

Dear Friends:

For most of us, 2020 has been an extraordinarily challenging year. COVID-19 began as a public health crisis and quickly developed into a full-blown economic, housing, education, and food insecurity crisis for so many Americans.

As Chair of the Senate Housing Committee, I have been working to develop solutions to ensure that New Yorkers are not displaced from their homes during the pandemic and to prevent housing costs that people are struggling with now from causing them long-term financial distress. I am also continuing to lead our larger effort to make New York a place where everyone has access to affordable, secure, high-quality permanent housing, building on our huge success enacting the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act in 2019.

Providing timely services has always been a key priority for me and my staff. We have worked hard to help constituents who have lost jobs or are working less because of the pandemic to obtain unemployment benefits, and to ensure that we're meeting New Yorkers' basic needs for food, shelter, telehealth services, COVID-19 testing, and personal protective equipment. I am also fighting to ensure that small businesses can stay afloat.

In this year-end newsletter, I want to share with you some of the work my staff and I have been doing and let you know that we're always here to help. If we can be of assistance, please contact us at 212-298-5565, 718-875-1517, or kavanagh@nysenate.gov.

I hope you enjoy the holidays in spite of the health precautions we must all continue to take, and let's look forward to a better year in 2021!

It is my honor to serve you.



Brian Kavanagh



Senator Kavanagh adapted to necessary health and safety precautions while in Albany this summer during the extended legislative session, in order to pass urgent legislation that protected New Yorkers during the pandemic.

Preventing Evictions

In March, as the COVID-19 crisis emerged, my colleagues and I called for a moratorium on all evictions and housing court proceedings, which we achieved through a series of executive orders issued by Governor Andrew Cuomo and administrative orders issued by the court system. These steps allowed New York to stop all legal evictions from March through September. We appear to be one of the only states in the U.S. to have maintained such a comprehensive statewide moratorium.

However, the Governor and the courts have recently loosened the restrictions and are now allowing for some residential evictions to resume. The laws still in place, including the Tenant Safe Harbor Act we enacted in June, offer protections against eviction for most New Yorkers experiencing hardship, but I think it is unconscionable to allow people to be evicted from their homes at this time—and a serious mistake from a public health perspective.

With the public health crisis continuing and about a million New York households behind on their rent, I am pushing to reinstate a full moratorium on evictions until COVID-19 is behind us. Negotiations toward that end are ongoing as I write this, and my legislation for such a moratorium has two dozen cosponsors. I will continue to advocate for additional measures through legislation and executive orders, as needed, to ensure that we do everything in our power to keep New Yorkers safe and secure in their homes, now and through the end of this crisis.

Fighting for Rent Relief

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, I led a coalition of more than 200 state and local elected officials, along with tenant activists, real estate leaders and community advocates, in calling on the federal government to provide \$100 billion in additional stimulus funds dedicated to residential rental assistance, with \$10 billion for New York. The U.S. House of Representative heeded our call, passing the HEROES Act, which included tens of billions in funding for renters and homeowners struggling with housing costs. While negotiations with the U.S. Senate and the White House have not yet been fruitful, I remain hopeful that additional federal relief will be coming in the new year, and will include substantial housing funds.

In the meantime, I sponsored the Emergency Rent Relief Act, which directs \$100 million towards emergency rental assistance to help some of the tenants with the greatest need. The State housing agency has faced challenges implementing the program, and only 15,000 households have been found eligible to date; we are working to expand eligibility and get more relief out as soon as possible.

To ensure that New York is prepared to spend additional housing funds once we receive them, I've sponsored a bill to create the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program. This legislation is intended to provide relief for any tenants who have been unable to pay rent during the pandemic, prioritizing those with the greatest need, including those who experience homelessness or are at imminent risk of eviction. As discussed above, federal relief funding is going to be essential to ensure that New Yorkers are not left with severe long-term financial distress. The fight for federal funding continues.

Breaking Ground on the Last Section of Brooklyn Bridge Park



Senator Kavanagh joined Mayor Bill de Blasio, Councilmember Steve Levin, and colleagues to break ground on the final section of Brooklyn Bridge Park, named for Emily Roebling, an engineer largely responsible for completion of the Brooklyn Bridge in 1883.

Enacting Mortgage Forbearance

Renters aren't the only ones experiencing difficulties with housing costs as a result of COVID-19. Many homeowners are struggling to pay their mortgages and property taxes. To help address this, I authored and passed the strongest mortgage protections for homeowners suffering financial hardship in the country. Under the new law, those with mortgages through state-regulated financial institutions receive forbearance for a period of six months, plus an additional six months if they continue to experience financial hardship.

