



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Announces Senate District Offices Are Now Open Under State Guidelines

PETE HARCKHAM July 1, 2020

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Peekskill, NY – With the reopening of his Albany and two district offices today, New York State Senator Pete Harckham expressed his gratitude and appreciation to his staff for accomplishing so much while working remotely during the new coronavirus pandemic.

Earlier this week, Harckham's office surpassed its 500th completed constituent unemployment insurance case since pandemic caused the state to shut down in March. In

total, there have been 650 completed casework files since March. Normally, Harckham's office handles about 30 casework files in total each month.

Along with helping 40th Senate District residents and others register for unemployment claims with the state Department of Labor, Harckham and his staff worked to help small business owners file for state and federal economic recovery loan programs.

Harckham has also organized food drives, senior wellness calls and deliveries of personal protective equipment (PPE) to first responders in order to mitigate the devastation caused by Covid-19.

"It was apparent from the start of the pandemic that a lot needed to be done, and that many folks were going to need as much help as possible," said Harckham. "Everyone on my Senate team and plenty of volunteers all stepped up to offer their assistance. For the last three months, it has been all hands-on deck, and we have done our best to solve all of the problems and concerns that residents have been facing during this unprecedented time. I could not be prouder of what our team has been able to take care of and produce under these circumstances."

In order to keep the lines of communication open between his office and constituents, Harckham had the Albany and District office phones transferred automatically to his staff members' mobile phones. Hundreds of calls came in each as week, with residents inquiring about New York State on PAUSE regulations, various Executive Orders, what qualified as an "Essential Business" and where to get help with various issues, like when horseback riding lessons could resume or when boat owners could put their boat into a local waterway.

The largest number of calls, though, were from those wanting help with filing a claim for weekly unemployment insurance benefits. For many people who suddenly found

themselves out of work, the benefits were necessary to pay bills and put food on the table.

Jennifer Castelhana, Harckham's Director of Constituent Services, said, "Resolving most of these unemployment cases required multiple phone calls and emails, but the effort is always worth it when you know what's at stake. Helping people receive the benefits they deserve is what mattered most."

"Senator Harckham makes sure that his constituents are cared for and helped, said Alice MacDonald, a graphic designer from Peekskill. "These have been difficult times for many of us. The senator and his staff deserve my thanks for being able to cut through the red tape and help me survive."

Added Leia Rodman, a Yorktown resident, "It is extremely gratifying to know that you can contact your state representative and get the help you need."

Harckham decided he wanted to hear from seniors in the Senate District to see how they were doing, and so he organized a wellness outreach initiative. Over 70 volunteers made close to 6,000 phone calls to seniors beginning at the end of March, with personal contact made in around 900 instances.

Regular phone calls also went out to municipal officials, school districts and first responders in the 40th Senate District. And when a volunteer ambulance corps or fire department was running low on PPE or hand sanitizer, Harckham loaded up his car and made the deliveries himself.

Additionally, Harckham has held two "Coffee and Conversation" events via online video conferencing since March, giving him an opportunity to offer updates on his work in the Senate as well as the statewide relief and response efforts to the coronavirus.

Then, to help alleviate the hunger and food insecurity that New Yorkers are experiencing, Harckham has held five food drives in the past few weeks—one each in Sleepy Hollow, Peekskill, Mount Kisco, Mohegan Lake and Brewster—and collected over 30,000 pounds of food items and \$9,000 in cash donations so far.

“Right now, we have a greater need for food assistance among our community members, and the donations that Senator Harckham and a group of volunteers collected will help us in our goal to make sure families don’t go hungry,” said MaryJane Decker, a retired Cortlandt Manor resident who helps organize the Community Food Pantry at St. Mary’s Mohegan Lake. “During these extraordinary times we need to work together and help each other out, and food drives like this show that people really do care.”

After the Brewster food drive on Sunday, June 28, Judy Callahan, the director of the Putnam Community Action Partnership, an anti-poverty program, remarked, “Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, we have seen over a hundred new families each week coming in for food assistance. Because there is such need, we very much appreciate what Senator Harckham has organized here.”

Today, the reopening of Harckham’s Albany and district offices in Peekskill and Carmel is following state guidelines, which require a mask or face covering that properly covers both their mouth and nose be worn and social distancing of at least six-feet be practiced. Right now, only Senate employees are allowed entry to the offices.