



ASSEMBLYMAN

*Michael Cusick*

*Update from Albany*



SUMMER 2018

Dear Neighbor:

*I hope this finds you well and that you are enjoying your summer. As your representative in Albany, I work each and every day to advocate for policy and legislation that will positively benefit the people of our borough. During this session, I sought to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing Staten Islanders, including increasing funding for education, continuing the ongoing battle against the heroin & opioid epidemic, and improving quality of life issues.*

*This newsletter contains information on what my colleagues and I accomplished on your behalf during the Legislative Session. I hope that this is both helpful and informative and should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. My office is located at 1911 Richmond Avenue, our phone number is (718) 370-1384, and my email address is [cusickm@nyassembly.gov](mailto:cusickm@nyassembly.gov). I wish you a safe and relaxing summer and look forward to hearing from you soon.*

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick  
Member of Assembly  
District 63



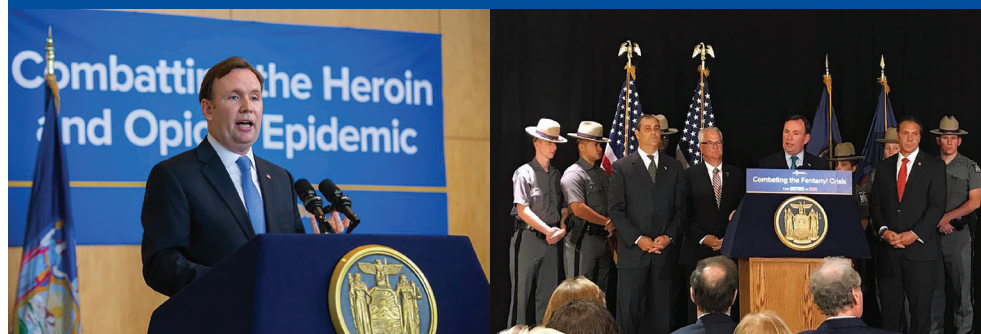
## Establishment of New Supreme Court Judge

On December 5, 2007, Chapter 690 of the Laws of 2007 was signed into law creating the 13th Judicial District. Under this law, Staten Island (Richmond County) was allotted three Supreme Court Justices. The Staten Island Court system has been shortchanged on judges for years. In New York City, all four other boroughs have been granted more representation than Staten Island on the bench.

After extensive bi-partisan state budget negotiations with **Governor Cuomo**, we are pleased to announce that Staten Island's 13th Judicial District will be getting an additional Supreme Court Justice.



## Combating the Heroin and Opioid Epidemic



To continue our fight to combat the opioid epidemic, the enacted 2018-2019 New York State Budget provides over \$200 million in funding. It includes an increase of over \$30 million in operating and capital support for the NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) to continue to enhance prevention, treatment and recovery programs, residential service opportunities, public awareness, and educational activities. The state budget also provides a \$100 million dollar investment to establish an Opioid Stewardship Fund. This fund seeks to fight the epidemic by creating a partnership with the pharmaceutical industry to further expand prevention, treatment and recovery programs operated by OASAS. This program will be funded by fees paid by manufacturers and distributors registered to sell and/or distribute opioids.

## Advocating for the Creation of Increased Mental Hygiene Legal Services



The NYS Court of Appeals, the State's highest court, ruled that Mental Hygiene Legal Services (MHLS) lacks jurisdiction to represent mentally ill individuals who have been admitted to nursing homes from psychiatric centers and psychiatric hospital wards because the Office of Mental Health does not license the facilities. I, alongside **Assembly Member Matthew Titone**, introduced legislation (A.1362) to grant

Mental Hygiene Legal Services the authority to provide legal assistance to patients or residents of residential healthcare facilities who have been admitted directly from a psychiatric facility or a psychiatric ward of a hospital and who have a severe mental illness for which they are receiving services related to such illness. I will continue to advocate for this legislation to pass the NYS Senate and be signed into law.





## Providing Small Businesses with a Tax Credit Who Employ People with Disabilities

It is a continuous uphill battle to seek and retain viable employment. Disabled persons, by far, face unprecedented challenges. According to a 2015 Bureau of Labor Statistics study, the unemployment rate of persons with a disability was 10.7%, compared to 5% for those without a disability. This is why I authored legislation, A.1369-A, which will provide small business owners who retain disabled persons within their company for 12 months or more with a tax credit. Their services will contribute to the economic growth of New York State, create greater awareness of their overlooked skills, and establish fairness with confidence. This bill awaits action by the Governor.

