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News from STATE SENATOR  
**Liz Krueger**



**COMMUNITY  
BULLETIN**

June 2009

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New York State Senate - 26th District

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## Message from Liz . . .

The legislative session will come to a close by the end of June, and there are still a great many issues on the table to be addressed. Obviously this has been an interesting and challenging week and issues of leadership are still being resolved as I write this. But I am focusing my efforts on continuing to fight for progress on key issues as I work to support continuing with the Democratic majority in the Senate as the best way to make progress on those issues.

One of the things I have learned about being in the Majority (and particularly a majority by one seat) is the difficulty of herding cats. While the Majority has been able to come together on the budget, Rockefeller Drug Law Reform, the Bottle Bill and the MTA bailout, there are plenty of other issues on the agenda where the fight goes on. My key priorities for the remainder of session include:

- **Meaningful Rent Regulation Reform:** We must pass legislation addressing the real problems tenants face in New York City. Among the legislation I am urging my colleagues to support include repealing vacancy decontrol and the Urstadt Law, reforming the MCI process, and limiting increases for rent controlled tenants who now face higher annual increases than market rate tenants.

- **Passage of Marriage Equality Legislation:** I will continue to work to pass legislation which would legalize same sex marriage, to build a majority in the Senate in support of this basic piece of civil rights legislation. If every other northeastern state is ready... along with IOWA!... then so are we.

- **Elections and Ethics Reform:** We have a real opportunity to move campaign finance reform legislation this session. We also must improve oversight of lobbying activities and the pension system.

- **School Governance:** The legislature must determine the future of NYC's school governance legislation. The current legislation sunsets June 30th, and many parents, educators, and researchers are weighing in with what has worked and what needs to be fixed. In my Senate district, there are currently waiting lists for kindergarten... so I know school overcrowding and the absence of planning are crucial issues to address.

- **Breastfeeding Bill of Rights:** For the last several years, I have carried legislation (S.1107A) which would improve women's access to information about breastfeeding. I developed the legislation through working with a coalition of doctors, nurses, lactation specialists, and child nutrition advocates. The Assembly has passed the bill the last two years, and now that the Democrats have taken the majority in the Senate, there is a real opportunity to move the bill. I am committed to moving it in the Senate this year and seeing this important legislation become law.

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There are obviously many other issues we must address before the end of session, but I am picking my battles, and these issues are the ones I think are most critical. It is exciting and challenging to have the opportunity to make progress on some long delayed issues, and I am looking forward to all which we will be able to accomplish in the days ahead.

## **State Senator Liz Krueger Presents:**

# Town Hall Meeting: Learning About the NY Prescription Drug Card

Come learn about a new program which provides discounts on prescription drugs to the disabled and those 50 to 65 years old with limited incomes.

**Wednesday, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2009**

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Temple Shaaray Tefila

250 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street at 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue

## **COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT**

### **Upcoming Rent Guidelines Board Hearings:**

On May 5th, the Rent Guidelines Board voted on a preliminary range for increases for rent stabilized apartments of 2 to 4.5 percent for one-year leases and 4 to 7.5 percent for two-year leases. If the tenant has been in the apartment for more than 6 years, the landlord can charge the increases listed above or a different adjustment, whichever is greater. The increase ranges for these adjustments: one-year leases: \$20-\$45; two-year leases: \$40-\$75.

It is incredibly important that tenants and other interested New Yorkers make their voices heard before the board takes its final vote on June 23rd. Below is a list of upcoming Rent Guidelines Board meetings and hearings:

<b>Wednesday, June 17<sup>th</sup></b> 10:00 AM – 6:00 PM	Public Hearing (public testimony)	The Great Hall at Cooper Union 7 East 7th Street (at 3rd Avenue), Manhattan
<b>Tuesday, June 19<sup>th</sup></b> 5:30 PM – 9:30 PM	Public Meeting (final vote) (no public testimony)	The Great Hall at Cooper Union 7 East 7th Street (at 3rd Avenue), Manhattan

For more information about how you can get involved, contact New York State Tenants and Neighbors via e-mail at [gdadlani@tandn.org](mailto:gdadlani@tandn.org) or by phone at (212) 608-4320.

### **Hearing on Second Avenue Subway Entrance Plans:**

The Federal Transit Administration and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority have completed a Supplemental Environmental Assessment to the Second Avenue Subway Final Environmental Impact Statement regarding the 72nd and 86th Street Station Entrance Alternatives (EA), providing the environmental analyses of MTA's proposed entrance modifications at the northern ends of the Second Avenue Subway 72nd Street and 86th Street Stations.

The Environmental Assessment is available for public review at the following locations:

- MTA Headquarters: 347 Madison Avenue , 9th Floor Law Library
- Federal Transit Administration: One Bowling Green, Room 429
- Manhattan Community Board 8 Offices, 505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
- Online at <http://www.mta.info/capconstr/sas>

The MTA will hold a public hearing on the Second Avenue Subway EA on Thursday, June 18, 2009, at The DoubleTree Metropolitan Hotel, Metro Ballroom, 569 Lexington Avenue, at 6 PM. Doors open at 5 PM and project staff will be available at that time. Anyone wishing to speak at the hearing must register by 7 PM at the Metro Ballroom or by calling (212) 878-7483 in advance.