Homeowners have the option of postponing their payments to the end of the loan term or increasing their future monthly payment amounts. This law will help thousands of homeowners, but many New Yorkers' mortgages are issued and serviced by out-of-state financial institutions over which New York has no jurisdiction. I have urged the federal government to replicate New York's strong protections nationally for all residential mortgages.

Advocating for Public Housing Residents

I have pushed for the NYC Housing Authority to be responsive to tenants' financial hardships stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and to expeditiously resolve maintenance issues and service outages, which are especially problematic at a time when most New Yorkers are staying home more. NYCHA residents are eligible for rent reductions due to lost work, and the normal waiting period has been waived.

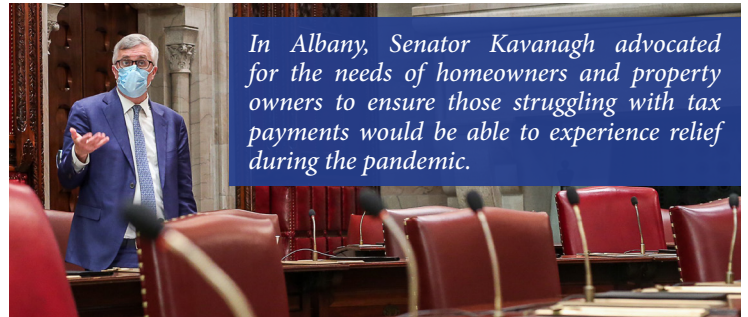
If you need assistance applying for a rent reduction or have critical maintenance issues in your apartment or your building that are not being addressed, please contact us at 212-298-5565 or kavanagh@nysenate.gov.

Responding to Violations of Fair Housing Laws

In response to investigative reporting by Newsday about race-based fair housing violations on Long Island, the Senate Housing Committee, the Investigations Committee, and the Consumer Protection Committee held public hearings to identify ways to move New York toward the elusive goal of ending housing discrimination. We have already introduced several pieces of legislation, and we will soon issue our findings calling for a comprehensive package of statutory and policy changes, which we hope to begin taking up in the 2021 legislative session.

Authorizing Property Tax Relief

Many homeowners and other property owners have inquired about property tax relief for those experiencing hardship during COVID-19. Property taxes are imposed locally by the City government. I co-sponsored and helped pass legislation to authorize the City to reduce or delay property tax payments on an emergency basis during the pandemic. I have urged the City to make use of this option to ease the burden on New Yorkers who are struggling with tax payments.



In Albany, Senator Kavanagh advocated for the needs of homeowners and property owners to ensure those struggling with tax payments would be able to experience relief during the pandemic.

Making the Unemployment System Work

When many businesses were forced to shut down or curtail hours due to COVID-19, New York's system of unemployment benefits was quickly overwhelmed. New Yorkers filed more than 80,000 claims in the first week and have filed a total of two million claims to date.

Through the CARES Act, our federal representatives provided much needed funding to help those experiencing unemployment make ends meet, enabling New York to provide enhanced Pandemic Unemployment Assistance through the end of July and basic benefits for up to 59 weeks. My colleagues and I in the State government quickly realized that one of the most important roles we could play during this time was to fix our antiquated unemployment system, and update existing platforms at the Department of Labor, so New Yorkers could receive the financial assistance they need.

My staff and I worked directly with hundreds of unemployed constituents to expedite their claims. After a very rocky start in the early months of the pandemic, the system is now functioning much more smoothly. With COVID-19 still keeping many New Yorkers unemployed or working fewer hours, we must continue to advocate for the renewal of federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and for an extension of the period basic benefits will be available. We must also develop programs for New Yorkers who are excluded from unemployment and other relief because of their immigration status or other issues; I have co-sponsored legislation that aims to address this problem.

If you need assistance with unemployment benefits, please contact my office at 212-298-5565, 718-875-1517, or kavanagh@nysenate.gov. We are here to help.

Seeking Relief for Small Businesses

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses in New York City has been devastating. According to a report by the Partnership for New York City, more than half a million jobs have been lost in the small business sector and more than a third of small businesses are not expected to survive. The most pressing challenge for many businesses is paying rent, which has often remained their largest fixed cost as sales have plunged. Many businesses are facing months of missed rent payments, with little ability to pay off their arrears.

I joined Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou and Councilmembers Brad Lander and Keith Powers in introducing the COVID-19 Small Business Recovery Lease Act. The bill would authorize the City to provide a property tax break when small businesses and property owners agree to long-term leases that resolve any rent arrears and offer the small business affordable terms for at least ten years. It is clear that we will need multiple approaches to solve the challenges facing the small business sector, but I hope recovery leases will be one concrete way we can help.