## Increase in Funding for the NYS Office of People with Developmental Disabilities

The State Budget increased funding for the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) by \$120 million. A total of \$3.6 billion has been allocated to OPWDD in SFY 2019, which is an increase of \$130 million in comparison to SFY 2017-2018 spending. This funding will be used to support expanding services, especially for caregivers with aging family members, and to help provide additional services to those with developmental disabilities. Specifically, this funding goes towards 853 and 4410 schools for developmentally disabled children throughout our State.



## Securing the Staten Island Residents Toll Relief Program for the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge

Contained in the State Budget spending plan is the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge Rebate Enhancement, to provide a 24 cent rebate for Staten Island residents and keep the discount at \$5.50. In total, the budget provides \$13.8 million for the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge Rebate Program. The toll relief has been negotiated by myself and **Senator Andrew Lanza** for the past several years and has become a permanent discount in the State Budget.



## Port Authority NY/NJ Staten Island Bridges Plan

I want to remind people to take advantage of the discounts offered at the Outerbridge Crossing, Goethals Bridge, and Bayonne Bridge. The \$6.25 per trip toll discount will kick-in once three Staten Island-bound trips are made on any of the above mentioned bridges within a calendar month. These discounts were instituted by the Port Authority in 2012 as a result of negotiations led by myself and **Andrew Lanza**. You must sign up if you have E-ZPass. For more information on how you can sign-up for this discount, please visit <https://www.panynj.gov/bridges-tunnels/e-zpass-ny-nj-sib.html> or call 1-800-333-8655.

## Investment in Services for Seniors

The budget funds a number of programs that provide essential resources for seniors, including \$31.2 million for the Community Services for the Elderly program which supports personal care, home-delivered meals, transportation, senior centers and other vital services; \$100,000 for the Statewide Senior Action Council Patients’ Rights Hotline; \$86,000 for the Foundation for Senior Citizens Home Sharing and Respite Program; and \$250,000 for the Older Adult Technology Center.

The budget provides \$20 million in capital funding to support the establishment of 1,000 new assisted living program beds in underserved areas. It also includes \$7.8 million to maintain the right of spousal refusal.



## Mental Health Funding in New York State

The State’s spending plan has allocated \$15 million to expand behavioral health services. The budget awards \$10 million in additional funding for the Office of Mental Health (OMH) to support existing residential programs, as well as \$50 million in capital funding for the Finance Division Briefing Paper Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to expand the capacity of community crisis respite. The spending plan directs \$2.9 billion to OMH in the fiscal year 2019.



## Funding for the MTA

The 2018-19 State Budget fully funds the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) Subway Action Plan – for a total of \$836 million – to make emergency repairs and enhance subway performance. New York State and New York City will share the responsibility of funding the initiative.



## Total Fitness Challenge

To encourage children to exercise both their mind and body during the summer months, I established the Total Fitness Challenge in 2007. We have started the 2018 Total Fitness Challenge which is open to all students from kindergarten through eighth grade and their parents. Each child must read at least 30 minutes every day and perform as many physical activities as they want. The different physical activities are assigned various point values which count toward each student's total score. A Total Fitness medal will be awarded to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place top scorers from each grade among the island-wide entries. A trophy will be given to the school having the most points and participants in the challenge.

Brochures for the 2019 challenge will be sent to each school and distributed at the end of the school year. For more information, visit: [www.totalfitnesschallenge.org](http://www.totalfitnesschallenge.org) or call my District Office at (718) 370-1384.



## New York Access to Homes for Veterans Program

Many disabled veterans in New York State face a significant impediment to accessible and affordable housing as a result of service-related injuries, age or health-related disabilities. These men and women have served our country and state with honor and distinction and deserve to achieve maximum independence, social interaction and community integration. The "Homes for Veterans" program will establish a fund to assist New York State's veteran population so that they are able to live safely, comfortably and productively in the setting of their choice. Providing financial assistance with the cost of adapting the dwelling units of our disabled veterans is fundamental to providing for the promise of living safely, comfortably and productively in the most integrated setting of their choice. For more information on this program, please visit <http://www.nyshcr.org/Topics/Home/Buyers/SONYMA/HomesforVeteransProgram.htm>.



