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New York State Senate | 28th District



July 2019

Message from Liz...

On Independence Day we celebrate the birth of a great experiment in democracy, a nation bound together not through ties of ethnicity but through a common dedication to an idea. That revolutionary idea was that all people are equal, that they have inherent rights, that the purpose of government is to protect and enhance those rights, and that such a government derives its authority from the people it governs. Of course, throughout our history we have often fallen short of that

founding creed. But over time what Abraham Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature” have slowly overwhelmed our worst impulses, and through the tireless struggle and sacrifice of generations of Americans, have expanded the circle of liberty to come ever closer to our founding promise.

Today it can seem that our country is stumbling from crisis to crisis, as the President attempts to gain political and financial advantage by stoking the flames of hate, fear, greed, and division. It is easy to give in to despair and scoff at patriotism. But our country has struggled through far worse since July 4th, 1776, and as New Yorkers we don’t have to look far to find reasons for hope.

Last year, as a result of overwhelming grassroots engagement from voters across the state, New York elected a Democratic Senate Majority for the first time in over a century (give or take a couple of underwhelming years in between). With a large mandate, we were able to make great strides toward progressive change that will benefit New Yorkers across the board, breaking down barriers of discrimination, delivering justice to marginalized people, balancing the scales in favor working families, and boldly confronting crises head-on. I will touch on some of these below.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the progress we made this year is historic, but it is only the beginning. There is a great deal of work to do on many fronts. Still, I am proud to say that, thanks to the work of New Yorkers who have chosen to follow in the great American tradition of participation, our state is once again bent to the task of forming “a more perfect Union.”

The legislative session ended in the morning hours of June 21st, and I believe we got more done this year than in all my previous years in the Senate. I am so happy to now be part of a functioning majority that can act on so many long-delayed issues and restore New York to a position of leadership on progressive policies that improve the lives and protect the rights of our residents. In the

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final month of session we passed common-sense legislation that had been backlogged in Albany for years as well as a host of new progressive issues.

Here are some of the key legislative accomplishments from June:

- Passed the strongest affordable housing legislation and tenant protections in history.
- Passed the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), to address and mitigate the effects of the climate crisis by drastically cutting greenhouse gases, diverting the state's energy reliance to renewable sources, and creating green jobs to promote environmental justice across New York State. This bill is the most comprehensive and aggressive climate change legislation in the nation.
- Following the first legislative hearings on sexual harassment in the workplace in 27 years, we acted upon the testimony of survivors by passing sweeping sexual harassment/anti-discrimination legislation.
- Passed the Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act to grant collective bargaining rights, workers' compensation, and unemployment benefits to farm laborers.
- Passed the Driver's License Access and Privacy Act (Green Light NY) which will restore the right to obtain a license, regardless of immigration status, that existed prior to 2001. This legislation will provide undocumented immigrants (who must prove ID and residence) with an opportunity to obtain a driver's license. Positive impacts will include significant economic growth and improved road safety, and the bill was supported by many in law enforcement.
- Passed legislation to expand protections from wage discrimination for public employees, ensure equal pay for equal work for public employees with protected class status, and prohibit salary history inquiries to prevent the cycle of wage discrimination.
- Passed legislation that will combat the ongoing measles epidemic and protect the health of New York's most vulnerable residents by eliminating religious exemptions for vaccination requirements.
- Passed legislation abolishing the "Gay and Trans Panic" defense by clarifying that it is not a reasonable explanation or excuse that a violent act was triggered by a nonviolent sexual advance by the victim or the discovery of the victim's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Passed the Stop Hacks and Improve Electronic Data Security Act (SHIELD Act) which will return control of personal data back to New Yorkers and require businesses to put customers' privacy over profits. This legislation will broaden the definition of a data breach, expand the scope of information subject to current data breach notification laws, and empower the Attorney General to bring action over privacy violations.

This was the final flurry of action in a session where so many of my priorities were finally addressed, from the Reproductive Health Act and GENDA to Voting Reforms, the Child Victims Act and Bail, Discovery and Speedy Trial Reforms. It is gratifying to finally see action on so many progressive issues, and while I am happy to have a little break from Albany, I look forward to getting back up there

next session and passing more good bills! I'll discuss a couple additional end of session issues in the Policy Spotlight below.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

Marijuana Policy

Despite all the issues the Legislature addressed this year, we didn't accomplish everything, and I was disappointed that the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) that I carry was not passed before the end of session. I believe that the best way to address the negative impacts of racially biased enforcement of our marijuana laws would have been to pass MRTA (S.1527-B), which would have created a legal adult-use market and reinvested the revenue back into communities disproportionately impacted by the drug war.

Although I am disappointed that full adult-use legalization will have to wait until next year, I am glad that we moved the ball down the field by further decriminalizing marijuana possession and expunging existing criminal records (S.6579). These important steps would not have been possible without the tireless work of advocates pushing for marijuana justice through MRTA. Even though we have only gotten part of the loaf, these reforms will improve the lives of many New Yorkers.

