



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

## September 2010 Community Bulletin

LIZ KRUEGER September 20, 2010

| ISSUE: **AGING, ELECTIONS, GENERAL, HEALTH CARE, HOSPITALS**

### Message from Liz . . .

Already post-Labor Day—wow!

In reviewing what summer 2010 will be remembered for, I am struck by the BP oil spill disaster in the Gulf, the hottest summer on record in New York City and a disturbing upsurge in Islamophobia throughout the US, including right here in New York City.

Early September this year brings the Jewish New Year (L'SHANA TOVA 5771 to those of you who are celebrating) and so too the end of Ramadan for the Muslim community, which is celebrated with a big feast, that happens to fall on September 11th this year. Jewish and Muslim holidays move dates every year due to solar changes.

Just in case everyone isn't familiar with the traditions of Ramadan, it is the Islamic month of fasting, in which participating Muslims refrain from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset. During Ramadan, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils and try to purify, themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

So, before some brainless TV or Radio personality starts ranting that Muslims are CELEBRATING the tragedy of September 11th, THEY ARE NOT! They are celebrating the feast of Ramadan, in a similar way that my family will be celebrating the Jewish High Holidays this month. I fear this theory will be spread by the same people who have been heard arguing that the US doesn't need to permit the building of Islamic places of worship because places like Saudi Arabia don't allow churches and synagogues to be built. Didn't many of us and our ancestors come to the US because it is not, like Saudi Arabia, a country with rules about which religions are acceptable?

Religious freedom and tolerance must continue to be a cornerstone of our democracy. Islamophobia cannot be tolerated in our society! The threats of violence are growing and must be confronted. According to published reports, a Florida pastor has announced plans to burn copies of the Koran on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, arguing that Jesus would burn the Koran because "it's not holy." Groups calling themselves the "Freedom Defense Initiative" and "Stop the Islamization of America" have sponsored advertisements offering Muslims a "safe" way to give up Islam. Here in NYC, where most of us are immigrants within a few generations, we have a special obligation to remember that variations on these attacks were hurled at our grandparents when they first arrived from so many corners of the globe.

**Changing topic,** I want to make sure anyone with a pre-existing health care problem and issues with health insurance knows the following: As healthcare reform legislation begins to go into effect, one of the first issues being addressed is coverage for pre-existing conditions. New York has created a new temporary Statewide insurance option for uninsured legal residents who have pre-existing medical conditions. This plan, called the NY Bridge Plan, is New York's version of the Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan, which was created under Federal healthcare reform. The NY Bridge Plan is a valuable product of healthcare reform in that it provides health insurance coverage at a lower price than other options currently

available in the individual market. Through the NY Bridge Plan, premiums will be \$362/month for residents of upstate counties and \$421/month for residents of downstate counties. More information on the NY Bridge Plan, including the application and brochure, is available through [www.healthcarereform.ny.gov](http://www.healthcarereform.ny.gov).

Health insurance coverage is essential to having access to care. Through this program, more New Yorkers who need medical care will be able to receive it. The NY Bridge Plan covers a broad range of services, including primary and specialty care, inpatient and outpatient hospital care and prescription drugs, as well as assistance from professional nurses and caseworkers to help members manage chronic conditions and maintain overall health. Coverage for a pre-existing condition begins right away, with no waiting period. Eligibility for this program is not based on income. To be eligible to apply, individuals must:

- Be a legal U.S. resident;
- Be a resident of New York State;
- Have a pre-existing medical condition; and
- Not have had health care coverage for the last six months.

Applications are available now. Enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis. If the NY Bridge Plan reaches capacity, a waiting list will be established. Coverage will be effective October 1, 2010, and will be available until January 2014, when more health insurance coverage options become available through a new Health Insurance Exchange. I encourage you to apply for this program if you are eligible, and to also help us spread the word about this new health insurance option to your uninsured family and friends.

### **Community Spotlight**

## **New Voting Machines for Fall 2010 Election**

Beginning in Fall 2010, voters in New York City will vote using a paper ballot and optical scanner system. To help voters feel comfortable marking a paper ballot and using the new poll site voting system, the Board of Elections is conducting a comprehensive voter education program throughout New York City's five boroughs. It includes a multi-language website and advertising campaign, along with voting system demonstrations conducted in communities across the City. Learning Centers are open in each Board Borough Office, allowing voters to have a hands-on experience using a paper ballot and the new voting system. Find out more about the new way to vote at [www.vote.nyc.ny.us](http://www.vote.nyc.ny.us) or by calling (866) VOTE-NYC (868-3692). If your community organization would like to request a demonstration of the poll site voting system, submit your request to [Demo@boe.nyc.ny.us](mailto:Demo@boe.nyc.ny.us).

## **Mammogram Van Coming to the Upper East Side**

On Friday, October 15th, the Scan Van Mobile Mammogram Program will have a van at All Souls Church at 1157 Lexington Avenue (at 80th Street), beginning at Noon. This program provides mammograms for women 40 and older who have not had a mammogram in the past year. Medicaid, Medicare and other insurance plans accepted and co-payments are waived. The service is free for uninsured women 40 and older. An appointment is necessary. Please call (800) 564-6868 to make an appointment.

