actually live there. I constantly hear from constituents whose quality of life and sense of safety have been undermined by illegal hotel activity occurring in as few as one or two apartments in their buildings. When tenants and apartment owners decide to rent their apartments to tourists, they do so at the expense of all their neighbors who have to live with the consequences and never had a chance to sign off on the deal in the first place.

I am pleased the city council is investigating this important issue and that numerous councilmembers have expressed support for increasing funding for enforcement of the illegal hotel law.

### **Opening of Asser Levy Park:**

Last month I participated in a ribbon cutting ceremony for Asser Levy Park, a new park located between East 23<sup>rd</sup> Street and East 25<sup>th</sup> Street, between 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and the FDR. This new park space contains a diverse mix of outdoor recreational opportunities. Neighborhood residents of all ages and abilities will be able to play ping pong, badminton, chess, soccer, football, t-ball, exercise, jog, practice yoga or enjoy some shaded seating on a former two-block-long street. New park features include a synthetic turf field, exercise track, adult fitness equipment, benches, tables, drinking fountains, park lighting and trees.

I’m so pleased that this brand new park is open for the community to enjoy. It provides much needed outdoor amenities in a neighborhood with an acute shortage of open space. Thanks to CB 6 and all my elected colleagues on the east side for negotiating this transformational win for a NEW city park, and thanks to the Parks Department and Commissioner Silver for transforming a paved street into a great multi-use, full-year park.

### **UFT Forum on the Governor's Education Budget:**

On Friday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, the United Federation of Teachers is hosting a community forum on the Upper East Side focusing on the impact of Governor Cuomo's budget proposal on NYC students and schools. The forum will take place at the Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 East 88<sup>th</sup> Street, between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenues, at 3:30 pm. To RSVP, visit [www.uft.org/community-forums](http://www.uft.org/community-forums).

### **2015 Kindergarten Application Process:**

The kindergarten application period closes on February 13 for children born in 2010. Placement offers will be distributed in early April and pre-registration at schools starts in April. Like last year, families can apply online by visiting [www.nyc.gov/schools/kindergarten](http://www.nyc.gov/schools/kindergarten); over-the-phone by calling (718) 935-2400 between 8 am and 6 pm Monday through Friday; or in person at one of the DOE's Family Welcome Centers, listed online here:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/NewStudents/WelcomeCenters/default.htm>.

This year the kindergarten application is translated into nine languages online, and the Family Welcome Centers will have translated paper copies as well.

### **Apply to Run for Community Education Councils:**

Interested parents can apply to participate in Community Education Council elections beginning February 11th. Parents interested in becoming members of a Community or Citywide Education Council should visit [NYCParentLeaders.org](http://NYCParentLeaders.org) for more information.

The Community and Citywide Education Councils provide parents a voice in public education and an opportunity to make a grassroots-level impact on education policy.

Parents serve two-year terms on 36 Councils throughout the City, including the Community Education Councils (CEC), Citywide Council on High Schools, Citywide Council on English Language Learners, Citywide Council on Special Education, and the Citywide Council for District 75. CECs in each of the City's 32 school districts are responsible for approving school zoning lines, holding hearings on the capital plan, and providing additional input on important policy issues. Citywide Councils evaluate and advise on school policy concerning their areas of focus.

After applications have been received, candidates will engage parents and parent leaders at forums planned between March 18 and April 18. Officers of each school's parent or parent-teacher association will cast ballots online for their preferred candidates between April 19 and May 8. On May 12, the results will be posted online at [NYCParentLeaders.org](http://NYCParentLeaders.org). Elected parents will receive trainings and leadership development sessions, ensuring they are able to use their positions effectively to make their voices heard, advocate for students, and form functional Councils.

Each applicant for a CEC position must be a parent of a student enrolled in a district elementary or middle school. Applicants for the Citywide Council on High Schools must have a student in high school, and applicants for the other Citywide Councils must have a student receiving the relevant services.

### **NY's Health Plan Marketplace - Open Enrollment is Here:**

New York's Marketplace, *NY State of Health*, is a way for individuals, families, and small businesses (under 50 employees) to find quality health insurance. It can help if you don't have coverage now, or if you have insurance but want to look at other options under certain conditions (the Marketplace is not for people who have Medicare). The Marketplace is being administered as part of the federal health care reform law.

Free and low-cost options are available to those who qualify, including Medicaid, Child Health Plus, and financial aid. Financial aid to buy insurance is available for certain small businesses, individuals who earn up to \$46,680 a year, or \$95,400 a year for a family of 4. All plans provide essential care, including doctor visits, emergency care, and prescription drugs. You cannot be denied coverage for a pre-existing condition.

**When Do I Apply?** Open enrollment for 2015 runs through February 15, 2015. Apply by the 15<sup>th</sup> of any month for coverage effective the 1<sup>st</sup> of the following month.

