

BUDGET NEWS

Negotiations regarding New York State's 2016-2017 Budget are well underway in the Assembly and our office is working to ensure that the \$154 billion being negotiated is aimed at improving the lives of our constituents. The Budget includes many proposals that will help New Yorkers, and particularly the low-income New Yorkers in every part of the state. One of our main goals in the current fiscal year is to ensure that the Governor's Executive Budget Proposal is fixed so that it includes investments to improve the quality of and accessibility to education for New York's children from pre-kindergarten through college.

We are working tirelessly to ensure that additional funding is allocated to our schools. Specifically, we are pushing for additional Foundation Aid for the 2016-2017 state budget. Under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), it is the State's responsibility to ensure that all students receive a "sound basic education." This will require the State to include additional Foundation Aid in our underfunded schools across the state. Currently, the Executive Budget Proposal short-changes Bronxites and New York State residents by \$2.4 billion in education funding. Our office and the Assembly as a whole have worked tirelessly to make sure that our children get the education funding that we deserve and to get that money in the budget. Providing this additional and critical Foundation Aid will help ensure that our teachers and students have the academic tools to ensure all students receive a quality education.

Additionally, our office is pushing to finally and completely address the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA), a built-in reduction in aid for schools, which will help ensure all schools are appropriately funded. We are aiming to ensure the State adequately invests in our children's future so that they are given all they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

While the Executive Budget proposal provides continued support for many important programs at both SUNY and CUNY schools, the proposal calls for significant funding cuts, gaps in capital funding, and tuition hikes for students. SUNY and CUNY schools are of vital importance to many disadvantaged students in our district and across the State; and SUNY is the largest comprehensive post-secondary education in the nation. The Assembly is working to ensure funding levels for these vital educational facilities remain intact and they continue to receive reliable funding to provide affordable education to all New Yorkers.

We are continuing our everlasting support for our senior citizens by aggressively fighting for appropriate funds to be allocated towards quality and affordable health care and housing. There is a growing population of households with individuals 65 and older, and this population will continue to grow. As New York State is making efforts to redesign Medicaid, we are dedicated to ensuring that funding is available for senior services, including those which assist seniors in obtaining appropriate and affordable health care and rental assistance.

The Assembly is negotiating a budget to ensure that our senior residents have a safe and affordable place to live that allows them to stay in their communities and avoid relocation to costly institutions. These efforts include the continued support of the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase, to ensure that senior's paying 1/3 of their earnings on rent costs receive a rent freeze; the creation of the Taxation Rent Increase Exemption (TRIE), so that all low income renters can have access to fair and affordable housing at frozen rents; and the support of the reinstatement of the 421-a tax abatement to ensure more affordable housing will become available to seniors in a manner that addresses the concerns of citizens throughout the state.

In creating more affordable housing, we will also be creating more jobs; including jobs during construction and sustained permanent jobs to support resident spending and building maintenance. Additionally, the budget includes Economic Development funding to continue the support of the revitalization of Upstate New York. This funding will continue the economic development strategy of creating jobs, strengthening and diversifying economies, and generating economic opportunities across the State. We will also ensure the continued funding of Regional Economic Development Councils which have been awarded \$4 billion for job creation and community development projects that will create and retain over 200,000 jobs. The Assembly will continue the support of and negotiate a budget that supports initiatives that encourage the continued growth of employment throughout New York State.

The Assembly is confident that we can deliver an on-time budget that ensures the needs of our students and seniors are adequately provided for and that job creation continues to flourish.

Coming Soon – Legal Service Series

In the upcoming months, Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj will host a series of forums focused on different legal topics which hold significance to the constituents of the 80th Assembly District. These community outreach forums will take place in various areas of the District.

