



Assemblyman

Steve Otis



Legislative Update

WINTER 2017

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to provide you this report highlighting what has been a productive year serving as your State Assemblyman. My goal is always to achieve results on issues of importance to the residents, local governments, school districts, businesses, and organizations in the 91st Assembly District.

Two years ago, I helped create a new statewide clean water grant program to lower the cost to local governments and taxpayers of expensive water quality projects. Thanks to Governor Cuomo and the work of the Assembly, this program has been greatly expanded with significant 2017 grants coming to Westchester and the Sound Shore.

The year brought increased state aid to all of the school districts in the 91st Assembly District, and we have seen promising new reforms in education policy from the Board of Regents that reduce reliance on testing. Legislation I sponsored was signed into law to help locate missing persons and to improve options for consumers owning annuities, as well as local legislation on behalf of communities on the Sound Shore.

Ideas for new legislation often come from the experiences we all have as consumers, residents, or in business. My office is available to help with individual issues you may have with state agencies or other entities. Those problems may also trigger ideas for changes in the law. Please call my District Office at 914-939-7028, if I may be of assistance.

It is an honor to serve you and to work on the issues of concern to Westchester residents and businesses.

In this holiday season, I wish you and your family happiness and health in the New Year.

Warm regards,

Steve

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman

State Clean Water Grants Come to the Sound Shore

New Rochelle, Larchmont, Mamaroneck and Port Chester Receive Funding

2017 was an exceptional year for clean water grant funding coming to Westchester and the Sound Shore. When I helped initiate New York's clean water grant program two years ago the goals were clear; make water quality projects more affordable for local governments and taxpayers across the state and bring those funds to Westchester where we have an aging water infrastructure in need of repair.

Clean water grants are not a lottery. Applications must include a good deal of engineering detail, which means local governments must do up front analysis to be selected. This year, \$20 million in water grants were awarded to Westchester projects. The largest grant in the Mid-Hudson region, \$5.7 million, went to an intermunicipal application submitted by New Rochelle, Larchmont, the Town of

Mamaroneck, and Pelham. This was made possible through the creation this year of the new Intermunicipal funding category that I supported, which will provide an additional \$150 million in grants. Municipalities submitting joint applications for projects covering multiple communities are now eligible for larger grants.

Other Westchester grants were awarded to Port Chester, which has been working on water infrastructure repairs for four years as part of an EPA consent decree. They will receive \$487,000 to lower local costs. Croton-on-Hudson, Greenburgh, North Salem, and Westchester County all received grants this year. The Village of Mamaroneck and Town of North Salem received grants in 2016.

Breakthrough Clean Water Program Adopted in 2017

The water grant program received a tremendous boost this year as part of Governor Cuomo's \$2.5 billion clean water program, which continues the municipal water grants through 2022 and creates new, ongoing water quality initiatives to address the other varied and complex issues related to water quality issues around the state.

The Clean Water Infrastructure Act of 2017 was proposed by the Governor and enhanced by the Legislature to place New York at the forefront of national efforts to provide a multi-pronged approach to address drinking and water infrastructure issues. Building on the program we created two years ago, the 2017 Act commits an additional \$1.5 billion for municipal drinking water and wastewater infrastructure projects over the next five years.

In addition, our action this year establishes funding streams to help local governments replace lead drinking water lines, fund water quality, wastewater, and sewer system improvements, acquire land for source water protection, as well as mitigate and remediate contaminated drinking water.

In advocating for the increased funding we achieved this year, I worked closely with a coalition of construction and labor



Assemblyman Otis with Sabrina Ty, President of the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (center) and Suzanne Clary, President of the Jay Heritage Center at the Clean Water Grant workshop at the Jay Center. Since the program was created in 2015, Assemblyman Otis has hosted annual meetings for Westchester local governments to learn how to apply for the Clean Water grants.

