



Assemblymember
Jim Brennan
Reports to the People

SUMMER 2012

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High-Stakes Testing:
 The Use and Misuse of
 Test Results in the
 School System

**A Community Forum on this
 Important Issue**

**Temple Beth El-Elohim
 (Garfield Temple)**

274 Garfield Place
 (at the intersection of 8th Ave.)

**Wednesday,
 October 3, 2012
 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

PANEL:

Regent Kathleen Cashin

Elizabeth Phillips

Principal of P.S. 321

Martha Foote

Parent Voices of New York

Michael Mulgrew

President, UFT

Aaron Pallas

Professor at Columbia Teachers
 College

Sponsored and moderated by
Assemblymember Jim Brennan

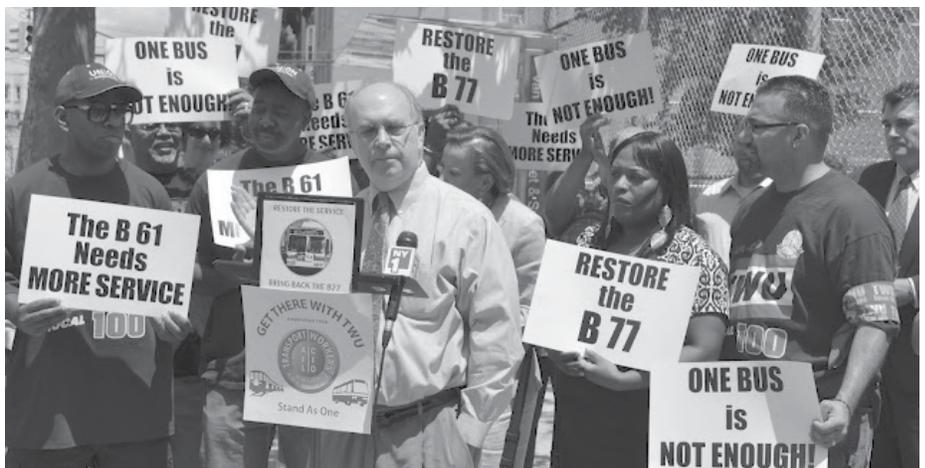
See Education article on page 2.

**Pressure on MTA Produces
 Service Restorations;
 Brennan Says Fight Will Continue**

The MTA announced in late July that it would permanently retain the “G” train extension to Church Avenue on the “F” line and restore weekend service on the B69 bus. In addition, it would extend B57 service into Red Hook, providing relief for the B61 service in Park Slope and Windsor Terrace. The two bus lines overlap in Red Hook, giving the B61 less “dwell-time” in Red Hook.

These changes were part of a system-wide \$29 million restoration made to address some of the significant cutbacks that were made in 2010. Local residents and

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I attended a press conference demanding service restoration with the Transport Workers Union and local residents. In July, the MTA announced it would extend the B57 into Red Hook, which overlaps with the B61 there, providing relief for that line. But more needs to be done —see article inside page 3.

EDUCATION

Confidentiality Law on Teacher Evaluation Test Data Enacted

The use of student test data for teacher and principal evaluation and personnel decisions has become a major controversy. In March of this year, the legislature approved a new law supported by Governor Cuomo that will begin allowing student test scores to be incorporated into teacher and principal evaluations, ratings, and personnel decisions [Chapter 21]. I voted no on this proposal because there are major questions about the validity of correlating student test scores with teacher effectiveness.

This legislation was enacted shortly after the forced release of teacher evaluation data had occurred from the New York City school system. The release was a fiasco because the data was filled with errors and the results were capricious. But after the teacher evaluation law was passed, the Legislature recognized the dangers of inappropriate disclosure and passed another bill that allowed for confidentiality of individual results.

As a result, the press will not be allowed to obtain individual teacher identification data for test results from the State or City government. Only school summaries will be released without individual teacher identification. A parent or guardian may still request and receive their child's teacher rating.

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Neighborhood Cleanup

I joined the neighborhood cleanup campaign that painted a beautiful mural over the formerly graffiti-stricken corridor in the Plaza. Congratulations are in order to Oksana Mironova and Lyna Saad of Newkirk Cares Collaborative for organizing this project and Susan Jaramillo, the local artist who designed the mural.

Windsor Terrace versus Walgreens

In June, it became public that the owner of the Key Food supermarket in Windsor Terrace, the only full-service supermarket serving a community of 12,000, had leased the site to Walgreens. Key Food closed in June, laying off dozens of employees.

Community residents were shocked and outraged, and began holding a series of community meetings and rallies. In addition, a community coordinating committee, my-



I joined neighborhood residents at a rally for a full-service supermarket after Key Food in Windsor Terrace closed and leased the property to Walgreens. See my website for a video from the rally.

self, Borough President Markowitz and Councilmember Lander met with Walgreens at Borough Hall in June. We demanded a full-service supermarket be incorporated into the new Walgreens at the site, either by Walgreens or by partnering or subleasing with a supermarket. We argued that the company could build out into the oversized parking lot, add a second floor, or merely configure the new store with standard supermarket features. Walgreens said it could not provide a full-service supermarket and refused to disclose the terms of the lease deal, other than the fact that it was more than five years. Walgreens may not open until early 2013. In the meantime, community residents have begun a petition drive to support local businesses, set up a research committee to explore community action options and other initiatives.

My office is also preparing legislation to direct State and City economic development agencies to acquire the former Key Food site from Walgreens, ask for bids from supermarkets to locate a quality supermarket there, and explore alternative sites for a supermarket (A.10809, A.10810).

