



Dear Friends,

First of all, to those who are celebrating, **Happy Passover and Happy Easter!** I know many of us are still not able to celebrate with our families the way we would like, but thankfully those days appear to be numbered. I am grateful that my wife Illyria and I will be receiving our second vaccination shortly, and that we will soon be able to spend the holidays with our children and our granddaughter Nora, who turns two in May.

In the meantime, there has been a lot of progress in New York State this week. The Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA) was adopted by the legislature and signed into law by the Governor. The final budget should likewise be finished up shortly, and COVID-19 eligibility has opened to all those who are 30 years of age and older (and will open up to those 16 and older on Tuesday).

As with the rest of the country, New York has seen some dark days over the last year, but there is a light at the end of the tunnel. I would implore everyone, however, to continue wearing masks and practice social distancing. COVID-19 cases are on the rise throughout the country. **We can't take our eye off the ball now, when we are so close to the end.**

[COVID-19 Updates](#)

Eligibility

All New Yorkers age 30+ [are now eligible](#) to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Beginning Tuesday, all New Yorkers 16+ [will be eligible](#) to schedule an appointment and receive the vaccine. It is a testament to the successful ramping up of the vaccine program at the federal and state levels that eligibility has begun to open up so quickly.

COVID-19 Vaccine Eligibility Update:

All New Yorkers who are 30+ are eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

On April 6, universal eligibility for New Yorkers who are 16+ goes into effect.

For more information, visit: am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov

The graphic features a teal background with a white rounded rectangle containing text. To the right of the text is an illustration of a blue vaccine vial and a syringe, surrounded by red coronavirus particles.

Actualización sobre la Elegibilidad para la Vacuna del COVID-19:

Todos los neoyorquinos de 30+ serán elegibles para recibir la vacuna del COVID-19.

El 6 de abril, la elegibilidad universal para los neoyorquinos de 16+ entrará en vigor.

Para más información, visite el sitio Web: am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov

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Reminder: By law, **employees are granted up to four hours of excused leave *per injection***, which will not be charged against any leave that the employee has earned or accrued.

To schedule your appointment via the state website go to am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov or call 1-833-NYS-4-VAX (1-833-697-4829). [Click here](#) for the most updated list of non-State providers in the area. **If you are still having difficulty making an appointment**, please contact my office at (914) 244-4450 or e-mail me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov.

[Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act](#) [Passes Legislature, Signed into Law](#)

After several years of consideration and debate, **the NYS legislature voted this week to adopt the [Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act \(MRTA\)](#)**, which legalizes adult-use marijuana for those 21 and older and provides a framework for its production and sale. In doing so, New York joins 14 other states, two U.S. territories and the District of Columbia in legalizing marijuana. The bill was signed into law by the Governor on Wednesday.

This was an important decision that no one in the legislature, including myself, took lightly.

The MRTA contains tight restrictions, strong safeguards, state licensing and perhaps most importantly, the power of governing bodies in our cities, towns and villages to prohibit the retail sale of marijuana and cannabis products within their borders. For those jurisdictions who do not opt out, they may still regulate the time, place and manner of such retail sales. Learning from other states that have already legalized adult-use marijuana, **the Legislature has constructed a comprehensive plan that helps protect public safety, advances racial justice, creates new small businesses, fosters economic growth and weakens the illicit drug trade.** This modern approach will lead to a safer, more secure New York State for all of us.

The legislation will also bring **much-needed revenue to our state that will help fund education, community reinvestment, drug treatment and public education, and training for law enforcement.** Tax revenue from legal adult-use marijuana in other states has surpassed expectations, and right now, New York tax dollars are being spent in neighboring states.

In 1973, New York State enacted the Rockefeller Drug Laws as part of the "war on drugs". These laws were pernicious. The only real outcome was in putting black and brown people in jail and destroying lives for low level drug offenses. They did nothing to reduce marijuana use in our state. **The current legislation vastly improves upon the failed approach of that "war on drugs" and will make our communities safer.**

I understand and appreciate the concerns that have been expressed by those who opposed the legislation, but there is also a great deal of inaccurate information circulating regarding the MRTA.



