



Community Newsletter

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DANIEL O'DONNELL

Upper West Side ■ Morningside Heights ■ Manhattan Valley

SPRING 2015

■ SERVING NEW YORK'S 69TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT ■

Dear Neighbor,

As many of you are aware, this year has been a fraught one in Albany. With long-standing leadership structures in turmoil, strides toward improved accountability and integrity have been accompanied by greater uncertainty about how the legislative session will be conducted until its close in June. I am continuing the push to advance my own progressive and reform legislation, but it is more difficult than in previous years to predict what will be able to pass and what will not.

One thing I know we will deal with this year is rent regulation. I am committed to advocating on behalf of the strongest possible rental protections this year, as well as an extension of the condo/co-op tax abatement. I am proud to be a leading co-sponsor on the recently introduced comprehensive rent reform bill carried by Assembly Member Keith Wright, Chair of the Housing Committee. This Wright-Farrell-O'Donnell bill, A7526, expands protections for many rent-controlled and rent-stabilized tenants by repealing vacancy decontrol and reregulating some apartments that were deregulated pursuant to vacancy decontrol prior to December 31, 2014; increasing the income thresholds required for high income/high rent deregulation; restricting a landlord from recovering more than one apartment to serve as a primary residence; and requiring that any rent increase due to Major Capital Improvements (MCIs) only extend until the cost of the MCI has been recouped. Many other provisions in this bill will provide strong protections for renters in New York City. I look forward to working with Assembly Member Wright and many more of my Assembly colleagues to defend New York's renters and help them to remain in their homes.

For those of you who have pressing housing issues of your own, I have a full-time housing specialist on staff, and offer a free monthly legal clinic for individuals who are unable to come in during the workday. Turn to page 4 for the upcoming dates of my legal clinic.

As part of last year's budget process, I was proud to vote in favor of a provision which expanded eligibility for the Senior Citizen and Disability Rent Increase Exemption programs (SC-RIE and DRIE), up to incomes of \$50,000. For more information about these programs and how to apply, turn to the Tenant's Corner piece on page 4 or contact my office at (212) 866-3970.

Most recently, I have been reaching out to constituents who live in buildings receiving J-51 tax abatements to inform them that their apartments should be under rent regulation. If you believe your building qualifies, or to see a copy of the letter I sent, please call my office.

Finally, I am outraged by the abhorrent conditions in our local public housing developments. I reached out to the Chair of the New York City Housing Authority to emphasize the drastic nature of these conditions, and am planning to attend a meeting with NYCHA and several other local elected officials to discuss the state of the developments in our area. Everyone deserves a safe and secure place to live, regardless of their rental or ownership status. I will continue to work to ensure that all much-needed repairs are addressed as soon as possible, and to preserve safe, affordable homes for New Yorkers in every way I can. Stay tuned for updates on this and all the matters addressed in this newsletter.

I hope you will find this newsletter informative and useful. My staff and I are always available to assist you in my Community Office located at 245 W. 104th Street, just off Broadway, or by phone at (212) 866-3970. I encourage you to call, write, or visit us, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. For those with specific housing problems, I have a dedicated housing specialist on staff available to help every day. And as always, if you would like to receive monthly email updates from me, please send an email with the subject "subscribe" to odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us.

Very truly yours,

Daniel O'Donnell



O'Donnell speaks on behalf of A3694 during the debate on the Assembly Floor. This bill, which passed the Assembly on April 23, 2015, would allow domestic partners to be eligible for compensation from the Crime Victims' Board.

2015-16 Budget Highlights

Despite a tumultuous year for both the Assembly and the Senate, this year the New York State Legislature and the Governor's office spent several months negotiating the state budget, and negotiations wrapped up in time to avoid any budget deadline extensions. The agreement reached represented a series of compromises, many of which were hard fought, with some being more favorable than others. Nevertheless, there were a number of important protections and types of funding that O'Donnell was proud to have worked to ensure were introduced or retained.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESS SERVICES

New York City residents are acutely aware of the vital boost that affordable housing can provide to the vibrancy and health of a community. As New York City experiences ever-increasing popularity as a destination and as a home, O'Donnell feels it is essential to advocate for programs that help families remain in their homes and new families begin their lives with manageable rents and affordable opportunities for housing. This year's budget provides \$415.6 million for housing and community development programs, including \$225 million for repair and rehabilitation programs. This includes \$100 million for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) capital repairs, and it also requires the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal to work with NYCHA to develop a coher-

[\(continued on page 2\)](#)

¡Atención!

