



Dear Friends,

I hope this email finds you well, as I know it has been a busy time for all of us.

First of all, **I would like to congratulate all the winners of the general election in the 93rd District.** I look forward to working with each and every one of you for the betterment of your municipalities.

Second, as I am sure many of you with young children have heard, **the CDC has approved the Pfizer pediatric COVID-19 vaccine for children 5-11.** The availability of this vaccine for younger children is tremendous news, as we continue to move towards a post-pandemic world.

New York State [has created a website](#) to answer frequently asked questions and to help parents find vaccine providers for their children. Please note that unlike for persons 12 and over, the pediatric vaccine is *not* currently being provided at any of the state-run locations. Rather, the state is encouraging parents of children in this age group to contact their "pediatrician, family physician, local county health department, community-based health center, or pharmacies" to arrange for the vaccination.

Many school districts across the state have also indicated they plan to host vaccine events, but the timeline and exact locations for this are not yet available. As we are made aware of Westchester pediatric vaccination locations open to the general public we will keep you posted; in the meantime, **I would encourage you to reach out to your pediatrician to get more information on where/when to get your child(ren) vaccinated.**

Finally, with Veterans Day coming up on Thursday, **I would like to take this opportunity to thank our veterans for all they have done to keep our country safe.** Your sacrifice, and the sacrifice of your families, is not something we should appreciate only on Veterans Day, but on every day of the year. I personally feel so grateful for the opportunity to sit on the Assembly's Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I pledge that in that position I will always do everything I can to honor and make better the lives of veterans in New York.



On a related note, for those who are interested (or know of someone who might be), Fordham University's **Feerick Center Veterans Rights Project, which provides legal information for low-income veterans, will be holding its [2021 virtual legal clinic](#) from November 15-19.** The program will consist of virtual know-your-rights presentations (via zoom) followed by one-on-one legal consultations (via phone or zoom). Topics to be covered (subject to change) include consumer bankruptcy, consumer debt, discharge upgrades, family law, housing, taxes, micro-enterprise and small business, VA benefits, wills and end-of-life planning, women veterans, and military sexual trauma. [Click here for more information.](#)

Recent Assembly Hearings on Important Issues for New Yorkers

Although the Assembly is out of session, three of the committees on which I sit recently held public hearings on important issues.

Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Last month, the Assembly's Standing Committee on People with Disabilities, along with the Standing Committee on Labor, and the Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities (which I chair), held a public hearing to consider barriers to employment opportunities for people with disabilities, as well as programs and services designed to assist such individuals in securing employment. **Over 75% of New Yorkers with disabilities are unemployed and over the last several years that unemployment rate has risen.** We face a crisis that must be addressed.

The hearing drew over 60 witnesses and ran for 10 hours. The testimony was compelling and disturbing at the same time. The hearing was historic, as the first in-depth immersion into a bewildering world of complex and often impenetrable services and programs intended to lead to jobs. The job of the Assembly now is to seize on the moment so that both legislators, and those whom we serve, see a glimmer of hope in rectifying the deep-seated problems.

While speaking at a pre-hearing rally with advocates for change, **I stressed the importance of acting promptly and decisively following the hearing.** I am working with colleagues on the relevant committees, as well as others in the Assembly, on legislation to promote employment for the broad array of people with disabilities, including those with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities. Recognizing that perceptions and attitudes need to change, we will be working with those who already are making a difference to explain to employers both in the private and public sectors that matching jobs with abilities works well for employees and employers alike. There are many opportunities for positive change.

I anticipate sponsoring legislation to strengthen existing laws that require state agencies to provide a preference in awarding contracts to firms that hire people with disabilities, legislation to codify former Governor Cuomo's Executive Order 136 (which established a commission with hiring goals), and legislation incentivizing the private sector to adopt or adapt existing successful models.

Elevating the NYS Division of Veterans Services to the Department Level

The Assembly's Standing Committee on Veterans' Affairs, as well as the Subcommittee on Women Veterans, recently held a hearing in Albany to review the purpose and structure of NYS Division of Veterans' Services, including the possibility of **elevating the Division to a department, to ensure that the best possible services are available to New York's veterans.**

Veterans' Affairs Committee Chair Didi Barrett opened with a report on regional roundtables, which she held with committee members and guests throughout the state to share thoughts on what is working and what is not. She concluded that the roundtables confirmed her belief on the need to review the state's structure for assisting veterans, and elevating the "Division of Veterans' Services" to the "Department of Veterans' Services," which her bill [A08294](#) (of which I am a cosponsor) would accomplish.

The testimony submitted at the hearing from veterans, veterans' organizations, and the agency provided a compelling case for this change. New York, as home to some 740,000 veterans and their families, is the only state among the 12 states with more than 500,000 veterans that does not have services at a departmental level. U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dennis McDonough recently stated that it would be a good idea "to elevate the division to a department to support better federal-state coordination." How we treat our veterans is important not only for democracy, but to support a willingness to serve in our armed forces.

