



Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon



Reports to the People

Winter 2018

Dear Neighbors and Friends,

The Assembly wrapped up our legislative session in Albany this year with key accomplishments for New Yorkers, but also with some critical issues left unresolved. The good news is that the legislature included my bill to conduct an asthma study in Brooklyn in this year's budget, along with my bill to address school lunch shaming. This ensures that no child will be made to feel ashamed or denied a meal because his or her family cannot afford the school lunch program.

The State budget also included more protections for victims of sexual harassment, and an initiative to ensure that domestic violence offenders do not have access to firearms. We also invested in vital programs and services that help hardworking families and move New York forward, including significant additional funding for education, a full restoration of funding for school-based health clinics, and additional capital money for the New York City Housing Authority. However, I am disappointed that we did not do more to address certain aspects of discrimination, such as including forms of discrimination on bases other than sex in the new employer policy requirements.

I am also relieved that — in close partnership with local elected officials and civic groups — we were able to secure the use of design-build bidding for the City for the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) repairs from Atlantic to Sands, including the triple cantilever. Design-build authorization for the desperately needed BQE repairs will save time and money, which means fewer headaches for the community. Rehabilitating the BQE will be a difficult process, for close neighbors and all those who rely on this critical stretch of the interstate highway. I have urged the NYC Department of Transportation to consider and explain all of the feasible options to the public, beyond the two options they have presented thus far. It's imperative that the community is engaged so that we can move forward confidently with the least disruptive plan for this massive project.

Despite progress in some areas, there were missed opportunities and we have much work ahead of us in the upcoming legislative session. I am hopeful that with a new Senate majority as a result of this past election, we can finally enact into law key bills that the Assembly has passed but that the previous Senate majority has blocked. This includes voting and campaign finance reforms, the Reproductive Health Act which codifies *Roe v. Wade* into state law, the Dream Act for immigrant students, stronger environmental protections, the Child Victims Act to extend the civil and criminal statutes of limitations for sex offenses against a minor, bail and criminal justice reforms, and stronger rent regulations to protect our stock of affordable housing.

It is truly my privilege to serve you. Please reach out to my office to receive my regular e-newsletters on legislative and community updates.

Sincerely,

Jo Anne Simon



Gender Neutral Bill for Police Officers and Firefighters

The legislature unanimously passed my bill (A.8321) changing every New York State law which contains the words “policeman” or “fireman” to the gender neutral language “police officer” and “firefighter.” This antiquated and inaccurate language promotes an outdated worldview that suggests to young girls and boys alike that law enforcement and firefighting are only open to men. Stamping out gender-specific language recognizes the incredible women who keep us safe every day, and promotes inclusivity and participation in these professions to everyone, regardless of gender. This bill is currently before the Governor for approval.

Thank you to all the police officers and firefighters who fought for inclusion in their chosen professions. You can listen to my interviews with these remarkable women on my webpage.



New Dyslexia Guidance Issued to Schools!

It was a great way to start the school year off right: the New York State Education Department issued the guidance documents to school districts on dyslexia and other learning disabilities, pursuant to my legislation (A.8262). About one in five children have dyslexia, a language-based learning disability that makes word recognition, spelling, and reading success a difficult task.

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Gun Violence Prevention Efforts

Gun violence has shaken the country to its core, from the school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, to the recent shootings at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh and the Borderline Bar & Grill in Thousand Oaks. Fighting gun violence is a top priority of mine, from pushing for stronger gun violence prevention bills, to investing in community programs, and working with local law enforcement and community leaders.

I am pleased that one of my major gun violence prevention bills, the Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO), passed the Assembly with bipartisan support. Too often, we are able to see the warning signs that an individual close to us poses a risk of serious harm to themselves or to others, but lack a mechanism to prevent unthinkable tragedies such as interpersonal gun violence or suicide.



This bill empowers families and law enforcement to help prevent these needless gun tragedies by applying to a court to temporarily restrict an individual's access to firearms if the court finds that the individual is likely to engage in harmful conduct. While the Senate didn't pass this bill, I'm hopeful that it will be taken up this session, along with other measures, including more comprehensive background checks.