La oficina de la comunidad del asambleísta O'Donnell tiene disponible empleados que hablan español para asistir al público tiempo completo, lunes a viernes de 9:00 a.m. a 5:30 p.m. La oficina está localizada en el 245 West 104th Street, cerca de Broadway. También pueden llamar a la oficina en horas laborables al (212) 866-3970.

Recuerden que nuestro boletín informativo está disponible en español. Para obtener una copia favor de comunicarse con la oficina del asambleísta Daniel O'Donnell.

O'Donnell speaks to raise awareness for HIV and AIDS treatment and funding.



2015-16 Budget Highlights (continued from page 1)

ent plan detailing how the funds will be used. It also includes \$25 million for Mitchell-Lama housing repairs and \$34.7 million for community development programs, as well as to \$155.5 million for additional affordable housing programs. Finally, it provides \$742,000 for NYCHA's Tenant Watch Program.

New York City is also facing another type of housing crisis—the homelessness crisis. This year's state budget includes vital funding to ensure that more New Yorkers have access to safe, stable places to live by providing \$440 million over the next four years for homelessness services and programs. In addition to \$220 million in rental subsidies for domestic violence victims, seniors, and families struggling to afford rent, the budget provides \$124.5 million to enable individuals to live independently in supportive housing outside the shelter system; \$40 million for the Living in Communities (LINC) program, which provides subsidies for working families living in shelters; \$34.2 million for shelter, transitional housing, and homelessness prevention programs; \$4.5 million to assist runaway and homeless youth; and \$15 million for a new program designed to prevent evictions by increasing public assistance housing allowances.

CORRECTION

As Chair of the Assembly Correction Committee, Assembly Member O'Donnell is deeply committed to improving New York's criminal justice system. Thanks in large part to the Assembly's advocacy effort, this year's final budget rejected multiple drastic cuts to vital programs and infrastructure funding proposed in the original Executive Budget, amounting to a total of \$12.27 million in restored funds. These funds included \$1 million for the New York State Defenders Association; \$5.58 million for the Legal Services Assistance Fund; \$2.2 million for domestic violence-related civil and criminal legal services support; over \$700,000 for alternative to incarceration programs; and \$600,000 to support immigrant legal services.

In addition, Assembly Member O'Donnell is proud to have been part of the movement to demand public hearings in many areas related to criminal justice reform, and to have secured a commitment by the Assembly Majority to hold these hearings with him. Over the course of his tenure he has explored such topics as parole reform, solitary confinement, and the intersection of mental health and correction. This spring he hosted a roundtable on sex offender residency restrictions.

EDUCATION

This year, education funding loomed large in the conversation about the state budget, and the initial Executive Proposal included draconian teacher evaluations and a large expansion of the charter cap, and sought to tie increases in education funding to the passage of more rigid and test-driven teacher evaluations and the extension of mayoral control in New York City.

Two of the Assembly's most immediate successful achievements were to eliminate the changes to the charter cap and the extension of mayoral control from the budget – Assembly Member O'Donnell believes that these two highly contentious issues must be discussed separately in order to give proper voice to the debate on these topics.

The final budget, primarily due to advocacy by the Assembly, included much more generous funding for schools than the origi-

nal proposal—a \$1.6 billion increase over last year's budget. This number includes an increase of nearly \$1.3 billion over last year for school aid, \$428 million for foundation aid—a \$170 million increase—and \$603 million to cover more than 50 percent of the remaining Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA). (The GEA was a school funding reduction implemented in the 2009-2010 Budget in response to the fiscal crisis. As the state's fiscal health continues to improve, the Assembly continues to lobby to eliminate the GEA.) An increase in aid was provided to “struggling schools,” especially those in high-needs districts, and an additional \$30 million was provided to promote universal pre-K's expansion in New York City.

New teacher evaluations were included in the budget proposal, despite Assembly Member O'Donnell's and the Assembly's attempts to separate them from the budget for further discussion. In contrast to the original proposal, however, the new evaluations will be administered by the Board of Regents rather than the Commissioner of the New York State Education Department, and the Governor's proposed requirement that 50% of a teacher's evaluation must be based on state assessments has been stripped. After lengthy negotiations, only half of a teacher's evaluation will be based on student achievement, gauged by a test or by locally agreed-upon alternatives. In this way, teachers will not be bound by the scores achieved on evaluations that many consider to be unfair and frequently lacking in meaning. Assembly Member O'Donnell believes that there remains more to be done to design an evaluation system that simultaneously holds teachers accountable and recognizes the complexity of measuring what they contribute to our children's education. He will continue to fight for better ways to address this in the remaining weeks of the legislative session and in future budget negotiations.