Borough President Markowitz reports that other supermarkets are interested in locating in Windsor Terrace if adequate space can be found. I support the community effort to obtain a full-service supermarket.

MTA

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elected officials like Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, Councilmember Brad Lander and Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez have been active in the fight to improve service.

This legislative session I introduced a bill to require the MTA to provide to the Governor and Legislature a plan to restore the 2010 cutbacks. The bill passed the State Assembly in June. While the bill did not pass the Senate, I asked the MTA to voluntarily undertake this service restoration review, which they did. While these additions are modest, they are a step in the right direction and my office will continue to press for further improvements in service.

[See Work of Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions below.]



Mammography Van

The Mammography Van, provided courtesy of the American-Italian Cancer Foundation, recently made stops at each of my Brooklyn offices, where fifty women received mammograms. I am pictured here with the terrific women who performed these procedures.

Work of Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions

As Chair of the Assembly's Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions, I have been actively working on issues related to the MTA (see previous article), the Port Authority, and oversight of our utilities across the City and State. Legislation I have written and introduced include:

A.9150: An overhaul of the governing statute of the Port Authority to improve the transparency and integrity of that agency's operations. The bill has passed the State Assembly, and a similar bill has passed the State Senate. The bill applies the comprehensive reforms of the Public Authorities Reform Act (2009) and the Public Authorities Accountability Act (2005) to the Port Authority. You can read more about this bill on my website.

A.9339-b: Another new proposal was a bill to require 18 major public authorities to "Go Green." The bill would apply to public authorities including the MTA, the Thruway Authority, the Dormitory Authority, and Battery Park City Authority, and would require them to achieve dramatic improvements in environmental standards. By 2027 these authorities must acquire 50% of their electricity from renewable sources of energy and cogeneration, cut their energy consumption 50% by that date, and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions 50%. The authorities are required to meet interim targets along the way to 2027, meeting standards of 15% by 2017 and 25% by 2022 for the various energy targets. A State review council is

set up to receive reports and monitor progress. The bill was reported favorably from the Corporations Committee and is under review by the Assembly. It has also been introduced in the State Senate.

A.10597: This bill mirrors the one above, it is a "Go Green" proposal for the Port Authority. Since this is a bi-state authority, it needs its own legislation which must be passed in both New York and New Jersey. The major components are the same, but need special references in both states.

A.9477: Transportation Bond Act: I have introduced legislation to place a proposal before the voters in November 2013 to help fund the future infrastructure needs of the State. The voters will be asked to authorize the State to borrow and pay for the debt service on \$4.5 billion of improvements for mass transit, and roads, bridges, and airports as well as other transportation infrastructure throughout New York State. The funds would be divided into \$2.025 billion for the MTA; \$225 million for non-MTA mass transit; and \$2.25 billion for roads, bridges, and other infrastructure.

The State's road, bridge and mass transit construction and rehabilitation program for 2015 and beyond has a multi-billion dollar shortfall in funding. This proposal would help avoid the need for tax increases to pay for critical transportation projects.

Brooklyn Hospitals

Crisis at SUNY Downstate

In May and June it was revealed that SUNY Downstate had a huge operating deficit—a problem that was not disclosed to the Legislature during the budget process. The SUNY Central Administration is providing a \$75 million line of credit to Downstate for this year—but says that the State also needs to provide substantial additional cash assistance to help the institution. SUNY Central Board Chairperson Carl McCall says the administration is committed to keeping the hospital and the medical school open. The Brooklyn Assembly and Senate delegation has been meeting continuously with the Governor's office, the State Department of Health, and both SUNY Central and SUNY Downstate to fight to keep Downstate open.

I have helped initiate an audit of the Downstate situation by the State Comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli, and am committed to a maximum effort to obtain State funds to preserve a full-service hospital and medical school, and provide critical health care services and employment.

Kingsboro State Psychiatric Hospital

This spring, the delegation received a plan from the Governor's office and the State Office of Mental Health to save Kingsboro State Psychiatric Hospital. As part of the plan, which involves helping the hospital stay open, the State will add transitional



I joined union leader Rowena Blackman-Stroud outside SUNY Downstate to discuss the crisis there. She is president of UUP's Brooklyn Health Science Center chapter and holds many other union leadership positions.

residences at the hospital campuses and add 350 supported housing apartments in Brooklyn to provide safe, supported places to live for recently discharged patients.

It is hoped that this plan will address federal U.S. Department of Justice concerns about excessive lengths of stay at the hospital.

EDUCATION

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Validity of High-Stakes Testing Being Questioned

Where is our society going with high stakes testing? This year, the State tests included three days for both reading and math in grades 3-8, instead of two days. Why? Because the State Education Department allowed the new testing contractor, Pearson, to include "field test questions," meaning questions that weren't scored for this year but were experimental for the purpose of constructing next year's test.

In addition, the kids have found out that their teachers could get fired if they don't do well on the test, adding to

their anxiety about doing well. (The law requires student test data to be an element of the teacher rating.) The Bloomberg administration has closed 140 schools, usually citing poor test scores as the primary rationale for the closure.

Is constant preparation for the tests narrowing what is being taught in the schools? Are the high stakes consequences causing cheating? Nobody wants incompetent teachers and failing schools. Are better assessments and accountability systems available? What are the limits on the use of test scores?

Come to the meeting on Wednesday, October 3 to hear and participate in this important discussion (*see front page for details*).