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Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Improvements Underway in Mamaroneck and Port Chester

Working with state and local officials, I am pleased to report that the NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) has agreed to move forward on several pedestrian safety improvements, including a School Speed Zone on the state-owned Boston Post Road in the vicinity of Mamaroneck High School and Hommocks Middle School.

I have long shared the concerns of parents, Mamaroneck school and village officials and local police regarding pedestrian safety issues on the Boston Post Road near these schools. As a result of the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program launched in 2007, pedestrian activity on the Boston Post Road has increased dramatically over the past decade. The high school's open campus school lunch policy has added to the congestion in the area and further highlighted the need to adopt traffic calming measures on this heavily traveled corridor.

In October of 2016, I convened a meeting with Senator Latimer, DOT representatives, the Superintendent of Mamaroneck Public Schools, Village and Town officials, local law enforcement officers and SRTS advocates, to explore several options that could address the increasing safety concerns.



A smaller working group was formed that met several times in the spring of 2017 to survey the area, inspect traffic signals, and review police accident reports. As a result of those meetings, DOT representatives recognized that the increased number of students walking to school and bicycling on the sidewalks posed a significant safety issue.

In May, the Village of Mamaroneck passed a resolution to support and guide DOT's safety initiatives, and DOT agreed to establish a School Speed Zone in the vicinity of the Mamaroneck High School between the Mamaroneck Town Center and Richbell Road. The 20 miles/hour speed zone will be in effect on school days between the hours of 7:00 am to 6:00 pm. In addition, DOT has given permission to the Village to install pavement markings identifying the "School Zone" on both approaches to the Mamaroneck High School. DOT also installed new signage on the Boston Post Road about 300 feet in advance of Hommocks Road, to alert motorists as they approach Hommocks Middle School.

This was a true team effort. While we had previously sought special legislation to allow improvements in this corridor, we brought everyone together this year to achieve these much-needed improvements. NYS DOT and Governor Cuomo are playing a leadership role in supporting innovative pedestrian safety measures around the state. DOT has established the goal of instituting more cutting edge safety measures, and we are seeing the results with the collaborative effort here.

Gathering to announce new school traffic safety improvements in front of Mamaroneck High School are Superintendent of Mamaroneck Public Schools Dr. Robert Shaps, Assemblyman Steve Otis, Deputy Town Supervisor Jaine Elkind Eney, Mamaroneck Mayor Norman Rosenblum, NYS DOT Assistant Commissioner Thomas McIntyre, Senator George Latimer, BOE President Melany Gray, and NYS DOT Regional Director Todd Westhuis.

King Street School Safety Improvements Being Designed in Port Chester

We have undertaken a similar collaborative effort to improve pedestrian safety near the King Street School in Port Chester. The Port Chester Village Board adopted a Resolution in support of implementing pedestrian and traffic safety measures on King Street. To ensure that school children residing in the populated neighborhoods across from the King Street School can safely cross King Street and enter the school grounds, the Village requested that DOT consider placement of a traffic light at the intersection of King and Upland Streets or at Betsy Brown and King Streets.

As we did in Mamaroneck, we have begun the process of bringing the school community, the village and NYS DOT together to address pedestrian safety concerns at King Street. DOT officials have met with us at the school and a game plan is being put together.

Otis Missing Persons Bill Signed Into Law

For the second year in a row, legislation I sponsored to improve our ability to solve missing persons cases has been signed into law by Governor Cuomo.

The new law requires that reports of missing children and adults filed in New York be transmitted to the National Missing and Unidentified Remains System (NamUs), a federal Department of Justice database to assist families and law enforcement in finding missing persons.

This legislation will build on the law I sponsored last year that required reports of unidentified remains to be reported to NamUs. One month after that bill was signed into a law the remains of a missing person in Erie County were identified, bringing closure to his family. My hope is that this new law will also help families and law enforcement in their search for missing relatives. Unlike other federal databases, the information stored in NamUs can be accessed directly by family members and the public, not just law enforcement agencies. NamUs officials stress that this additional reporting requirement will increase their ability to locate missing persons.