CHILD CARE AND FAMILY PROGRAMS

New York's families will have increased access to affordable child care after the \$34 million increase in child care funding provided in this year's budget. This funding increase includes support for more than 600 new child care slots, and increased funding for CUNY Child Care Centers and the Advantage Afterschool Program. In addition, the budget includes \$9.3 million for Facilitated Enrollment, which expands eligibility for childcare assistance to working families with incomes up to 275% of the federal poverty level, enabling more parents to remain employed without needing to arrange costly childcare.

The budget also restored \$24 million to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) budget, reversing every cut made in the Executive Proposal. While many other states have reduced their TANF funding in recent years, New York remains committed to providing adequate public assistance to keep families afloat during difficult times.

HEALTH CARE

This year's final budget expanded the Basic Health Program in New York, ensuring that approximately 438,000 New Yorkers—individuals whose income precludes them from qualifying for Medicaid, but who most likely still need significant assistance to cover health insurance premiums—can afford coverage. This program, in conjunction with the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), will help around 2.5 million New Yorkers receive health care through the state's health care exchange. O'Donnell and his colleagues believe that quality, affordable health care is a right that should be guaranteed to each and every New Yorker.

Goddard Riverside's Options Center Opens a New Location on the Upper West Side



O'Donnell with two alumni of the Options Center who are now in training there to become college counselors themselves.

On May 6th, Assembly Member O'Donnell attended the ribbon cutting for the Goddard Riverside Options Center office at 352 W. 110th Street (at Manhattan Avenue). The Options Center has been a fantastic resource for New York City students since 1985, providing counseling and encouragement to over 5,000 youth and adults seeking to attend college, and has now expanded to offer support to even more current students. Options has been instrumental in fostering a "college-going culture" in the neighborhood.

A number of years ago Goddard Riverside approached Assembly Member O'Donnell about expanding this successful program, and O'Donnell was able to secure Assembly capital funds to contribute to the construction of this new office. On May 6th, O'Donnell was proud and honored to attend the opening of this long-anticipated Center, and looks forward to witnessing the Options Center's expanded ability to encourage college access and success.



O'Donnell looks on as Stephan Russo, Goddard Riverside's Executive Director, and Lily Owen, Options Center Director, cut the ribbon on the new Options Center.

Program to Reduce Rat Population in Area Extended

Last year (FY 2015) the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) launched a Rat Reservoir Pilot Program to eliminate rat infestations in a few especially affected neighborhoods. One of those was in Assembly Member O'Donnell's district, in the area from 105th Street to 110th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. The program attacks rat reservoirs, ideal harborage environments for rats, which can be found in places like tree pits, holes in sidewalks, and underneath garbage bins.

The program addresses these areas with a proactive, comprehensive, and intensive neighborhood-based approach. It has been locating areas of rat activity, baiting city-owned spaces, and pest-proofing public infrastructure to prevent the re-emergence of rats. In addition, DOHMH has provided individualized services to tenants and building-owners, given out free rat-resistant trash cans, and hosted, in conjunction with O'Donnell's office, a Rodent Academy in January that provided tips and advice to tenants, property owners, and building managers.

The program's efforts have led to a significant decrease in rodent activity in the target area. Due to such successes and the ongoing citywide need for such services, the Pilot Program, including in this neighborhood, has been funded permanently, and has been given sufficient resources to expand to more locations in FY2016. For more information on this program, and information on how to make your own area more rat-resistant, call O'Donnell's office at (212) 866-3970.

O'Donnell Allocates Funds for Community Organizations

Assembly Member O'Donnell is pleased to announce that he was able to secure funding for the below community organizations. These organizations are largely based in the 69th Assembly District, but a number are centered elsewhere in NYC and provide services to large numbers of 69th Assembly District residents.

Bloomington School of Music • Broadway Mall Maintenance Fund, Inc. • Emergency Food Pantry at the Franciscan Community Center • The Center School • The Community Action School • Manhattan School for Children • M.S. 54 • P.S. 9 • P.S. 75 • P.S. 84 • P.S. 125 • P.S. 145 • P.S. 163 • P.S. 165 • P.S. 166 • Goddard Riverside Community Center • Groundswell • Landmark West • Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT) • Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center (The Center) • Lifeforce in Later Years (LiLY) • Medicare Rights Center • Morningside Heights Historic District Committee • Morningside Heights/West Harlem Sanitation Coalition, Inc. • Morningside Retirement and Health Services, Inc. • New York Cares • New York Classical Theatre • New York Shakespeare Festival • Roundabout Theatre Company • Services and Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Elders (SAGE) • The Saturday Soup Kitchen at St. Michael's Church • Upper West Side Recycling Center • Urban Yoga Foundation • Westside Community Garden

Join Assembly Member O'Donnell's 12th Annual Community Reading Challenge!