### **Update on Illegal Hotels:**

On Sunday, May 31st I joined Assembly Member Dick Gottfried, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, Councilmember Gale Brewer, tenants and tenant advocates to announce the introduction of our bill, S.5617/A.6013, to address the issue of illegal hotels and to release the findings of the economic impact of illegal hotels in New York City. S.5617 would begin to address the problem by protecting tenants by discouraging owners from vacating buildings during the co-op/condo conversion process to rent as illegal hotel rooms. It also mandates that rent regulated units only be used for strictly residential purposes. Tenants also unveiled a report on the dramatic growth of illegal hotels in New York City. The report by the West Side Neighborhood Alliance was an update of an earlier report released by the Illegal Hotels Working Group in 2008. There was a marked increase in the prevalence of illegal hotels despite efforts by the Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement to aggressively combat this problem. One of the key points of the report was that 18% of these buildings receive some type of tax subsidy. Illegal hotel use also increases tenant harassment and often drastically reduces the quality of life for tenants in their buildings. While illegal hotel use continues to be a serious problem because it compromises the safety of tenants and tourists, and also hurts the legitimate hotel industry, I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Legislature, tenant advocacy groups and tenants to combat this serious problem.

### **Help Preserve the History of the Garment Center:**

The Garment Industry History Initiative, a partnership of the Gotham Center and the Leon Levy Foundation, is looking for first-hand accounts, stories, and anecdotes about life and work in the Garment Center of Manhattan. The Gotham Center's Web site will collect all reminiscences and discussion of the Garment Industry. To participate, go to <http://www.gothamcenter.org/garment/discussion>. To spark old memories, download a video or a podcast of historian Warren Shaw's 50-minute illustrated talk about the Garment District and popular culture given at the Graduate Center in March 2009. Shaw examined the Garment Center from the 1920s through the 1970s through plays, movies, novels, and books related to the famous neighborhood.

For more information please visit the Gotham Center's Web site at [www.gothamcenter.org](http://www.gothamcenter.org).

### **Education Update:**

On Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup>, the NYC Department of Education announced that it had an agreement in principle with the Archdiocese of New York for a three-year lease to incubate four P.S. 151 kindergarten classes in the former parochial school of Our Lady of Good Counsel. I am happy that,

after nine years, the DOE has finally re-established the P.S. 151 zoned elementary school in the Yorkville neighborhood and I applaud the parents for identifying Our Lady of Good Counsel as a viable location. The parents showed extraordinary leadership by organizing weekly meetings with the DOE to help find a solution to the overcrowding on the Upper East Side and to re-establish the zoned school. I look forward to continuing to work with the other East Side elected officials, parents in my district and the DOE on the remaining issues which contribute to the severe overcrowding throughout District 2.

## SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

### **Unemployment Insurance**

Last month, the New York State Senate passed critical legislation (S.4110A) which will provide an additional 13 weeks of extended unemployment benefits to nearly 120,000 current or soon-to-be unemployed New Yorkers. The Governor has since signed the legislation.

Thousands of New Yorkers, many of whom are receiving unemployment benefits for the first time in their lives, were about to lose their benefits. Unemployment benefits for approximately 56,000 jobless New York residents were set to expire and nearly 5,000 more people would have lost benefits every week over the next 2-3 months. Now these people will have an opportunity to find fair-paying jobs and get back on their feet.

New York will receive more than \$645 million through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to extend unemployment benefits for an additional 13 weeks to those currently unemployed. Additionally, Federal stimulus dollars will also stabilize New York's Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, which pays out all benefits for unemployed workers.

Because of the rising unemployment rates, with more than 160,000 jobs lost in the last year alone, that fund has been running in deficit since January of this year.

Helping those who have lost their jobs maintain a stable income is a great way to invest in the economy. I am proud to have supported this legislation and will continue to work to help those who have been hit hardest by this economic crisis.

### **EPIC Eligibility Expansion**

The New York State Senate passed legislation which I co-sponsored which expands the income eligibility of the EPIC (Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage) program. The bill is currently awaiting action in the Assembly.

Currently, the eligibility requirements for EPIC are \$35,000 for an individual and \$50,000 for a couple. This legislation expands the income eligibility to \$50,000 for an individual and \$75,000 for a couple.

Expanding the income eligibility for EPIC will allow more than 5,000 additional New York seniors to access this proven program and gain much needed savings for their prescription drugs at their local pharmacies..

More than 300,000 New York seniors are now eligible for EPIC benefits and save an average of 80% of the cost of their prescription drugs. EPIC is used in conjunction with Medicare Part D to lower drug costs.

This legislation maintains the Senate Democrats' commitment to affordable healthcare and I am very pleased that in this difficult time for our economy, we are able to take care of our seniors. No one should have to go without the medications they need simply because they cannot afford their prescriptions. This bill will help people remain healthy and active and helps address the daunting increases in medical costs facing seniors on fixed incomes.

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