## Notifying Veterans of Resources Offered by the Division of Veterans Affairs

Veterans and their families often deal with numerous subdivisions of the state, from the DMV to Social Services. Often, they are not aware that in addition to the services they receive from these agencies, they are entitled to assistance through the Division of Veterans Affairs. **Senator Andrew Lanza** and I authored legislation (A.1206/S.6610), which passed both houses, that will make sure that veterans and their families are notified whenever dealing with state agencies that they also have tremendous additional resources in the Division of Veterans Affairs. This bill awaits action by the Governor.

## Discount Program for Veterans

I partnered with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to initiate a discount program for veterans of the United States military who live on Staten Island. To join this program and receive reductions on goods and services at participating businesses, sign up at my office at 1911 Richmond Avenue. Please bring your discharge papers (DD-214) to receive your Staten Island VETS card. You will be given a listing of participating businesses that offer discounts at their establishments. For more information, contact our District Office at (718) 370-1384.



## Combating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

The State Budget included language that requires businesses bidding on State contracts to certify that they have adopted and implemented a written policy addressing sexual harassment prevention in the workplace and provide annual sexual harassment prevention training to all of its employees. These measures will apply to both government and private sector workplaces. The new rules will terminate state taxpayer-financed settlements for state officials who are found to be guilty of accusations made against them. This law will also prohibit mandatory arbitration for cases of alleged sexual harassment and will end secret settlements unless otherwise requested by the victim.

## Fighting for Election Law Reform – Voter Enfranchisement Modernization Act of 2018

The NYS Assembly passed legislation I introduced known as the "Voter Enfranchisement Modernization Act of 2018" (A.5382-A). This bill will allow for the establishment of an electronic voter registration system through which voters could register to vote online. Additionally, the bill would provide for the establishment of an online voter registration application that would include all of the voter registration information required under election law, including a signature or the option of an electronic signature, if necessary. This bill awaits action by the senate.





## Funding for Education

Under the 2018-2019 State Budget spending plan, there will be a total increase in school aid by \$1 billion. This entails \$50 million for community schools, \$618 million in foundation aid, \$240 million in expense-based aids, and a \$334 million increase to city schools. The total in funding for education in the State Budget totaled \$26.7 billion.

The spending plan includes an additional \$15 million investment in prekindergarten to expand high-quality half-day and full-day prekindergarten instruction for 3,000 three and four-year-old children.

Also included in the spending plan is \$9 million in funding to create 15 new early college high school programs, with a focus on communities with low graduation or college access rates. The programs will align their curriculum towards industries with growing demand for skilled workers.

The approved budget also includes \$96.6 million in aid to public libraries, which is an increase of \$1 million over last year. Also, the plan consists of \$34 million for public library construction grants, an increase of \$10 million over SFY 2017-18.

## Places To Go & Things To Do in the 63rd Assembly District

### The Big Park

Located at the corner of Grandview Ave and Continental Place, The Big Park was just re-opened after a \$5.6 million renovation.

A staple of Mariners Harbor, this park's new features include new playground equipment, spray showers, rain gardens and water fixtures, a fitness trail, remodeled basketball and handball courts, a multi-purpose open lawn, and a green space.



### Green Belt Conservancy

The Greenbelt consists of more than 2,800 acres of public and private land in central Staten Island, and includes natural areas and traditional parks. The Greenbelt Conservancy is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1989 that works in partnership with the NYC Parks to oversee the operation, administration and public use of the parkland of the Greenbelt, the largest of New York City's five flagship parks. The Conservancy is dedicated to promoting conservation of the Greenbelt, to increase public awareness, support, and enjoyment of its parks and resources, and is responsible for the prudent management of its financial resources to benefit the Greenbelt. The Greenbelt Conservancy consist of the following:

- Willowbrook Park
- The Willowbrook Carousel – Eton Place & Richmond Ave.
- Greenbelt Nature Center – 700 Rockland Ave.
- High Rock Park
- La Tourette Golf Course
- Moses' Mountain



*For more information on running events, hiking events, and the Willowbrook Carousel, please visit <https://sigreenbelt.org/events-calendar/> or call 718-667-2165.*

New York State Assembly • Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman

**Michael  
Cusick**

**UPDATE  
FROM ALBANY**

SUMMER 2018

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## UNCLAIMED MONEY

The New York State Office of the Comptroller may have money that belongs to you! There is over \$14 billion of unclaimed money from bank accounts, stocks, and bonds, utility deposits, income tax refunds, and inheritances to name a few. To see if New York State has money that belongs to you go to the Comptroller's website ([www.osc.state.ny.us](http://www.osc.state.ny.us)) and click on "Unclaimed Funds."