Senator Kavanagh, Congressmember Nydia Velázquez, other elected colleagues, and local leaders toured Chinatown to assess the impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in the area.

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Providing for Greater Police Accountability

Catalyzed by the national outcry over the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, and inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, more than twenty-four thousand of my constituents contacted me to express strong support for legislative changes to increase police accountability and transparency, many of which were long overdue. My colleagues and I passed a major package of legislation that was signed into law in June. I was proud to be a cosponsor of all of the bills, which:

- Repeal Section 50-a, ending unnecessary secrecy regarding police disciplinary processes.
- Empower the Attorney General to investigate civilian deaths involving police, initiate prosecutions when warranted, review police practices, and recommend reforms.
- Ensure access to demographic and geographic data on police enforcement.
- Enact the Eric Garner Anti-Chokehold Act, banning chokeholds by police.
- Establish the right to record police activity.
- Require a report when a police officer fires a gun.
- Require access to needed medical care for those in custody.
- Require State Police to wear body cameras and to record certain interactions with the public.
- Make it a civil rights violation to call the police based on bias rather than a reasonable belief there's a crime or threat.

Honoring the Life and Legacy of Ruth Bader Ginsburg



Senator Kavanagh at Borough Hall in Brooklyn speaking during a ceremony organized by Borough President Eric Adams, honoring the legacy of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg after her passing in September.

Supporting Schools and Students

I have also been focused on supporting schools, students, and their families during a very challenging year. I am a co-sponsor of the E-LEARN Act which would provide broadband internet access to all families with students who attend school in any setting, so all children can learn during the pandemic. I've also paid special attention to the particular challenges certain students with disabilities have faced, including the need for services that are difficult to deliver remotely. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you need help with school-related issues.

Getting Food to New Yorkers in Need

The loss of jobs in New York due to COVID-19 has made it difficult for many New Yorkers to meet their basic needs, including access to food. Stay-at-home orders and social distancing measures have also cut off reliable pathways to food access, such as meals provided in community settings in houses of worship, senior centers, and schools. In response, I fought for substantial emergency food assistance to be funded in the State budget, and I've worked with State and City agencies to ensure that food banks and other food providers have the resources they need. My staff and I have also been involved in providing direct relief through community-based efforts. For example, from May to October, my office, in collaboration with Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer and Assemblymember Harvey Epstein, helped distribute weekly Fresh Direct pantry boxes to public housing residents in our community.

If you or a New Yorker you know needs food assistance, please contact my office, or try these helpful resources:

- Free "Grab and Go" meals, available for all New Yorkers, M-F, 7:30am - 1:30pm: www.opt-osfns.org/schoolfoodny/meals/default.aspx
- For the nearest food pantry: <https://maps.nyc.gov/foodhelp/#map-page>
- For medically tailored meals: <https://www.glwd.org/get-meals/for-you-or-your-loved-ones/>
- For meals for homebound adults: Call 212-AGING-NYC



Senator Kavanagh and staff have prepared bags of food and personal protective equipment for residents, small businesses, and community organizations located in District 26, on a weekly basis, alongside volunteers.

Distributing Personal Protective Equipment

My office has also been working hard to provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) throughout the district to community organizations and individuals who need it. The staff at these organizations are heroes who work tirelessly to support their neighbors. If you know of organizations or individuals in need of masks, hand sanitizer, or other supplies, please contact us at 212-298-5565, 718-875-1517, or kavanagh@nysenate.gov.



Senator Kavanagh and our Director of Community Affairs, Chantel Cabrera, distributed free masks to subway riders as part of a collaborative effort with the DOHMH and the MTA to promote safe subway habits during the pandemic.

Honoring a Great Community Leader



Senator Kavanagh named Daisy Paez as District 26's Woman of Distinction for 2020. She is known for her advocacy on behalf of children, seniors, and those experiencing food and housing insecurity. Here, they stand at the Grand Street Amphitheatre for a socially distanced and masked outdoor celebration.

COVID SAFETY BASICS

1. WASH YOUR HANDS OFTEN
2. WEAR A MASK THAT COVERS YOUR NOSE AND MOUTH
3. PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING
4. STAY HOME IF YOU ARE SICK
5. GET TESTED (IT'S FREE!)
6. GET A FLU VACCINE

VISIT: <https://bit.ly/hhccovidinfo> for more info



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**NYS Senator
Brian Kavanagh**
26th Senate District

Drumming Up Interest in the Census

Senator Kavanagh at a Census 2020 parade through the Lower East Side to engage residents and promote awareness of the Census. Ultimately, New Yorkers had impressive Census count rates, especially given difficulties presented by the coronavirus pandemic, and outperformed the state's rates from previous years.



NYS Senator Brian Kavanagh

26th Senate District

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