This year's Twelfth Annual Community Reading Challenge kicked off on May 6th, and continues until June 12th! Visit Assembly Member O'Donnell's District Office, or the **Morningside Heights, Bloomingdale, or George Bruce Library** to register to participate in this exciting community event!

This year's theme is "**All for One, One for All,**" and the book recommendations include stories promoting individuality and friendship. For the Challenge, students in grades pre-K through 8 will be provided with a book list, reading log, and a list of suggested activities and events that Assembly Member O'Donnell hopes will both entertain and inspire readers to foster and celebrate the qualities that make each of us unique. These materials can be collected at the Assembly Member's Community Office, located at 245 West

104th St., or at any of the following participating libraries: George Bruce, Morningside Heights, or Bloomingdale.

The Challenge will culminate in **three book festivals**. On **Thursday, May 21st, at George Bruce Library, Thursday, June 4th, at Morningside Heights Library, and Friday, June 12th, at Bloomingdale Library**, readers are invited to join Assembly Member O'Donnell for gatherings filled with special guest authors, prizes such as tote bags, free books and bookstore gift cards, and lots of fun! Our **guest authors** include Heather Demetrios, Susanna Leonard Hill, and Aimee Friedman. If you have any questions about this year's Reading Challenge, please don't hesitate to visit any of the participating libraries or call Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office at (212) 866-3970.

Assembly Member O'Donnell's Upcoming FREE Legal Clinics

For constituents who need help with legal issues but are unable to come to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office during the workday, Assembly Member O'Donnell hosts a monthly evening opportunity for constituents to consult with a volunteer attorney.

Call Joyce at
(212) 866-3970
to make an appointment.

Upcoming clinic dates:
May 28th • June 25th •
July 23rd • August 27th

TENANT'S CORNER:

Helpful Rent Freezes for Seniors and Disabled New Yorkers

Two programs that have kept rents affordable for countless seniors and disabled New Yorkers have now expanded to assist even more city residents. These are the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program.

To qualify for SCRIE the head of household must:

1. Be a rent-controlled or rent-stabilized tenant, or the owner of an HDFC cooperative apartment;
2. Be sixty-two years old or older;
3. Have a household income of no more than \$50,000; and
4. Be paying more than one-third of the total household income for rent.

To qualify for DRIE the head of household must:

1. Be a rent-controlled or rent-stabilized tenant, or the owner of an HDFC Cooperative apartment;
2. Receive any one of the following forms of financial assistance:
 - a. Supplemental Security income (SSI) from the Social Security Administration
 - b. Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) from the Social Security Administration
 - c. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Disability pension or compensation
 - d. Disability-related Medicaid;
3. Have an annual household income of no more than \$50,000; and
4. Pay more than one-third of the household income for rent.

Tenants in the SCRIE and DRIE programs are not generally subject to future rent increases, and do not pay future fuel cost adjustments or the costs of major capital improvements.

Both programs are administered by the New York City Department of Finance. Applications are available on the internet or at Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office. All those who think they may qualify for SCRIE or DRIE are encouraged to apply. The vast majority of New York City's landlords are familiar with SCRIE and DRIE.

It should be noted that landlords are not deprived of any rental income when their tenants are in the SCRIE or DRIE programs—they are fully compensated for the excess rent by the city.

Daniel O'Donnell's Community Newsletter

Assembly Member ■ 69th District

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COMMUNITY OFFICE INFORMATION:

Open Monday through Friday
9:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.
(212) 866-3970

odonnellid@assembly.state.ny.us

Upcoming Cell Phone Drive!

A donated cell phone can become a lifeline for an isolated or otherwise vulnerable individual who needs to call 911, including seniors or victims of domestic violence. **Secure the Call** is a charity with a single mission: to collect and convert as many old cell phones as possible into 911 emergency access phones. Please help us support this important cause by bringing your used cell phones to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office, 245 W. 104th St. (between Broadway and West End) any time during the month of June. For more information, please visit www.securethecall.org.

June 1st – 30th, 2015

E-Newsletters

Do you want more frequent updates about interesting community events, important government information, and what Assembly Member O'Donnell has been working on? Sign up to receive his monthly electronic newsletters by sending an email to

odonnellid@assembly.state.ny.us.