I have also been advocating for a Firearms Violence Research Institute. New York must lead the way in conducting scientific research to better understand and prevent the gun violence that claims 33,000 lives in the U.S. each year. While other major health and safety concerns such as motor vehicle accidents, heart disease, and tobacco have rightly received expanded research, far too little research has been conducted on firearm violence. To sign the petition in support of the institute, go to my webpage.

Senior Resource Fair Spotlight

Caregiver Resources

Every year, I am impressed by the scope and quality of programs provided by my annual Senior Resource Fair vendors, ranging from information on legal services and health care to government services and community resources. This year, I was especially glad to see resources for caregivers of every kind. Heights and Hills (718-596-8789) provides a wide variety of caregiver support and informational programs and partners with groups like the Brooklyn Parkinson Group (929-262-0317) and CaringKind (646-744-2900: 24-hour hotline to connect with dementia experts or for emotional support). SAGE-GRIOT Innovative Senior Center of Brooklyn (718-246-2775) provides a myriad of services for LGBTQ elders, including the Buddy-to-Buddy Peer Caregiver Program that provides a mutual support system.

Thanks to St. Francis College for hosting the event, and to our vendors. To receive a full list of the vendors, contact my office.



Tax Exemption and Rent Freeze Programs for Renters and Homeowners

Many people are eligible for renters and homeowners programs, including the Senior Citizen Homeowner's Exemption (SCHE), Disabled Homeowner's Exemption (DHE), Enhanced STAR, Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE), and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). I was pleased to host an enrollment event on the programs with the NYC Dept. of Finance (DOF). For more information, contact DOF by either calling 311 or visiting <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/rentfreeze/index.page>, or contact my office.

Homeowners

Apply for an exemption to lower your property tax bill:

- STAR: homeowners with an annual income of \$500,000 or less
- E-Star: seniors 65 & older with annual incomes of \$86,000 or less
- SCHE/DHE: seniors 65 & older, disabled homeowners with annual incomes of \$58,399 or less
- Veterans
- Clergy

Tenants

Seniors and people with disabilities, you may apply to keep your rent from increasing if you:

- Are at least 62 years old or 18 years old with a qualifying disability; and
- Have a household income of \$50,000 or less; and
- Live in a rent regulated apartment; and you
- Spend more than 1/3 of your income on rent.

Voting and Campaign Finance Reforms

New Yorkers deserve transparency and fairness in the electoral process and closing the notorious Limited Liability Company (LLC) loophole would be an important step forward. This egregious loophole has allowed unchecked campaign contributions by treating LLCs as individuals instead of corporations, and has allowed them to funnel millions of dollars into state elections with almost no transparency. This allows the wealthy and special interests to anonymously pour unlimited money into campaigns in hopes of influencing candidates. I'm so pleased that the Assembly passed my bill (A.9758) to close the loophole, but unfortunately it wasn't taken up by the Senate.

As much as we were thrilled to see a high voter turnout, it was unacceptable to see the litany of problems at the polls on Election Day, from long lines to broken scanners to misinformation. The Assembly has passed a comprehensive set of voter access bills, and we are expecting to make headway with the new shift of control in the Senate. We need to make voting easier and early voting and no-excuse absentee voting should be a priority when we return to session in January. We also need automatic voter registration and to professionalize and reform the Board of Elections (BOE), in addition to better preparing our poll workers. I shared many problems with the BOE on Election Day, and the Assembly also held a hearing on voting reforms.

Keeping Our Streets Safe

I am also extremely relieved that the school zone speed safety cameras are back on. School speed cameras had gone dark over the summer after the state authorization expired. While the Assembly passed legislation that would have re-authorized and expanded the cameras, the Senate refused to act. Fortunately, cameras were reactivated in time for the first day of school because of an executive order crafted by the Governor and legislation passed by the City. This was also largely due to the safe streets advocates and brave members of the community, who have turned their indescribable losses into advocacy to save lives. However, the city measure is merely a stop gap, and we still need to pass long-term legislation.