**How Do I Apply?** For more information, or to apply for a plan, call the Marketplace at 1-855-355-5777 or go online to the Marketplace's website at <http://www.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/>.

**Need Assistance?** For a complete list of certified health care navigators and counselors, go to <http://info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/IPANavigatorSiteLocations> or call the Marketplace at 1-855-355-5777. These services are free for you. In my district, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House has a certified application counselor who can help you understand your options and enroll in a plan. Call to make an appointment: 212-218-0432 (no walk-ins). Please feel free to call my office at 212-490-9535 with any questions.

#### **Improved Online Filing of 311 Complaints:**

311 has made it much easier to file complaints online, and many users will find the new system a quicker and easier way to file and make sure your complaint is appropriately directed. You can access the improved online system at <http://www1.nyc.gov/311/>.

#### **LawHelpNY Launches New York City Housing Rights Portal:**

LawHelpNY, the free statewide resource for people facing civil legal issues, has launched an online portal that brings together resources designed to help low-income NYC tenants facing eviction who do not have an attorney. The portal also provides legal information for tenants who have problems with their landlord or a government agency. The portal features three interactive, do-it-yourself court forms: to help rent stabilized and NYCHA tenants prepare a legally sufficient answer to a non-payment lawsuit; to help explain to the Court why they didn't appear in time in an eviction case and request the right to return to court; and to explain why they need more time to comply with the terms of a prior settlement. The portal also offers video instruction on how to navigate Housing Court. To access the portal visit [nyhousingrights.org](http://nyhousingrights.org).

#### **Legal Services NYC Government Benefits Hotline:**

Legal Services NYC has launched a centralized Government Benefits Hotline (917-661-4500) for residents in need of assistance with Public Assistance, SNAP (Food Stamps), HASA, one-shots, and Medicaid (primarily Spend Down and Home Care) matters. Hotline callers can obtain advice, referrals and appointments with advocates by calling the Central Hotline number Monday through Friday, between the hours of 10am – 4pm. They provide free legal advice and representation to low-income New York City residents in all languages.

#### **Legal Advocacy Clinics At Lenox Hill Neighborhood House:**

The Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Legal Advocacy Center Offers assistance on a number of different issues. Here is a list of their ongoing programs and clinics:

- **SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) Clinics:** Wednesdays from 10am to 1pm at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street. First come, first served. Bring proof of identity,

income information, utility bill, proof of housing costs, information on any dependents and if you are 60 or over or on SSI/SSD, information on medical costs. For more information, call 212-218-0431.

- **SCRIE Clinics:** Call 212-218-0503 ext. 6 for assistance in applying or recertifying for the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program.
- **Eviction Prevention:** Walk-in clinic, every third Monday of the month, from 10am to 1pm at 331 East 70th Street. For more information, call 212-218-0429.
- **Advance Directives:** Volunteer attorneys may be able to assist you with one-on-one counseling and individualized drafting of Advance Directives including Health Care Proxies, Living Wills, Powers of Attorney, and simple, low-asset Wills. If you are interested in being screened for a possible appointment, call the intake hotline at 212-218-0503 ext 4.

**And, just across the Park on the Westside: Monthly Housing Clinics and Workshops:**

Council Member Helen Rosenthal, Goddard Riverside's SRO Law Project, and the Urban Justice Center co-sponsor monthly housing clinics and workshops at the Goddard Riverside Community Center, 593 Columbus Avenue (between 88th and 89th Streets). On the first Wednesday of each month, from 6pm – 8pm, the clinic offers a presentation on a variety of topics, followed by a question and answer session. The funding is provided by the Housing Preservation Initiative of the New York City Council. Each evening, at least one staff attorney will meet with individuals who are seeking specific legal advice.

For questions, contact the Urban Justice Center at 646-459-3017 or the Office of Council Member Rosenthal at 212-873-0282. Sign-up sheet starting at 6pm each evening.

**March 4, 2015:** DHCR Overview, including MCIs and 1/40ths

**April 1, 2015:** Housing Court 101

**May 6, 2015:** SCRIE and DRIE

**June 3, 2015:** Succession Rights, Preferential Rights and Non-Primary Residence

**Affordable Housing Opportunities in Manhattan:**

**The Frontier** is now accepting applications for 19 affordable studio, 1- and 2-bedroom apartments under construction at 200 East 39th Street in the Murray Hill neighborhood in Manhattan. Rents for these apartments range from \$847 to \$1,101 depending on unit size. To be eligible, applicants must have incomes between \$30,720 and \$50,340, depending on unit and family size. Preference will be given to Community Board 6 residents for 50% of units, mobility-impaired persons for 5% of units, visual- and/or hearing-impaired persons 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://housingpartnership.com/thefrontier/>.

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: The Frontier Apartments, c/o Housing Partnership Development Corporation, 242 West 36th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10018.

