
News from STATE SENATOR **Liz Krueger**



COMMUNITY BULLETIN

August 2009

New York State Senate - 26th District

Message from Liz . . .

Early this month, the Senate passed the school governance legislation approved by the Assembly in June. The Senate also passed a number of accompanying bills which will empower parents with greater access to the school system, increase transparency and fiscal oversight, promote enhanced arts education, address concerns over school safety procedures and strengthen the role of community superintendents. While this process was not pretty – very little in Albany is these days – in the end I believe the legislative package we passed will build on the successes of the original school governance reform package while addressing some of the weaknesses of the mayoral control model.

I know how important school governance is and I worked aggressively to bring the Mayor and Senate leadership together to resolve this issue and to improve our schools. During the debate over this contentious issue, it sometimes seemed both sides were more focused on insulting each other than getting this done, but in the end, calmer heads prevailed. I worked hard to convince my colleagues in the Senate that we needed to focus more on the substance, and less on the rhetoric. I also worked to convince the city administration that there were legitimate concerns about accountability and parental participation in decisions about their children's education which had to be addressed.

Key components of the final package which passed included:

- Strengthening the role of School-based Management Teams in developing the schools' Comprehensive Educational Plan;
- Creating a new, citywide procurement policy for the Department of Education to end the granting of no-bid contracts;
- Authorizing the Independent Budget Office to issue reports on all schools and student data including graduation rates and performance, class size, pupil-to-teacher ratios, student enrollment projections, school utilization, test scores and all matters related to the school system's budget and fiscal practices;
- Requiring the public receive six months notice and an opportunity to review and comment on proposed school closings and changes in the use of local school buildings; the provision also

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requires the Chancellor to issue an impact statement on any such proposed changes and hearings to allow public input;

- Creating a Parent Training Center to increase the capacity of parents to participate and engage in the educational system through training and support programs;
- Establishing an Arts Advisory Committee to strengthen arts education programs;
- Including quality of curriculum and instruction as part of superintendent review of principals; and
- Requiring Schools to Hold Open Public Meetings Concerning School Safety.

I believe the final agreement is in the best interest of the 1.1 million public school students by recognizing both the successes of the mayoral control model and the areas where improvement was needed.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

"The Senator is In" Rotating Office Hours In the District

Upper East Side

Date: Saturday, August 15th

Time: Noon-2:00 PM

Place: East 61st Street and 1st Ave
(in front of Bed Bath & Beyond)

Turtle Bay

Date: Saturday, August 22nd

Time: Noon-2:00 PM

Place: East 48th Street and 2nd Avenue
(in front of Morton Williams Supermarket)

A Community Conversation with State Senator Liz Krueger

A discussion of recent events in Albany

Date: September 16th 2009

Time: 6:00-8:00 PM

Location: Lighthouse International Auditorium
115 East 59th Street (b/t Lexington & Park)

For more information call my office at (212) 490-9535.

State Senator Liz Krueger's Senior Advisory Board
Presents
RESOURCE FAIR FOR SENIORS & CAREGIVERS

Date: Thursday, October 29th

Time: 1:30 PM –4:30 PM

Place: Temple Emanu-El

One East 65th Street (at 5th Avenue)

No RSVP Required - Call (212) 490-9535 for further information.

Volunteer Public Benefits Counselors Needed:

The Advocacy, Counseling and Entitlement Services (ACES) Project of the Community Service Society is seeking individuals age 55+ to serve as volunteer public benefit counselors dedicated to helping financially disadvantaged people. No prior benefit experience is required. Volunteers will participate in an intensive seven-week training program beginning October 6, 2009. The training covers eligibility requirements and application procedures for Medicaid, SSI, Food Stamps, and other public benefit programs. Upon completion, volunteers are placed in agencies in one of the five boroughs to provide information on government benefits to low-income families, older adults, and individuals with disabilities. Volunteers assist clients with completing applications and helping correct benefit-related problems. A personal interview, successful completion of the training, and a commitment of six hours per week for one year of volunteer service is required. For more information, please contact Edwina Osborne at (212) 614-5412 or eosborne@cssny.org.

Update on Teachers Aides in Public Schools:

I have been working closely with other elected officials and the Department of Education to find a solution for the current conflict over the ability of parents to fund the hiring of teachers' aides in public schools. Particularly because these aides have been one of the key mechanisms by which schools on the Upper East Side have addressed overcrowding, it is critical that this resource continue to be available in our schools. I participated in a series of meetings at which solutions were discussed which address the concerns of parents, the Department of Education and the United Federation, and I believe that these discussions can provide a framework for resolving this issue.

Saturday Summer Streets Program Expanded:

On August 8th, 15th, and 23rd from 7 AM to 1 PM, the Summer Streets program will close streets from the Brooklyn Bridge to Central Park, including Park Avenue below 72nd Street, and Eastbound lanes of 72nd Street from Park Avenue to Central Park. This will allow these streets to become public spaces for pedestrians, skaters and cyclists. There will be fitness and cultural activities along the route, and at two places between Park and Lexington Avenues, at 26th and 47th Streets, several bike-share companies will have bikes available for free use. Borrowers will have to leave a credit card as deposit for the bicycle. For more information of Summer Streets programming and volunteer opportunities, call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/summerstreets.

