



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## Senator Sanders Hosts Successful Special Needs Family & Resource Fair

JAMES SANDERS JR. January 11, 2018



In response to requests for help from community residents regarding children with special needs, State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway), held a two part resource fair on January 11, 2018 geared to connecting these constituents to city, state and federal resources as well as parent advocates who could provide vital information about education, healthcare, transportation services and more.

The morning session was held at the Ocean Bay Community Center in Far Rockaway and

the evening session took place at Greater Rescue Church of Christ in Jamaica. Dozens of residents attended and asked a myriad of questions that included everything from how to acquire wheelchairs and ramps to what daycare and after-school programs are available.

“We are here to open the lines of communication in a way that is beneficial to both children with special needs and the organizations that serve them,” Sanders said. “When my constituents, whom I refer to as my bosses, tell me that they need services and they can’t find them – that’s a problem. I like to solve problems and that is hopefully what we are going to do today.”

Panelists included representatives from District 75, the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, and the Office of Pupil Transportation. Also present were Trisha Bermudez, CEO / President of Perfect Piece of the Puzzle and Nicole Lee of Through Seth's Eyes.

One of the common questions asked was why there aren’t standalone schools for children with Autism. Jill Post of District 75 said it’s because since around 2001 the city’s educational system has aimed to be inclusive rather than restrictive, and therefore special needs programs are co-located in general education public schools. In addition, classrooms are not separated by disability but rather organized by teacher to student ratios, Post explained.

“We want these children to grow up to be able to interact and feel that they’re not different,” said Trisha Bermudez, CEO/Owner of Perfect Piece of the Puzzle, an autism advocacy group. “We want them to feel included, even though the environment that we live in is very segregated, we don’t want them to feel less than anyone else with another disability.”

Among the agency representatives in attendance was Jonathan Novick of the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities. He explained that MOPD provides information on accessible

programs, accessible transportation, employment, health services, activities and other resources to the nearly one million New Yorkers with disabilities.

Also in attendance was Glenn Risbrook, Borough Director - Queens Operations - for the Office of Pupil Transportation. The agency provides transportation to both special needs and general education students – that's over 600,000 students. In Queens alone that's approximately 260,000 students, from 360 schools, and 1,600 of those have special needs, Risbrook said. They also provide transportation through the MTA by distributing MetroCards. Some 20,000 students utilize that service.

In addition to all of our guest speakers, we would like to thank our community partners who were on hand to disseminate information and answer constituent questions. They were: New York Life Insurance Company, Douglass, Rademacher, and Brown LLP, Rockaway YMCA, Simple College Solutions, NYC Child Support Enforcement, Family Resource Center of Eastern Queens, Pre-K for All (NYCDOE), Social Security Administration and St. John's Episcopal Hospital.

In addition to all of our guest speakers, we would like to thank our community partners who were on hand to disseminate information and answer constituent questions. They were: New York Life Insurance Company, Douglass, Rademacher, and Brown LLP, Rockaway YMCA, Simple College Solutions, NYC Child Support Enforcement, Family Resource Center of Eastern Queens, Pre-K for All (NYCDOE), Social Security Administration and St. John's Episcopal Hospital.