



Assemblyman

Andrew Hevesi

Legislative Update – Assembly District 28



Assemblyman Hevesi Provides Free Personal Protective Equipment Weekly to Neighbors During the Pandemic

As COVID-19 cases rose in our neighborhoods and New Yorkers faced unprecedented levels of need, Assemblyman Hevesi has worked with community partners to organize weekly face mask and hand sanitizer distributions throughout the district. Months of distributing free personal protective equipment (PPE) and collaborative efforts with organizations such as Community Board 6, the MTA, and Forest Hills Green Market have accounted for over 45,000 masks and 5,000 small bottles of hand sanitizers having been distributed to date.

Assemblyman Hevesi also personally delivered thousands of additional masks, gallon jugs of hand sanitizer, and PPE to nonprofit organizations at the beginning of the pandemic such as Forestdale, the SCO Family of Services, the Fortune Society, the Coalition for Homeless Youth, the Floating Hospital, Common Point Queens, Coalition for Hispanic Family Services, Queens Community House, New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence at the Korean American Family Service Center, the Coalition for the Homeless, Safe Horizon, and Sanctuary for Families.

As we approach 2021, it is important that we continue to trust the science, wear masks, maintain social distance, and get tested on a regular basis. We must all work together to fight this virus and stop the spread.



**Serving the Communities of Forest Hills / Rego Park / Kew Gardens /
Richmond Hill / Ridgewood / Middle Village / Glendale**

Two COVID-19 Response Bills Authored by Assemblyman Hevesi Become Law

A.10673 / S.8247 – The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated food insecurity across our state. In an effort to combat this growing problem and use every available resource to ensure that safe, easily accessible, nutritious food is available to every New Yorker, Assemblyman Hevesi wrote A.10673, which was signed into law in December as Chapter 342 of the laws of 2020. Under this new law, New York State will expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach program which allows SNAP recipients to use their benefit to purchase groceries online, by increasing retailer participation and seeking all necessary federal approvals to bring the program to as many stores as possible. Its passage is a step forward to ensuring that all New Yorkers, especially those who are elderly, disabled, or low-income (the vast majority of SNAP recipients) will be able to feed themselves and their families, while maintaining their safety, especially during the pandemic. Allowing SNAP to be used to purchase groceries online removes an arbitrary and paternalistic barrier and increases food accessibility for New Yorkers facing unprecedented challenges. Thank you to Senator Kaminsky for carrying this bill through the Senate and to Governor Cuomo for signing it into law.

A.10566 / S.8643 – The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on vulnerable New Yorkers, particularly our homeless neighbors. Due to a lack of safe, private, and clean living spaces, homeless New Yorkers are at a higher risk for transmission, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19. In an effort to provide the necessary services, shelter, and safety for homeless New Yorkers, Assemblyman Hevesi authored A.10566, which requires new reporting on the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. This bill was signed into law in December as Chapter 331 of the laws of 2020. The new data about the effects of COVID-19 on this vulnerable population will enable our state and city to respond appropriately and provide adequate care and protections for this population that has been hit exceptionally hard by the pandemic. Thank you to Senator Liu for carrying this bill through the Senate and to Governor Cuomo for signing it into law.

Assemblyman Hevesi Puts Together Coalitions of Elected Officials to Force New York State to Provide Funds to Non-Profits and the New Yorkers hit hardest by the COVID-19 Pandemic

In the immediate aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, New York State received \$5.1 billion for its Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) from the federal government in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. One of the purposes of the CRF fund was to assist states with the extra costs imposed by their pandemic response at the same time state revenues had dropped dramatically.

Our governor's administration, unlike other governors and states throughout the country, decided to withhold these funds from the neediest New Yorkers. One problem caused by this unnecessary and illogical policy of withholding CRF funds came three months after funds were transferred to the authority of the governor and the State of New York from the federal government. At that time, childcare providers across the state began to report that nearly \$90 million of their \$163 million from the CRF fund appropriation had not been released, while at the same time, these providers were losing money due to decreased enrollment and additional costs to provide safe environments and services. The withholding of CRF funds came after New York State had already been withholding other payments for regular work of our childcare providers going back to 2019. Twenty-five percent of childcare programs and 70% of school-aged childcare centers were forced to close permanently because they had not received these funds.

After identifying this problem, Assemblyman Hevesi organized the Chairpersons of multiple Senate and Assembly Standing Committees into a coalition to call on the state to release this funding. On August 4, 2020, Assemblyman Hevesi and this new coalition of Senate and Assembly Chairs sent a letter co-signed by 81 members of the New York State legislature to the governor, requesting immediate executive action. As a result of this letter – and multiple subsequent events with elected officials and advocates coordinated by Hevesi's office – the state released \$88.6 million in remaining funds from the CARES appropriation to our childcare providers in New York State.