Web Directory of Free and Low Cost Health and Social Services:

The Health Information Tool for Empowerment is a new website that offers a searchable database of thousands of organizations providing health and social services for uninsured, underinsured, and low-income individuals. It also provides access to benefit eligibility calculators that can help people determine to which public benefits they may be entitled. To access this site, go to www.hitesite.org.

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

Breastfeeding Bill of Rights

Just days after new research from the Women's Health Initiative, a long-term study of 140,000 women, indicated clear health benefits relating to breastfeeding for the mother and newborn, the New York State Senate passed the Breastfeeding Mothers' Bill of Rights (S.1107A). This week Governor Paterson signed the law, which will become effective on May 1, 2010.

This legislation is based on the recognition that many women forego the option of breastfeeding their child, despite the health and economic implications of using formula. Oftentimes, women who forego breastfeeding are those who can least afford it – low-income women, whose child was often placed on formula shortly after birth, without their knowing. Once a newborn has adapted to formula, it is nearly impossible to switch to breastfeeding.

The legislation is designed to be educational, so that every new mother can make a fully-informed decision – many will continue to find that formula is the best option, but hopefully even more will realize the benefits of breastfeeding and make that choice.

Many studies have shown that there are fewer medical problems and hospital stays for breastfed infants, which translates into lower healthcare costs and workplace absenteeism. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists supports extended breastfeeding because it reduces the risk of ovarian and breast cancers in breastfeeding mothers. Other benefits include a lower risk of adult-onset diabetes and osteoporosis.

This is good for baby and this is good for mom. Women are often made to feel ashamed when they breastfeed, and oftentimes if they start, quit after a few weeks. Women are buying expensive, less healthy formulas when they can't even afford food for themselves. It makes no sense. It is time that we as a society stop being hung up on breasts -- after all 51% of us have them evolutionarily engineered for feeding babies – and start doing what is right for the health and well-being of our newborns and moms.

This is common-sense legislation which empowers and supports these new mothers by providing them the information they need prior to, and after, the birth of their infant so they can make the best decisions for their child and themselves.

The Breastfeeding Mothers' Bill of Rights requires that new mothers be informed of breastfeeding options before they deliver, while in the maternal healthcare facility, as well as after leaving that facility. In addition, it bans commercial interests (formula providers) from pressuring new mothers

while in maternal facilities. Included within the Bill of Rights:

- Before You Deliver: The right to information free from commercial interests, which provides the nutritional, medical and psychological benefits of breastfeeding; an explanation of some of the problems a mother may encounter, and how to avoid or solve them.
- In the Maternal Healthcare Facility: The mother's right for her baby to stay with her after delivery to facilitate beginning breastfeeding immediately; to insist the baby not receive bottle feeding; to be informed about and refuse any drugs which may dry up breast milk; 24-hour access to the baby with the right to breastfeed at any time.
- When You Leave the Maternal Healthcare Facility: The right to refuse any gifts or take-home packets, distributed by the maternal healthcare facility, that contain commercial advertising or product samples; access to breastfeeding resources in one's community.

As basic as some of these rights are, they are consistently violated. There is a very real problem of women feeling pressured out of breastfeeding because the information they received early in their child's life was manipulated by commercial interests more concerned with their bottom line. The Federal Government's Healthy People 2010 initiative has set a goal of increasing rates of breastfeeding mothers to 75% upon birth, and 50% until six months of age. It is critically important to support women who choose to breastfeed their newest family member.

Construction Safety

A bill to improve construction safety sponsored by Assemblymember Jim Brennan and myself was signed into law on July 29th by Governor Paterson. The legislation, developed out of 2005 and 2008 hearings by the Assembly Cities and Codes Committees on construction safety, requires contractors and developers to certify correction of violations posing an imminent threat to public safety or face shutdown of their worksites, as well as significant penalties.

The City Department of Buildings is required to revisit the site of a violation for a dangerous condition within 60 days, and stop work if the condition has not been corrected. In addition, the party responsible for the violation must pay all penalties before the stop-work order is rescinded. The Department must return to the site every 60 days until the condition is abated.

Former Governor Spitzer vetoed similar legislation in 2007 at the request of Mayor Bloomberg just a few weeks before the Deutsche Bank fire in August, 2007. Following the crane accident in 2008, the Assembly conducted another building safety hearing and Mr. Brennan, who chairs the Assembly Cities Committee, negotiated changes to the bill with the Bloomberg Administration and the Department of Buildings and introduced an amended bill in the spring of 2008. The bill passed both houses of the Legislature this spring.

I applaud the Governor for signing this bill into law and ensuring the safety of our citizens. There have been too many instances where the Department of Buildings lacked the authority to fully ensure that construction sites remain safe which tragically led to crane collapses and numerous other incidents throughout the city. Hopefully this legislation, along with other changes made by the Department of Buildings and City Council in the last year, will help put an end to this.

This bill also creates a major economic incentive for construction companies to correct violations. While the majority of building owners and construction companies are responsible, there are unfortunately some bad actors out there who, without the proper motivation, will continue to disregard the law and public safety if it means they can make some extra money. Creating enforceable civil penalties should deter these people from making such decisions in the future.

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