The importance of NamUs was brought to my attention by Jan Burke, the critically acclaimed mystery author and founder of the not-for-profit Crime Lab Project, who has become an advocate for missing persons and police forensic issues after researching these subjects for her books.

Raise The Age

I am pleased to report that legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility in New York from 16 to 18 years of age was included in this year's state budget. This change has long been supported by organizations focused on youth issues in our county, such as the Westchester Children's Association.

New York had been one of only two states to prosecute all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system. While teenagers who commit crimes should be held accountable for their actions, New York's antiquated law focused unduly on punishment, despite ample research that young minds are more receptive to rehabilitation.

The criminal justice reforms included in this year's budget recognize that youthful offenders can often turn their lives around, if given the chance to do so. Incarcerating young people, particularly those convicted of nonviolent offenses, alongside hardened criminals poses a danger to public safety, all but ensuring that these youth will go on to commit further crimes.

Under the new law, all misdemeanor charges against 16- and 17-year-olds will be adjudicated in Family Court. Non-violent felony charges would also be handled in Family Court, unless the district attorney demonstrates extraordinary circumstances for retaining the case in Criminal Court. Certain higher level felony charges committed by juveniles will be tried in a new "Youth" division of the criminal court and more serious crimes can be treated as adult violations.

Making College More Affordable for All New Yorkers

By 2024, it is estimated that 3.5 million jobs in New York State will require an Associate's Degree or higher. But even as higher education becomes more necessary for an individual to succeed, the burgeoning cost to earn a college degree is more than many New York families can afford.

This year, we broke new ground on affordability by enacting Governor Cuomo's plan to create the Excelsior Scholarship Program that will help to make college possible for students attending public colleges in NYS. This tuition-free degree program is the first of its kind in the nation. Students whose families make up to \$100,000 annually will be eligible for an Excelsior Scholarship. When fully phased in by 2019, the program will extend to students of families earning up to \$125,000. The Excelsior Scholarship program covers the cost of tuition exclusively and excludes any other college related expenses, such as transportation, textbooks, meal plans, room and board.

It is estimated that 80% of all college-aged individuals who reside in New York State – more than 940,000 students – will be eligible for the Excelsior program at SUNY and CUNY universities.

The scholarship will fill in the financial gaps remaining after funds from other scholarships, such as the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and Pell Grants, have been used to cover the cost of tuition. In order to remain eligible for the scholarship,

students must be full-time students in good academic standing enrolled in at least 30 credits per academic year.

Upon graduation, students are required to stay and work in New York State for the equivalent amount of time as they received the Excelsior Scholarship.

This year's state budget also provides for Enhanced Tuition Awards for students who attend private, not-for-profit colleges in New York State. These students are eligible for up to \$6,000 in tuition assistance through a combination of TAP funds, an Enhanced Tuition Award (ETA), and a match from the private college. As with the Excelsior Scholarship, students who receive an ETA agree to live and work in New York for the equivalent number of years that they received the award.

Investing in an educated population will help ensure a more prosperous future for New York. The Excelsior Scholarship represents 0.1% of New York State's \$163 billion state budget – a small investment to secure a better economic future for all New York's children. This landmark scholarship program will help students access the education and skills they need to succeed, and I will continue to monitor the program to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.

For more information about the Excelsior Scholarship Program, visit the Higher Education Services Corporation website at www.hesc.ny.gov.

Earlier this year, Assemblyman Otis co-hosted a conference panel in Albany on the challenges facing new immigrants in suburban communities. While there are many services accessible to new residents in New York City and large urban centers throughout the state, the statewide panel was focused on addressing services and issues in suburban areas. Numerous experts participated in the panel, including three from Westchester – Jirandy Martinez, Co-Executive Director of the Community Resource Center; Esmeralda Hoscoy, Regional Supervisor of the Westchester branch of Catholic Charities Community Services, and Ana Nunez, President of the Westchester Chapter of the National Association of Hispanic Nurses.