- The topics will include:
- Sanitation Violations
 - Parking and Moving Violations
 - Family Law
 - Criminal Law
 - Elder Law and Wills and Estates
 - Housing Matters
 - Consumer Debt
 - Civil Court Claims
 - Immigration

The programs will include participation of judges, lawyers, and agency department heads. They will provide individuals with their rights under each law, provide any additional information needed, and participate in a questions and answers segment.

DATES, TIMES & LOCATION TO BE DETERMINED

80th Assembly Staff

- Nathalia Fernandez, Chief of Staff
- Sonny Vataj, Executive Director
- William Madonna, Chief Counsel
- Lindsay Copeland, Executive Coordinator
- Lilyanna Pekic, Community Liaison
- Ilirjan Fundo, Director of Economic Studies
- Aleatha Williams, Administrative Assistant
- Desireh Garcia, Community Liaison

HIGHLIGHTED EVENTS / AROUND THE DISTRICT



Black History Month Poster Contest

For the fourth year in a row, Assemblyman Gjonaj has hosted his Black History Month Poster Contest within the public schools in his district. Students are asked to create a poster portraying a notable African American that has impacted our history and society. Pictured: Assemblyman Gjonaj in an assembly at P.S. 96 discussing our African American Heroes with students and participants of the poster contest.

Gift of Life

The Rotary Club of the Bronx, through their Gift of Life Program, has saved the lives of thousands of children around the world in need of treatment for heart disease. Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj has been a long-time contributor to the cause and has praised the efforts and successes of the Gift of Life Program. In 2015, Assemblyman Gjonaj opened his home to the father, Rasim Murtezaj and two-year old, Rexhem from Kosovo. Little Rexhem suffered from ventricular hypertrophy and severe aortic stenosis in which the lower part of the heart is extremely pressurized due to enlarged muscle tissue. The Gift of Life has given Rexhem the chance to live a healthy, active childhood with minor complications in his adult life.



First Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony in Morris Park

For the first time in many years, Christmas was celebrated in Morris Park. Along with the support of fellow elected officials and community leaders (l-r, John Marano, Michael Riverdeneyra, Thomas Messina, Santa Claus, Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, Senator Jeff Klein, Al D'Angelo, Tony Signorelli, Assemblyman Michael Benedetto), we celebrated Christmas with a beautiful tree, warm refreshments from Morris Perk Coffee, and performances from St. Claire's choir and P.S. 105's school band.



Immigration Forum

Assemblyman Gjonaj hosted the second annual Immigration Forum at Bronx House on October 21, 2015. Special guest panel included attorneys and representatives from the DHS and USCIS. Photo by Jeffrey Panish.



Visiting Community Board 7

The 80th AD represents the neighborhoods in Community Board 7 and Community Board 11. Pictured: Assemblyman Gjonaj greeting attendees at the January General Meeting for CB 7.



Meeting with Parents

A supporter of Charter Schools and the opportunity for quality education, Assemblyman Gjonaj paid a visit to the Success Academy where he heard first hand from parents the exemplary education this institution has brought to their children.



Rotary Club of the Bronx

A friend and supporter of the Rotary Club of the Bronx, Assemblyman Gjonaj visited their annual luncheon. Pictured: Hally Gilbert of Bronx Opera Company, Toba Lacrown, Assemblyman Gjonaj, Amir Asadi, Leslie Swanson, Michael Spierman (Founder of Bronx Opera Company), and Shawn Chang.



Making Strides Against Breast Cancer

Assemblyman Gjonaj accompanied with the outstanding students of CIMS High School at the Making Strides Breast Cancer Walk on Sunday, October 19th.



Kosovo Independence Celebration

In celebration of the 8th Anniversary of Kosovo's Independence, Assemblyman Gjonaj, along with various prominent Albanian-American Organizations and celebrities. Pictured top: Thomas Messina of Congressman Crowley's office, Miss New York USA Serena Bucay, Aleksander Nilaj, President of Albanian American Open Hands Association.

Pictured bottom: Representatives from hosting Albanian organizations.