The major concerns that we heard were the effects of legalization on our children, increased dependency on marijuana, and driving under the influence of marijuana. My staff and I spent considerable time and effort delving into not only the details of this legislation, but the possible consequences of this legislation. This bill addresses all of those concerns very well.

Quite appropriately the greatest objections to legalization center on impacts on underaged users. Having raised three children myself, I too am concerned about marijuana use among our youth. One of the principal reasons I support regulated legalization is to take the sale of marijuana out of the hands of organized crime and street corner sellers. I want to get rid of marijuana laced with more potent drugs such as LSD, cocaine and heroin. State licensed and highly regulated sales will weed out (so to speak) criminal elements and predatory dealers who victimize our youth.



There is a concern that legalization will lead to a sharp increase in underage use, despite the fact that the sale will only be permitted to those 21 and over. Research shows the opposite is more likely. [Researchers at the Washington University School of Medicine](#) found that **“the rates of marijuana use by young people are falling despite the fact more US states are legalizing or decriminalizing marijuana use and the number of adults using the drug has increased.”**

Concerns also have been expressed that legalization will increase dependency on marijuana. The data doesn't support that contention. The number of adolescents admitted to drug treatment programs for marijuana-related issues has fallen precipitously in states that have legalized and regulated its adult-use, according to [data published by the CDC](#). In fact, **states experiencing the “steepest level of admissions decline” were among those that had enacted adult-use legalization laws.**

There also are understandable concerns regarding impaired driving. Operating a motor vehicle under the influence of a controlled substance is illegal behavior in all 50 states. Amending the status of cannabis under state law does not change this fact. Moreover, **the existence of marijuana – and driving under the influence of THC – will not be a new reality for our state.** Indeed, I questioned the NYS Division of State Police Acting Superintendent back in February on this very issue. He stated clearly that law enforcement has been making traffic stops for driving under the influence of cannabis for years. In other words, this is nothing new for them, nor will it be for local enforcement who have likewise been doing the same. I have every confidence they will continue to do so.

Although the bill will go into effect when signed, it is expected to take between 18 months and 2 years before the legislation's rules and structures are in place for cannabis sales to begin.

Both the [Assembly](#) and [State Senate](#) have put out comprehensive information that I would encourage you to review for the more specific aspects of the bill. That said, after reviewing the information, if you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov or at 914-244-4450.



Wednesday was the 12th annual International Day of Transgender Visibility, a day to celebrate transgender individuals and their accomplishments, and also raise awareness regarding the continued discrimination faced by the transgender community worldwide.

In honor of the day, I circulated a sponsorship letter, asking my colleagues to sign on in support of legislation that I recently reintroduced, which will provide transgender New Yorkers born out of state a means for obtaining a corrected birth certificate. This legislation was originally filed last session by my predecessor David Buchwald, to address the situation in which certain states will not correct the gender or name on a birth certificate without a difficult, invasive process. Such states, however, will recognize a New York court order correcting gender and name.



As did Assemblyman Buchwald, **I am working on this bill in close coordination with attorney & Co-Chair of the National Trans Bar Association, Kristen Browde.** "There couldn't be a more appropriate day to spotlight this measure than on March 31, Transgender Day of Visibility," said Kristen. "This small change will be a big step forward for the thousands of transgender New York residents who were born outside

of the state. Passing A5969 won't cost New York a dime but will save hundreds of dollars and eliminate complications for those of us whose states of birth require court orders to correct errors in birth certificates."

I am grateful to have Kristen's assistance and insight once again, to help move this important legislation forward. I will keep you posted on its progress.

Budget Update - Almost There!

The Governor and the legislature are still working through the final aspects of the 2021-2022 budget. The legislature has passed a debt-service budget bill to keep the government running in the meantime. All expectations at this juncture are that the budget will pass and be signed into law shortly. Stay tuned!



As always, if there are any issues that you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov (or simply reply to this email). **Please also follow me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up-to-date information.**

Miss any of our previous newsletters? You can [find them here](#).

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Burdick".

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