



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.

Addabbo: Increases in Government Transparency for Sunshine Week

JOSEPH P. ADDABBO JR March 23, 2010

| ISSUE: **ETHICS**

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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ADDABBO: INCREASES IN GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY FOR SUNSHINE WEEK

Queens, NY, March 23, 2010 -- In honor of National Sunshine Week, **NYS Senator Joseph P. Addabbo, Jr.**, announced the Senate has taken another step forward in lifting the veil on state government operations by opening the legislative process to the public with the passing of a package of 'Sunshine' policy bills. The package is designed to provide the public with greater access to information they were long denied in order to hold state government accountable and to the highest standards.

"Sunshine Week is a national plan to create a dialogue about the importance of open government and freedom of information. Participants include print, broadcast and online news media, civic groups, libraries, nonprofits, schools and others interested in the public's right to know," explained Addabbo. The Senator added that an essential aspect of the democratic process is keeping society informed of the deliberations and decisions being made by policymakers, which the Senate Sunshine Policies attempt to achieve.

Bills in this package include:

S4284 requires open meetings to be held in a room of adequate size for citizens and officials to attend.

S8195B allows any meeting of a public body to be recorded, broadcast, Webcast and photographed as long as it is not disruptive to the proceedings of the meeting.

S7109 requires each agency and house of the legislature to proactively publish frequently requested records on its Internet Web site.

S7054 clarifies the court's authority to invalidate an action taken when the public body acted in violation of the open meetings law.

“The state’s legislative body has made great strides in making legislative information easily accessible to the public,” Senator Addabbo said. “Our people want and deserve to know what their elected officials are fighting for on their behalf and to be able to participate in the decisions that affect their lives.”

New rules stipulate that open meetings must be held in a room that can adequately accommodate anyone who wishes to attend and that any public meeting can be recorded, photographed, broadcast and webcast as long as it is not disruptive to the meeting. In addition, each agency and house of the legislature must post frequently requested records to its Web site.

Public access to government decisions is further promoted by making clear that a court may invalidate an action taken in violation of the open meetings law.

“It is my strong belief that the public has every right to know what government is doing and why,” said Senator Addabbo. “As the Chair of the Senate Elections Committee, I am pleased that every one of our committee meetings is audio- and videotaped and is posted to the Senate Web site within 24 hours. I believe that this type of access will help to foster citizen participation in government and will create a much needed partnership.”

The State Senate has implemented on the Senate Web site a searchable database where the public can access information such as, recordings of session, public meetings and hearings as well as committee records (nysenate.gov/video_archives). The Senate recently began publishing payroll reports and making them searchable and available online (nysenate.gov/opendata) to the public making the Senate one of, if not the only, government entity that does so.

Senator Addabbo expressed optimism that the more transparent government becomes, the more that citizens will participate in the process.

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