Completed applications must be submitted online or returned by regular mail only to the post office box that will be listed on the application. Applications must be submitted online or postmarked by March 16, 2015. *Applicants who submit more than one application will be disqualified.*



### **New Online Application for Rent Reduction:**

The Office of Rent Administration (ORA) has just released an expanded and improved online application form for rent-regulated tenants who want to file rent reduction applications based on a decrease of services in their apartment: <https://www1.dhcr.state.ny.us/ServicesIntake/BuildingSelect.aspx>

Tenants can still file applications on paper, if they prefer. Tenants who want to report a rent reduction based upon decreased services in their apartment should use form RA-81, available here: <http://www.nyshcr.org/Forms/Rent/ra81.pdf>

Tenants who want to report a building-wide decrease in services outside of their apartment may use form RA-84, available here: <http://www.nyshcr.org/Forms/Rent/ra84.pdf>

### **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:

February 10, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
February 10, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
February 10, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
February 18, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus  
February 18, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus  
February 18, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus  
February 19, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van  
February 19, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van  
February 24, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
February 24, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
February 24, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
March 4, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & 3 Avenue – Bus  
March 4, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus  
March 4, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus  
March 5, 7 – 9 am, 90 Street and York Avenue - Van  
March 5, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van  
March 5, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van  
March 6, 9 - 10 am, 57 Street and 1 Avenue – Van  
March 6, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 Street and 3 Avenue – Van  
March 6, 12:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street and 1 Avenue – Van  
March 10, 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
March 10, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm, 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus  
March 10, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus

The full mobile MetroCard schedule is available at <http://mta.info/metrocard/mms.htm>. Please note that MetroCard buses and vans do not take credit cards.



### **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. The Center is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## **POLICY SPOTLIGHT**

### *Police Disciplinary Procedures*

Late last month I was pleased that Governor Cuomo pocket-vetoed a bill to make police disciplinary procedures subject to collective bargaining. I was one of four legislators to oppose the bill, which would deny municipalities, counties, and the state the flexibility they need to protect the public by acting as they feel is necessary and appropriate in police disciplinary proceedings.

I am a strong supporter of collective bargaining rights, but the history of police misconduct investigations clearly shows the need for administrators to have greater discretion than in other fields. For years in New York City, police officers accused of misconduct were afforded protections under the 48-hour rule, which delayed interviews of accused officers. This practice was finally ended in the wake of the Abner Louima torture case. The city ended up settling that case for over \$7 million, and the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association paid \$1.625 million for its role in hindering the investigation of the assault on Mr. Louima by police officers.

Recent cases of alleged police misconduct highlight why we should not forget the reasons why police leadership was granted greater authority over investigations after the Louima case. There needs to be an independent investigatory process for allegations of police misconduct, and subjecting that process to negotiations with the PBA will inevitably undermine its effectiveness and legitimacy in the eyes of the public. There are some circumstances in life where the boss — in this case the police commissioner — needs to have the power to remove someone when something terrible has happened, especially when that someone has a gun. I am pleased that Governor Cuomo did not allow this misguided proposal to become law.

## *Vaccinations*

I have been extremely disturbed by recent reports of a rise in measles outbreaks across the country, which have been linked to declining rates of vaccination. I have been even more disturbed that some elected officials are actually discouraging people from vaccinating themselves and their children. How IRRESPONSIBLE!!!

Just one disease example: Measles diagnoses in the United States had dropped to below 50 annually in the early 2000s, but soared to 644 last year, and there were 102 cases diagnosed in January 2015 alone. I am old enough to remember when measles was a real public health threat. In the early 1960s, measles cases in the United States numbered in the millions annually, with 500,000 hospitalizations and 400 to 500 deaths per year.

Measles is an incredibly easy disease to transmit because it can live outside the body for up to 2 hours. The best way to prevent an outbreak is through “herd immunity” which health experts calculate kicks in at 92-94 percent vaccinations rates. The good news is that in New York, public schools and almost all private schools exceed this threshold.

We’re fortunate that New York has robust vaccination requirements for schoolchildren and this has limited the spread of the disease here. But the recent outbreaks highlight the potential dangers to public health that are created when parents do not vaccinate their children.

There have been a variety unfounded claims about the safety of vaccines. The most common claim is that there is a link between vaccines and autism. A 1998 British study alleged a causal link, but that study has been retracted, found to be fraudulent and the author was stripped of his medical license. It has now been refuted by numerous other studies.

Some parents argue that it should be their choice as to whether to immunize their child, but because of herd immunity, individual choices have consequences for the broader society. If too large a percentage of the population is not immune because they have chosen not to vaccinate, they are not only putting themselves at risk, but also endangering those who cannot vaccinate, such as infants below six months or people with immune disorders, or the small percentage of people for whom the vaccine does not confer immunity.

So vaccinating your children should be seen not only as protecting them, but as being a good citizen and protecting the public health. I am glad New York has such strong laws on vaccinations, and will certainly oppose any efforts to weaken these laws.