Increased Aid to Public Libraries

I am pleased to report that the 2017-18 enacted state budget includes a \$4 million increase in funding for public libraries and a \$10 million increase in library construction aid. This was made possible through negotiations with the Governor and both houses of the Legislature. I sit on the Library and Education Technology Committee in the Assembly and know how vital these funding streams are to our local libraries.

State operating aid for public libraries is \$95.6 million for the current fiscal year, while library construction aid totals \$24 million in the same period. These funds will enable our local libraries to continue their important work, providing critical access to information and technology for all residents, students, job-seekers, and seniors.

The library construction program has been very important to Westchester libraries. This year state library construction grants were awarded to two libraries in the 91st Assembly district – the New Rochelle Public Library and the Rye Free Reading Room. The New Rochelle library was awarded \$78,804 to install a new HVAC system in its main library building and a \$28,804 grant to replace interior windows at the Huguenot Children's Library. The Rye Free Reading Room was awarded a \$31,129 grant to create a new quiet study space in the library. State assistance for these projects helps our libraries become more efficient and comfortable spaces and to evolve with the changing needs of library patrons. State funds also help to ease the burden on local property taxpayers to make these improvements.

College Internships

Legislative internships are available to college students in my District and Albany offices. These internships focus on legislative research, analysis of state issues, correspondence and assisting constituents with problems they may be having with governmental agencies.

If you are interested in applying for the winter academic term or the summer of 2018, please send a cover letter and resume to me at otiss@nyassembly.gov. For more information, contact my District Office at (914) 939-7028.

Breakthrough Clean Water Program Adopted in 2017 *(continued from page 1)*

leaders headed by Westchester Putnam Construction Industry Council President Ross Pepe, and with Assemblyman John McDonald (Cohoes) another former Mayor who I have partnered with on this issue since 2015.

In addition to this major commitment to water quality, New York continues funding for the State Environmental Protection Fund at the \$300 million level, which was almost doubled by Governor Cuomo two years ago. State support of the EPF will fund many important environmental initiatives, including solid waste management, open space programs, parks and recreation, as well as efforts to combat the effects of climate change.

Reducing the Burden of Standardized Testing

I have long-opposed the overreliance on state testing, which not only increases student anxiety but eclipses valuable classroom time that is needed for instruction. Over the years, I have met with hundreds of parents, educators, and administrators who have expressed near unanimous criticism of student achievement measures that rely unduly on standardized tests. To make matters worse, the rush to embrace the Common Core educational standards movement led to adoption of a massive testing program that was neither properly vetted nor, in the end, a reliable indicator of student success.

Fortunately, the NYS Board of Regents is working to restore sanity and return essential instructional time to our teachers. In June, the Regents announced that they were reducing the number of days for student testing in grades 3-8. Beginning in the spring of 2018, the number of days of student testing in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments will be reduced from three to two.

More changes are expected as the Regents and the Department of Education develop plans to implement the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the federal initiative that replaces No Child Left Behind. Since the fall of 2016, SED and the Regents have met with thousands of parents, educators, community members, and other stakeholders to identify better measures of school performance and student success – not just relying on test scores – and to better support developing teachers and low-performing

schools. The goal is to ensure equity, access and opportunity for all New York students. More information about ESSA can be found on the SED website at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/essa.html>.

In recent years, we have sought to appoint educators to the Board of Regents, the key education policy-making board in our state. This has resulted in policies more responsive to the concerns of parents, teachers, and local school officials on issues such as standards, testing, special education, and the needs of bilingual students.



Assemblyman Otis at an Assembly Education Committee hearing on the current state of New York's school infrastructure and facilities. The cost of maintaining facilities is a challenge for school districts throughout Westchester and the state.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



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**Steve
Otis**

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