



E-News April 2015

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SAVE THE DATE:

May 18th
Nyack Bench Project
2:30 PM
Nyack Center

Bench by the Road dedication. Join Toni Morrison, Sam Waymon, The Nyack High School Chamber Orchestra, Jazz Band and Chorale, Gospel Choir from Nyack College and a community drum circle for a ceremony to honor Underground Railroad conductor Cynthia Hesdra.

Dear Neighbors,

In the final months of the 2015 Legislative Session there is much work to be done. I have been meeting in Albany with stakeholders and advocates and fighting for important legislative reforms. Along with fifteen of my Assembly colleagues, I [drafted a letter to the Board of Regents](#) making recommendations on teacher observations and the weight of standardized tests in teacher evaluations. I strongly support the Board of Regents' directive to the State Education Department to [push back the deadline](#) for school districts to fully implement new teacher evaluations to Sept. 2016. The Legislature elects a Board of Regents for a reason: to ensure that qualified education experts are directing the education system in our state- not politics. I will continue standing with teachers working to make our schools the best they can be, so that *every* child in Rockland County and across the state has the opportunities to succeed. Read more below.

- Ellen C. Jaffee

Push Back Deadline for Approving New Teacher Evaluations

The Board of Regents will work to find a way to administratively extend the deadline for school districts to approve new teacher evaluation systems to Sept. 1, 2016. The Assembly Majority fought hard during budget negotiations to put the teacher evaluation system into the hands of the Board of Regents, making sure the budget language was crafted to give the Board significant flexibility in coming up with a new teacher evaluation system. The Assembly Majority also made sure that dedicated education experts who actually understand what goes on in the classroom were elected to the Board of Regents.

Legislation to Limit Solitary Confinement in NYS

As a co-sponsor of the HALT Solitary Confinement Act ([S2659/A4401](#)), I [joined with experts and advocates](#), including individuals with first-hand experience of solitary confinement, to speak out against the inhumane use of extreme isolation in NYS. New York shamefully uses solitary to punish minor disciplinary violations. The NYCLU also reported that 85-90% of incarcerated women have a history of domestic and sexual abuse. Solitary confinement makes these women even more vulnerable to physical and emotional trauma. New York must end this egregious practice and focus on therapeutic options for all people.

Also featured at the event was a special videotaped statement by the [United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan E. Méndez](#), a vocal critic of the use of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons.

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[Giving Child Abuse Victims Their Day in Court](#)

I am proud to be a co-sponsor of The Child Victims Act of NY ([A2872](#)) sponsored by Assemblymember Margaret Markey (D-30). This legislation would eliminate the civil and criminal statute of limitations for child sexual abuse offenses and extend the authority to prosecute and to bring a civil lawsuit for damages, providing a remedy for those who have been affected by the horror of this abuse giving victims their day in court to get the justice they have been denied. It would also prevent future abuse by pedophiles who will continue to prey on children unless they are exposed.

[Spring Valley H.S. Thespians Shine in West Side Story](#)

I have helped secure funding for East Ramapo schools to support extra-curricular activities and Thespian Troupe 721 is among the beneficiaries. I attended the recent production of *West Side Story* and was impressed by the professional production.



"We are extremely grateful for her tireless work and support of our students. The programs in which they participate provide valuable experiences in the arts, community service, and a host of other areas, helping to show them the broad scope of their abilities and leading them to personal success outside the classroom," said Stacey Tirro, advisor, director choreographer. "*West Side Story* was one of the greatest and most inspiring challenges. It is, in great part, due to Ellen's work that we were able to take on this production. The kids absolutely shined. We wanted to honor her and show our gratitude for truly and tirelessly caring about our kids."

April 28 East Ramapo Advocacy Day in Albany

Several groups including Strong East Ramapo, Rockland Clergy for Social Justice, the Spring Valley Chapter of the NAACP, and the Power of Ten have worked together to organize a bus trip for students, parents, alumni and concerned New Yorkers, continuing to focus their advocacy on urging the New York State Legislature to pass my bill ([A 5355 / S 3821](#)), [which calls for strong state oversight](#) of the troubled district.



Nyack Center Executive Director, Kim Cross, Says Thanks

"I am proud to announce we've broken ground on Nyack Center's long-awaited Sound and Recording Studio thanks to a \$250,000 grant secured by Assemblymember Ellen Jaffee, Architect Jan Degenshein, who's donated his services, and the many volunteer musicians, and sound and recording professionals helping to build the digital, multi-track recording and film studio. We are so grateful to our champion Ellen Jaffee, our Mayor Jen White, Jan Degenshein, and the volunteers who have helped make the idea a reality. With expert guidance from professionals, our youth will have a unique opportunity to document creativity and for hands-on training in music production. In addition the studio will also be available to those who use the Center and for rental."