'Walk the Bronx'

Assemblyman Gjonaj was the guest of honor at the 18th Annual Community Walkathon organized and hosted by Doctors for a Healthier Bronx, Montefiore Hospital, and Walgreens Pharmacy. Children enjoyed numerous activities while learning about eating healthy and staying active. The Assemblyman was also able to get his annual flu shot by a helpful Walgreens pharmacist.

A Message from Assemblyman Gjonaj

Dear Neighbor and Friend:

As your Assemblyman, it is my honor to fight for the needs of the families living in the 80th Assembly District. Each legislative session gives me the opportunity to address major concerns we face here in the Bronx and all over New York State. This legislative session has allowed me to introduce legislation that will help improve the lives and quality of life of many New Yorkers and their families.

With the rising costs of living in New York City, it's important that we protect the most vulnerable populations. Currently, New York law contains two programs specifically aimed at addressing the impacts of increasing rents for specialized populations. The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) provide a rent-freeze for eligible senior citizens and individuals living with a disability. These invaluable protections help provide peace of mind that New York's most vulnerable populations are able to stay in housing as the cost of living and rents increase throughout the state. The State, however, must provide greater protections for all New York's citizens.

I've introduced legislation that would create a Tenant Rent Increase Exemption (TRIE) program that mirrors the highly successful and touted SCRIE and DRIE model. Similar to SCRIE and DRIE, this TRIE program would allow eligible families living in affordable housing, who earn \$50,000 or less per year and pay half of their income in rent costs, to have their rents capped and frozen. This program will enable working individuals to better provide for their families and allow their incomes to be used to acquire necessities of daily living.

An issue that goes hand-in-hand with quality of life within the Bronx are fears surrounding Synthetic Marijuana and Synthetic Cannabinoids, most commonly known as "K2" or "Spice."

Between June and September of 2015, the state saw over 1,900 hospitalizations and emergency room visits related to Synthetic Marijuana use. The state cannot stand by as these drug dealers find legal loopholes that the federal government refuses to address. We cannot allow these dangerous drugs to find their ways into the hands of our children. In response to the dismal state and federal level responses, I have introduced two bills addressing the growing concerns of the distribution and use of synthetic marijuana.

Our first bill would provide a definition of these drugs that covers all existing chemical forms of synthetic marijuana while also providing for a means for law enforcement to address any new formulas that dealers may create. Our definition strikes the right balance between deterring drug dealers and ensuring that legitimate usage of medical marijuana can continue in New York State.

Our second bill is aimed at the dealers and distributors themselves. These drugs are sold at local stores, under the guise of their legal loopholes, which provides easy access to citizens and children throughout the district, the Bronx, and the State. The legislation I introduced will impose a significant fine and penalty on any shop that is found to have been selling these dangerous drugs. These violators will also face having their licenses to sell tobacco, alcohol, and/or New York state lottery products revoked for multiple infractions. This legislation provides for and creates a Synthetic Marijuana surrender program to allow individuals to surrender any product containing synthetic marijuana without fear of punishment and enable law enforcement to penalize offenders and help ensure the safety of our communities.

– Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj



Assemblyman
Mark Gjonaj
Community Update

Spring 2016

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March**
- 29 – Metro Card Van
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Stationed at District Office
- 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Stationed on 204th Street and Bainbridge Avenue
- April**
- 16 – Pelham Parkway Clean Up
11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
White Plains Rd. & Pelham Parkway

- 30 – Mosholu Parkway Clean Up
10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Circle of Friends Plaza
Jerome Ave. and N. Mosholu Parkway

- May**
- 24 – Bronx Day in Albany

- June**
- 25 – International Family Day
Pelham Parkway and Wallace Avenue

- July**
- 16 – International Allerton Food Festival
Allerton Avenue

- August**
- 13 – International Music Festival
Location TBA

- September**
- 19 – Hispanic Heritage Festival
Location TBA