I was also pleased that on the final day of session the Legislature passed bills (S-6184A/A-7680A) to regulate the production and marketing of hemp extract in the state, including cannabidiol, known as CBD. This legislation establishes a regulatory framework for hemp extract production, extraction, manufacturing, and sale in New York, updating the hemp permitting process and regulating the extract industry through testing and labeling, protecting both farmers and consumers. It also requires that New York State hemp processors use New York-grown product.

Unfortunately, we did not pass legislation expanding the medical cannabis program. I had included such an expansion in the latest version of MRTA, because I believe it is critical to improve access for patients. Those using cannabis for treatment need a robust medical program to ensure they are getting the right product to treat their condition, rather than relying on the illicit market or self-medicating through the adult-use market once it is created.

Hopefully now that we have dipped our toes into reforming our outdated prohibition policies, we will soon be able to find the courage to dive into the full legalization that is supported by a majority of voters in every region of the state. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to find a path to passing MRTA, and implementing a tax-and-regulate adult-use program with all the right safeguards in place, one that centers on restorative justice and reinvestment in the communities most harmed by decades of failed prohibition policies.

Bus Lane Cameras

The session's final omnibus bill included legislation I introduced and passed that will allow the City of New York to expand the use of bus lane camera enforcement programs as it sees fit and free New York City police resources to be directed elsewhere.

The New York City bus system serves over two million riders daily. However, due to worsening congestion throughout the city, bus speeds have declined significantly in recent years. This has coincided with a significant and ongoing decrease in bus ridership, as riders switch to other transit modes, increasing crowding on the subways and traffic congestion on city streets.

Beginning in 2008, the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) and the MTA have collaborated on a bus rapid transit program known as Select Bus Service, or SBS. SBS routes are outfitted with a number of special features that have resulted in bus speed increases as high as 30%, and ridership increases of about 10%. One very effective element of the SBS program has been the addition of dedicated bus lanes and bus lane enforcement cameras along SBS routes.

DOT and the MTA have both released plans for improving bus service that include expanded use of bus lanes and bus lane enforcement cameras along more bus routes in the city. However, state law currently limits the use of bus lane enforcement cameras to just 16 bus routes in the city. DOT has installed additional bus lanes beyond the designated 16, but lacks the ability to enforce them with cameras, limiting their effectiveness as drivers often violate them with impunity.

The legislation we passed will allow the City of New York to deploy bus lane cameras as it sees fit. It also lowers the maximum fine for a single bus lane camera violation to \$50 and institutes a graduated fine schedule up to \$250 for repeat offenders as an added deterrent. Finally, this law directs the funds raised by the fines from these cameras to the general transportation account of the New York City Transportation Assistance Fund established in the 2018-19 budget to provide additional revenue to the MTA.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Forum on Scams July 16th:

On Tuesday July 16th from 6-8 pm I will be hosting a forum on scams, co-sponsored by City Council Member Keith Powers. This event will include two NYPD officers and Chuck Bell, Programs Director for Consumers Reports. The police officers will present a PowerPoint on certain phone scams, unsolicited calls, and email/mail scams, do's and don'ts, and who you can alert when you encounter these scams. Chuck Bell will speak about state and federal government legislative efforts, as well as industry efforts, to protect consumers from these scams. The forum will take place at Lenox Hill Hospital, 130 E 77th St, Floor 2A, Weisner Conference Room 201A/B. To RSVP, go to <https://tinyurl.com/ScamForum2019>, or call 212-490-9535.

Housing Forum July 25th:

Assemblymember Harvey Epstein is hosting a Housing Forum on Rent Regulation, Tenant Stability, and the Passing of Affordable Housing Protections on July 25th from 6 to 9 PM. It will be held at NYU Dental, 345 East 24th Street at 1st Avenue. I am co-hosting this event along with many of my colleagues. RSVP at chesters@nyassembly.gov.

Summer Meals for Kids and Teens:

Kids and teens can get healthy, no-cost meals and snacks in many communities across the state through USDA's Summer Food Service Program. Visit SummerMealsNY.org to find summer meal sites and access resources to help spread the word, including the USDA Summer Meal Site Finder Map. Use the interactive mapper on SummerMealsNY.org to find and refer to sites in your area.

Check back often, as sites are added as they are approved. Site information is also available by phone at 3-1-1 or by texting "Food" or "Comida" to 877-87.

Volunteer Health Advocates Needed:

The Volunteer Health Advocates Project of the Community Service Society in partnership with NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H) is seeking individuals age 55 years or older to serve as Health Advocates in NYC H+H facilities helping patients address their non-medical needs.

They are seeking retired professionals who would be interested in volunteering. The program needs volunteers who have advocacy and basic computer skills, in addition to an interest in assisting low-income populations in an outpatient clinic setting. The volunteer training begins on August 6, 2019 and will take place in Manhattan.

To apply, go to: <https://secure.cssny.org/page/signup/volunteer-application>. For more information, please contact Charlotte Brookover at (212) 614-5306.

92nd Street Greenmarket is Now Open:

The Greenmarket at 92nd Street and First Avenue is open through November every Sunday from 9am to 4pm. Cash, SNAP/EBT, debit/credit, FMNP checks, and Health Bucks accepted at this farmers market. SNAP/EBT users get a \$2 bonus for every \$5 you spend.