With regard to increasing rates of food insecurity in New York State due to the pandemic, Assemblyman Hevesi, as Chairman of the Social Services Committee, held a hearing focusing on the state's response to the growing rates of hunger in New York. Before the pandemic, 1.2 million New Yorkers were food insecure, but that number has grown to well over 2 million New Yorkers in recent months. A key finding of this hearing was the efficacy of the Nourish New York program, which connects food banks to New York farmers and food manufacturers and provides funds for the food pantries to purchase food for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. On October 21, 2020, Assemblyman Hevesi – with support from another coalition of 57 colleagues in the state legislature that he put together – sent a letter to the governor requesting additional support for Nourish New York. Shortly afterward, the governor allocated an additional \$10 million in CARES Act funds to the program on October 30, 2020, ensuring that thousands of New Yorkers would receive vital food.

While Assemblyman Hevesi had spearheaded those successful efforts to get tens of millions of dollars to the struggling nonprofit food and childcare sectors, the State of New York continues to withhold billions of dollars of the total \$5.1 billion received from the federal government in the CARES Act appropriation. Assemblyman Hevesi, the coalition of Senate and Assembly Chairpersons he put together, and colleagues from all levels of government will continue to fight for the release of this money to support our nonprofit service providers and the New Yorkers hit hardest by the pandemic that they serve.

Assemblyman Hevesi Authors a New Law that Requires the Collection of Years of Data to Evaluate Preventative Services for Vulnerable Children throughout New York State

A.10513 / S.8241 – This legislation passed unanimously in both the Senate and Assembly, and was signed into law in December as Chapter 329 of the laws of 2020. This new law establishes multiple reporting requirements for the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to collect data on child welfare preventative services. Preventative services keep kids out of foster care and save taxpayers millions of dollars annually. The new data will include the total annual number of unduplicated children and families receiving preventative services, along with the number of new preventive cases that were opened during the preceding calendar year with the referral source. It will also include the average length of time preventative services were provided for each child or family during the preceding calendar year, including an indication of whether the case was closed during such year; a descriptive list of all services and their rates of utilization in each local social services district that utilize preventative services funding; a descriptive list of all other services, including primary preventative services funded through the community optional preventative services fund, home visiting funds or any other state or local funds, and their rates of utilization in each local social services district that does not utilize preventative services funding; and the number of children who entered the foster care system that received preventative services in the year prior to entry. This information will be used to assess whether the hundreds of millions of dollars that are spent on the services are achieving their desired results, and consequently, any adjustment to multiple existing programs that may be required.

Assemblyman Hevesi Advocates for Schools to Be the Last to Close, First to Open During the Pandemic with Priority for Disabled Students Based Off of Conversations With Parents and Neighbors

In order to mitigate and contain the spread of the Coronavirus, Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio delayed the opening of schools at the start of the 2020 school year. Many of our schools were shut down once again in October 2020 when parts of Assembly District 28 were placed into orange and red cluster zones triggered by the percent positivity rate of COVID-19 cases. After multiple conversations with parents and neighbors, on October 28th Assemblyman Hevesi wrote the governor urging him to modify the state's cluster closure initiative. While public health remains a primary concern, our schools have gone above and beyond to accommodate COVID guidelines by implementing social distancing, mask enforcement, increased cleanings, and new ventilation systems to diminish the spread of COVID-19 in schools. School closures should be an absolute last resort and only implemented if there is COVID-19 on their premises, and our disabled and special needs students who need in-person instruction the most, should be the first back in school when it is safe to re-open.

School closures, remote, and blended learning models have exposed vast inequities in our school systems, especially for our disabled students for which in-person instruction is critical for development. Assemblyman Hevesi has been at the forefront of this issue, fighting for disabled and special needs students to have first priority for in-person instruction. For some of these children, remote instruction is simply not possible and the time lost will not result in a need to catch up, but rather long-term developmental deficiencies. These students can regress quickly and lose not only academic skills, but communication, social, and life skills (e.g., toileting independently, dressing themselves, etc.) that they have worked on for years. For these students, in-person instruction is much more than academics.

After meeting with multiple parent groups and hearing their firsthand experiences, Assemblyman Hevesi wrote to Mayor de Blasio urging him to prioritize students with special needs and disabilities in D75 schools, community schools, self-contained placements, and integrated co-teaching classrooms. The letter also called for learning bridges, recreation centers, and other childcare options during this time to have dedicated spaces and programs for students with moderate-to-severe disabilities. Two hundred thousand students across the New York City Public School system have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) making them eligible for special education within the city school system. Assemblyman Hevesi will continue to fight for equity for these students and to ensure that the necessary adjustments due to the pandemic do not take away their legal right to an education.

Dear Neighbor,

It is an honor and privilege to serve as your representative in the New York State Legislature. As the 2021 legislative session begins, I wanted to update you on the progress we have been able to make in 2020. This year presented all of us with daunting new challenges as the Coronavirus pandemic hit. New Yorkers proved, as we always do, to be resilient. This update reflects the tireless efforts of the staff in my district and Albany offices as they continue to work to assist our neighbors, as well as lead numerous efforts to assist the most vulnerable New Yorkers throughout our state. I am proud to work with them. We look forward to working with you to rebuild our communities, our state and our country together.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Hevesi".

Andrew Hevesi
Member of the Assembly



New York State Assembly, Albany, NY 12248

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Legislative Update

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