## **Free Prostate Cancer Lecture and Screening**

As part of September is Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Weill Cornell Medical Center is sponsoring a free Prostate Cancer lecture on September 13th from 6-8 PM entitled "Prostate Cancer: What Men Should Know," presented by Gerald J. Wang, MD. The lecture will take place at Weill Auditorium, 2nd Floor Weill Medical College Entrance, 1300 York Avenue (at 69th Street). Refreshments will be served. In

addition, on September 21st, from 7:30AM to 4:30 PM, free prostate screenings will be available to men over 40. The screenings will take place at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, 525 East 68th Street, Clinical and Translational Science Center (CTSC), F-260, 2nd Floor. No appointment is necessary. For more information, call Taquice Campbell at (212)746-5630.

### **Voluntary HIV Testing**

As of September 1st New York State's Public Health Law now requires that New York residents receiving health services at most medical facilities should now expect to be offered a voluntary HIV test. With limited exceptions, the new State law requires healthcare professionals to offer all patients between the ages of 13 to 64 a voluntary HIV test. The law applies to anyone receiving treatment for a non-life-threatening condition in a hospital, a hospital emergency department or a primary care setting, such as a doctor's office or outpatient clinic. The patient's consent must be documented in the patient's medical record, and the provider must share seven specified points of information about HIV. Routine testing is important because it enables people to be diagnosed earlier and take the necessary steps to not only preserve their own health, but also protect others. With this law, New York joins the 45 states that have acted on this important recommendation.

### **Institute for Senior Action Advocacy Training**

Are you concerned about budget cuts, changes to public transportation, senior center closings & Social Security? Join the Institute for Senior Action (IFSA), a program of JASA, and learn how to get more involved in the legislative process and be an effective advocate! The 10-week IFSA program integrates critical aging policy issues, with practical grassroots action. Classes focus on a wide variety of subjects, including: navigating the Federal, State and local legislative processes, public speaking, understanding senior benefits and entitlements, and much more. The fall semester meets on Thursdays from October 7th – December 16th, 10am–2:30pm at the Hudson Guild Elliot Center, 441 West 26th Street in Manhattan. To learn

more about IFSA, or to request an application, please contact Bola Aribidesi at (212) 273-5261 or email [ifsa@jasa.org](mailto:ifsa@jasa.org). All adults 55+ are invited to apply.

### **Turkish Days in New York**

“Turkish Days in New York,” organized by the Turkish Cultural Center, is a festival that will showcase the Anatolian Civilizations, Turkic and Balkan cultures and modern Turkey. During the festival, which runs from September 16th to the 22nd, New Yorkers can experience Turkic and Balkan Folklore performances, watch contemporary Turkish movies, explore Turkish arts and crafts and taste a variety of Turkish cuisines. Turkish days will be held in three locations:

- Grand Central Station: Sept. 16th & 17th; 8 a.m. – 8 p.m;
- 41st between 6th & 7th Avenues: September 19th ; 9 a.m. – 6 p.m; and
- New York Film Academy at 14th St, Union Sq: September 20th , 21st & 22nd; 7 p.m. to 11 p.

### **Policy Spotlight**

#### **Bedbug Infestation Disclosure**

Recently passed and signed legislation (S.8130) will require owners of New York City property to disclose any history of bedbug infestation in an apartment, within the past year, to of any prospective tenants before the property is leased. The purpose of this legislation is to ensure prospective tenants have information on prior bedbug infestations within an apartment they are thinking of renting.

#### **Expansion of “Do Not Call List” Law**

This month the Governor signed a new law (S.6034), which provides consumers with greater protections from annoying telemarketers. The law will further reduce unwanted

telemarketing calls by restricting them to the hours of 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and requiring greater disclosure by companies to protect consumers from deceptive marketing practices. Besides restricting the hours during which calls can be made, and requiring additional disclosure, the new law better protects consumers from deceptive and bothersome telemarketing by:

- Expanding New York's "Do Not Call" law protections to "robo-calls" including those targeted to answering machines or voice mail; and
- Expanding the Consumer Protection Board's (CPB) power to investigate complaints and enforcement the law.

For additional "Do Not Call" and other consumer information, visit [www.nysconsumer.gov](http://www.nysconsumer.gov) or call the CPB toll-free at (800) 697-1220.

### **Tenant Protection**

Last month Governor Paterson signed into law two bills that will strengthen tenants' rights and move New York one step closer towards resolving the many problems that continue to plague all-too-many New York residents.

S.7811, which I sponsored in the Senate, amends the Real Property Law so that tenants must consent to paying their rent electronically. Under previously existing law, tenants could be forced to use electronic payment as the only method of paying rent, which is an unacceptable demand to place on the elderly, indigent and others who may be unable to utilize electronic systems.

It's unfair to require that tenants can only pay rent on-line. While many people choose to pay their bills on-line, others may not have computer access or be computer literate. Plus, it is critical that tenants be provided receipts for rent payments, which many on-line systems do not offer. Finally, before a payment on-line is made, tenants must be assured payment

sites are secure and cannot be hacked, which could expose private bank account information and lead to theft. While national bank and credit card systems guarantee these protections, there is no assurance that any/all real estate managers have secure bill collection systems in place.

Also signed into law is S.7139, an act that protects rent-regulated tenants, when the buildings they live in are facing foreclosure. Under the new law, rent-regulated tenants are now required to receive a notice of their housing rights, along with a notice of the building owner's foreclosure. The bill takes effect 30 days from the date of signing. The legislation is the latest in the Senate Democrats' efforts to curb foreclosures and the adverse effects of them on residents of New York, while also empowering people to remain in their homes.

We still have a long way to go in providing adequate protection for tenants in New York, but the passage of these bills is a step in the right direction. I continue to fight for additional tenant protections to strengthen the existing rent-regulation system and prevent the further erosion of access to affordable housing.