Benefits of elevating the Division to a department include a one-stop shopping approach (at present veterans need to confront an often bewildering array of disjointed and uncoordinated services); greater and coordinated outreach efforts; greater likelihood that certain programs (such as the Joseph Dwyer Peer Support Program) will be funded on a permanent basis in the NYS budget; the moving of some (but not all) programs serving veterans into a single agency; and likely an increase in funding.

My thanks to Chairwoman Barrett for the introduction of [A08294](#). I think this change is not only appropriate, but important, and I will encourage my colleagues to make its passage a priority.

Hearing on NYS's Budget for Affordable Housing; Transitional Housing

Late last month, the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Housing held a public hearing seeking feedback on the NYS 2021-2022 budget, which allocated approximately \$1.7 billion to support New York's housing programs. The Committee, which prioritizes housing stability and the preservation and development of affordable housing in New York, sought testimony from those implementing and being served by the budget to better understand their needs and experiences, as well as to seek input about the need for a new five-year capital spending plan for affordable housing.

Housing experts and advocates here in Westchester emphasized their support of programs for the construction and rehabilitation of small rental housing developments. This would allow for housing on smaller lots and rehabilitation of buildings up to 20 units, which are common in many of the municipalities in my Assembly District. Though the cost per unit on smaller projects may be higher than on larger projects, there are fewer opportunities for larger projects, which typically require tax credits and other financial incentives, as well as longer-term development and planning processes. Of course, there is no single solution to help meet the significant affordable housing needs for seniors, first responders, municipal employees, and others who find local housing prices and property taxes unreachable; however, we must do everything we can.

We also heard from the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) that the vast majority of incarcerated individuals who are released end up in homeless shelters. It was encouraging that in her excellent testimony, RuthAnn Visnauskas, Commissioner of NYS Division of Housing and Community Renewal, recognized the need for transitional housing for formerly incarcerated individuals.

She also seemed receptive to the creation of a new five-year capital spending plan, although this is a decision for Governor Hochul. I will advocate for such a plan, with the inclusion of the priorities that have been identified.

(For those interested, please note you can see my questions and remarks during these hearings by [clicking here](#).)

Employers Who Excel in Hiring People with Disabilities... Congratulations and Thank You!

As I mentioned previously, October was National Disability Employment Awareness Month. As Chair of the Subcommittee for Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, I wanted to use this month as an opportunity to recognize businesses in my district (or who serve residents of my district) that excel in hiring people with disabilities. The goal was to shine a spotlight and bring awareness to the issue, hopefully encouraging others to follow in their footsteps.

Thank you to everyone who nominated a business for this recognition! Today, I would like to recognize and thank the following business for their contribution in this area:

Cambria Hotel, White Plains
Chappaqua Library, Chappaqua
The Nicholas Center, Pleasantville
ShopRite, Bedford Hills
Stop & Shop, Mount Kisco
Stop & Shop, White Plains
Wags & Whiskers, Mount Kisco

We will have an official event recognizing these businesses shortly, at which time we will highlight in greater detail each of their contributions. But please join me in thanking these businesses for making the employment of people with disabilities such a priority.

All Souls Day Interfaith Memorial Service at Taconic Correctional Facility Cemetery

A final note... November 2 not only marked Election Day, but also All Souls Day. That morning I joined with about 30 others, called by the Interfaith Prison Partnership (IPP) to a memorial service at the Taconic Correctional Facility Cemetery. The cemetery has been carefully restored and now is well-tended. **I wish to thank Department of Corrections and Supervision (DOCCS) Commissioner Anthony Annucci, and the Superintendent and Staff at Taconic Correctional Facility, for their collaboration with IPP in restoring the cemetery.** I could not be more proud of our community, which has supported this effort guided by faith and beliefs, whether found in religion or directed by a moral compass.

By way of background, in the 1970s, Sister Antonia was a determined Catholic Chaplain at Bedford Hills, Taconic and Sing Sing Correctional Facilities. Sister Antonia, also known as “The Worldwide Mother of People in Green,” went on a mission to bring dignity to those interred at the Taconic cemetery who were identified on their grave markers only by their prison numbers. They were nameless and forgotten. She made multiple pilgrimages to the Commissioner of DOCCS in Albany, where she ardently advocated for the release of the names corresponding to the numbers. She succeeded in her mission and, returning to Taconic, made certain that the nameless and forgotten were now known and remembered. Following the retirement of Sister Antonia, the graveyard fell into neglect and become an unrecognizable tangle of overgrowth.

Starting in 2018, Hans Hallundbaek of the IPP worked with the Taconic superintendent and staff on restoring the cemetery to a place of dignity. Their work together resulted in the overgrowth being cleared, shrubs and flowers added, statues being cleaned and the graveyard in general being well-tended.

My thanks to IPP for all their hard work and for bringing us together for last week's beautiful memorial service.



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](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) for the most up-to-date information.**

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

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Burdick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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