Transit Needs

Our transit system is the lifeblood of New York City and as a daily rider of the subway (and bus system), I have seen how deeply our subways have fallen into a state of disrepair. More than 5 million riders every day have to contend with constant delays and slowdowns because of antiquated systems that have not received adequate investment for decades.

The legislature took a step in the right direction this year by assessing "for hire vehicles" — a major cause of increased congestion — but that is far from enough to address the MTA's capital needs. Continuous investment is essential to the viability of our transit system, which is why I have been a staunch supporter of congestion pricing as a dedicated funding stream for the MTA, and I have long supported the equalization of tolling policies. However, we're not going to fix our system with just one revenue source; we need to make signal repairs a top priority and ensure multiple fair and sustainable funding sources for the MTA.

Bus performance is also too slow and unreliable, but it doesn't have to be this way. Common-sense ways that the MTA and the City can

improve our bus service include all-door boarding, giving buses the green light with signal priority at traffic lights, and redesigning out of date bus routes (study scheduled to take place in Brooklyn next year). It is also especially important to provide a reliable, accessible transit option for people with disabilities and the increasing population of older adults in the city, who rely heavily on buses.

Constituent Corner

Our Local Youth Policy Council

I am so proud of our Youth Policy Council that kicked off this school year! Students from grades 8-12 who live or go to school in the area review City and State legislation and propose their own ideas. So far, the students have learned about bill writing and how legislation progresses through the City and State legislatures. Throughout the rest of the school year, they will identify issues to take action on and advocate for policies they care about. It is more important than ever to make sure that our youth are not only engaged, but that we are listening to them, and I'm thrilled to be able to listen and learn from our future.

The council is a partnership between me and local elected officials. <https://www.youthpolicycouncil.com/>

New Dyslexia Guidance Issued to Schools! *(continued from page 1)*

The guidance documents will help more children learn to read and be successful students because when children's learning disabilities are clearly defined, educational interventions can be tailored to their needs and educators will be in a better position to teach them. The documents, created in cooperation with stakeholders, clarify that school districts may use the terms dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia in evaluations, eligibility determinations, or in developing an individualized education program (IEP).

The documents represent an incredible step forward, but now we must make sure that they are shared widely so that every student has the opportunity to succeed. I will also continue to advocate for early screening of dyslexia and for teacher training and professional development in this area.

You may access the documents on my website. You can also listen to the powerful testimony from parents, educators, and students at our first Dyslexia Town Hall, which took place at the 3rd Annual Dyslexia Awareness Day in Albany.

Java with Jo Anne

One of my favorite district activities is to partner with local coffee shops and hold "Java with Jo Anne" events so you can talk with me about community issues and current events. Thanks to the hosts of the 2018 series, including Daly Pie in Prospect Heights, Tazza in Brooklyn Heights, and Kos Kaffe and Veltette Brew in Park Slope. Please let me know if there is a coffee shop in your area that you'd like me to come to!



Save the Date!
Holiday Party
 Friday, December 21st,
 4:00 – 6:30 pm • 341 Smith Street

*I hope to see you at my annual holiday open house on Friday, Dec. 21st,
 4:00 pm – 6:30 pm, 341 Smith Street.*

*In the spirit of the giving season, my office is hosting a Toys for Tots Drive.
 Drop off an unwrapped toy or book for children ages 12 and younger at the
 holiday party, or at my office throughout December.*

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblymember
**Jo Anne
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**Reports
 to the People**

Winter 2018

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Helpful Resources

My office has various resources available for you, including a 2019 parking calendar, bike maps, recycling stickers for your trash and organic bins, a guide to filing utility complaints, and a host of housing, community and legal resources. Please stop by to take a look and chat with my staff.



Sign up for my Email Alerts

Email simonj@nyassembly.gov to receive my email alerts. Stay informed about community events, including my senior resource fair, mammogram van, flu shot drive, rain barrel give-away, summer reading challenge for kids, and public forums.