



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

## Important Bills Passed This Week: Tax Credits For Parents Who Adopt Foster Care Children, Promoting Community Gardens, and More!

ANDREA STEWART-COUSINS June 11, 2015



### **IMPORTANT BILLS PASSED THIS WEEK**

**Andrea Stewart-Cousins**  
*Senate Democratic Leader*  
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**Tax Credits For Parents Who Adopt Foster Care Children:** Senate Bill S.2026, sponsored by Democratic State Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson, will provide tax credits to people who adopt children from the foster system, and will make it easier for parents to afford the process, encouraging more people to adopt children from the system.

**Promoting Awareness And Prevention Of Spina Bifida:** Spina bifida is a birth defect affecting between 1,500 and 2,500 U.S. births per year and can cause severe disability, paralysis and death. About 4,000 New Yorkers are currently living with spina bifida. However, studies have shown that a diet rich in folic acid before and during pregnancy can reduce the prevalence of spina bifida by 70%. Senate bill S.299A, sponsored by Democratic Senator Adriano Espaillat, would authorize the State Commissioner of Health to establish a public outreach program to raise awareness of spina bifida and the benefits of a diet rich in folic acid for women of childbearing age as part of a campaign to eliminate preventable cases in New York State.

**Expanding Parent Eligibility For Community District Education Council:** Sponsored by Democratic State Senator Jesse Hamilton, Senate Bill S. 4602 will expand the eligibility to include parents of students in pre-k to serve on education councils. New York City's Community and Citywide Education Councils serve as an important bridge between parents and the school board by allowing parental involvement on the district level.

**Notifying Veterans of Benefits and Services:** Sponsored by Democratic State Senator Gustavo Rivera, Senate Bill S.775 will provide an option on DMV application forms for veterans to authorize the DMV to share data with the Division of Veteran Affairs through Vets Connect. Vets Connect would use the information to provide participating veterans with information regarding benefits and services that they may be eligible for.

**Reducing Dangerous Contrabands in Prisons:** Cell phones and other telecommunications devices offer inmates unlimited communication and pose a serious threat to public safety. Inmates use the devices to avoid monitoring of their communications, organize escapes and attacks, harass witnesses and victims, interfere with jurors and arrange for contraband to be introduced into facilities. Senate bill S.2383, sponsored by Democratic State Senator Michael Gianaris, would reclassify telecommunications devices as "dangerous contraband" and set penalties for their possession or introduction as a Class-D felony punishable by 2 to 7 years

in prison.

**Promoting Community Gardens:** In 1986, the state enacted Title 2-C of the Agriculture and Markets Law that created a task force to promote and foster the growth of community gardens and outlined goals for the task force. However, the legislation failed to require a report from the task force to provide recommendations for steps required for policy changes to facilitate achievement of the goals. Senate bill S.5026, introduced by Democratic Senator Leroy Comrie, requires the Community Gardens Task Force to submit such a report every five years describing the state of community gardens in New York.

**Criminalizing Use of Technology To Commit Stalking Crimes:** According to a report from the U.S. Department of Justice, one in four stalking crimes involves the use of technology. Survivors of domestic violence are particularly at risk of being stalked and contacted by their abusers due to easily available GPS tracking devices and mobile phone applications. S.113, sponsored by Democratic Senator Ruben Diaz, will update the definition of “technological means” to include the use of a GPS device, internet, cell phone, illegal wiretapping and cameras used to commit the crime of stalking in the first, second and third degrees.