The Greenmarket also offers GrowNYC's Food Scrap Composting: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. and Upper Green Side Recycling Collection: 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Batteries, Cords, Corks, CD/DVDs, Jewel Cases, Cellphones, and Cartridges accepted.

For more information on this and other NYC Greenmarkets, visit www.grownyc.org/ourmarkets.

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. Arrive by Noon.

- July 12th and 26th from 10am to 1pm at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Casa Mutua at 159 East 102nd Street. Arrive by Noon.

First come, first served. Bring proof of identity, income information, utility bill, proof of housing costs, information on any dependents, proof of immigration status for non-citizens, and if you are 60 or over or on SSI/SSD, information on medical costs. For more information, call [212-218-0503](tel:212-218-0503), option 2.

● Tenants Rights Advice Clinic: Walk-in clinic, now at 2 locations.

- July 25 from 10am to 1pm at 331 East 70th Street. First come-first Served, arrive by Noon.

- July 17 from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Lenox Hill Neighborhood House Casa Mutua Clinics at 159 East 102nd Street. First come, first served, arrive by 4 p.m. Please bring all relevant housing-related documents with you.

● SCRIE Clinics: Walk-in Clinic. The next clinics will take place September 10 from 10:00 a.m to 1:00 p.m at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street. You must arrive before Noon to ensure you can be seen. If you are 62 years or older, live in a rent regulated apartment and have an annual household income of \$50,000 or less you may be eligible for the Rent Freeze Program. Find out if you are eligible and get assistance applying or recertifying for SCRIE.

- DRIE Clinics: The next clinic will take place October 17 from 2:00 p.m to 4:00 p.m at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House, 331 East 70th Street. If you are receiving disability benefits, live in a rent-regulated apartment and have an annual household income of \$50,000 or less you may be eligible for the Rent Freeze Program. Find out if you are eligible and get assistance applying or recertifying for DRIE. For more information, please email DRIE@lenoxhill.org or call 212-218-1503, option 0.
- Health Care Access Project: call [212-218-0503](tel:212-218-0503). Assistance with Medicaid, Medicare Savings Program Medicare Part D, Epic and health insurance through the New York State of Health Marketplace.

VOLS Legal Clinics for Seniors:

The VOLS Elderly Project will be at one location in my district this month. The Elderly Project staff and pro bono attorneys provide free legal advice, information, document drafting, and other brief services to low-income Manhattan residents aged 60 and over, and to the social workers and advocates who assist them. Their schedule includes

Friday July 12th - 2:00 pm, Legal Clinic,
Burden Center for the Aging, 415 East 73rd Street (b/t 1st and York)

Monday July 22nd - 10:00 am, Legal Clinic,
Encore Community Services Center, 239 West 49th Street (b/t Broadway and 8th Ave.)

Friday, July 26th - 10:00 am, Legal Clinic,
Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center, 415 East 93rd Street

Affordable Housing Opportunities in Manhattan:

Essex Crossing Site 8 Senior Housing is now accepting applications for 84 affordable studio apartments newly constructed at 140 Essex Street on the Lower East Side in Manhattan. Rents for these apartments range from \$331 to \$761 depending on income. To be eligible, at least one member of the household must be 62 or older. Applicants must have incomes between \$13,303 and \$51,240 depending on unit and family size. Asset limits also apply. In addition 8 units are reserved for Section 8 eligible individuals making less than \$22,410 or couples making less than \$25,620. Rents for these units will be 30% of income. Preference will be given to residents of Community Board 3 for 50% of units, mobility-impaired persons for 5% of units, visual- and/or hearing-impaired persons for 2% of units, and municipal employees for 5% of units. A full description of the building and application process is available at <https://a806-housingconnect.nyc.gov/nyclottery/AdvertisementPdf/785.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.” To request an application by mail, mail a self-addressed envelope to: Essex Crossing Site 8 Senior Housing / Triborough Finance New Station, PO Box 2010, New York, NY 10035

Applications must be submitted online or postmarked by August 20, 2019. Applicants who submit more than one application may 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:

July 9, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
July 9, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
July 9, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
July 17, 9 – 10:30 am, 79 Street & Third Avenue - Bus
July 17, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
July 17, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York Avenue – Bus
July 18, 8:00 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
July 18, 11:30 am - 2:00 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
July 23, 9 - 10:30 am, 92 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
July 23, 11:00 am - 12:30 pm., 86 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
July 23, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 68 Street & Lexington Avenue – Bus
August 1, 7 – 9 am, 90 Street and York Avenue - Van
August 1, 8:30 - 10:30 am, 47 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
August 1, 1:30 - 3:30 pm, 28 Street & 2 Avenue – Van
August 2, 9 - 10 am, 57 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
August 2, 10:30 - 11:30 am, 57 Street and 3 Avenue – Van
August 2, 12:30 - 2:00 pm, 68 Street and 1 Avenue – Van
August 7, 9 - 10:30 am, 79 Street & Third Avenue – Bus
August 7, 11 am - 1 pm, 79 Street & York Avenue – Bus
August 7, 1:30 - 2:30 pm, 72 Street & York 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.