

Senator Perkins wishes each of you, your family and friends a Happy New Year



Senator Perkins sounds the call for stronger rent laws throughout the NYS Capitol

2015 was a year of fighting, advocating and making incremental progress on a number of important issues of central importance to those in Harlem, East Harlem, The Upper West Side, Morningside Heights and Washington Heights. We got arrested in the course of demanding stronger rent laws and the fruit of our fight for the people was more tenant protections. We continue to fight for a true affordable housing policy that prioritizes need over profits. We demanded that NYCHA put the “public” first always in public housing and protect, enhance and grow a collective asset that serves all of us. We fought for a living wage and made some progress as the “Fight for \$15” is now on. We continued to draw attention to the human rights crisis in our criminal justice system—from solitary confinement to Grand Jury reform—we are pushing solutions that will change the system and make it more fair, equitable and one that serves everyone with the humanity, compassion and forthrightness we all deserve. We spoke up and demanded action to solve the humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico, while organizing for changes in federal policy to unshackle the island, support our people and plan for the future. We have had wonderful events for our beloved seniors, our loving Moms and our heroic Veterans. It was another year of listening to the people and giving amplified voice to your concerns. It continues to be my honor to serve you in the State Senate.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Perkins".

Senator Perkins | A Leading Voice For Puerto Rico

Senator Perkins has been outspoken in his support for Puerto Rico as they struggle with a debt crisis largely caused by the forces of capitalist greed and selfishness combined with poorly designed and counterproductive federal policy. Senator Perkins realizes the tremendously important relationship between the people of Puerto Rico, the United States, and most importantly, so many Puerto Ricans who call New York City home. He believes it is unconscionable to let people in Puerto Rico suffer, with the Federal Government withholding a fair share of federal funding for essential services and benefits such as Medicare, transformative economic development and sustainable energy planning.

Sadly, Puerto Rico is treated like a second-class entity by the United States and this must cease. We have a unique and singular history and shared fate. It is inexplicable that we would make the people of Puerto Rico serve two masters: the United States and Wall Street bondholders who invested so freely when it was in their own financial interest to do so.

Senator Perkins fully supports legislation that will allow Puerto Rico to declare bankruptcy and to find a rational and sensible way to move forward from this crisis—which is as humanitarian as it is economic—with the full support of our Country and a host of new measures that support the natural economic and social strengths of Puerto Rico.

Senator Perkins | Longstanding Advocate For A Living Wage For All

Senator Perkins and his fellow Senate Democrats spent a good deal of the 2015 Legislative Session highlighting the need for raising the minimum wage—currently \$8.75/hour—to something more substantial that can truly support families and break the cycle of poverty. Senator Perkins supports longstanding legislation that raises the minimum wage substantially, and gives New York City the local option to go higher than the State. Recently, Governor Cuomo announced a push for a Statewide “living wage” at \$15 an hour. Thus, in 2016 a major campaign will be undertaken to fundamentally transform the minimum wage from a starvation wage, to one that will truly empower everyone to have a job that provides for their needs and allows them to grow and thrive.

To this end, in November, Senator Perkins proudly participated in a “Fight For \$15” rally to build momentum for a living wage. At the event, the Senator said “I am a proud and longstanding advocate, supporter and co-sponsor of proposals for a living wage in New York City; one that allows every single individual and family to make their hard work manifest into housing, education, advancement and ultimately the empowering freedom to pursue their dreams. I am in complete support of and in solidarity with the “Fight for \$15” Movement. However, I view it only as a next step—and an intermediary step at that—on the road to fundamental fairness. Our ultimate goal is a system that provides both a true living wage and related benefit enhancements that will allow every single individual and family to thrive, especially in places like New York City where the cost of living is so steep.

To learn more about this vital issue, sign a petition and be advised of upcoming events near you, please visit the Fight for 15 website at: <http://fightfor15.org/>

Senator Perkins Fights For NYCHA Residents

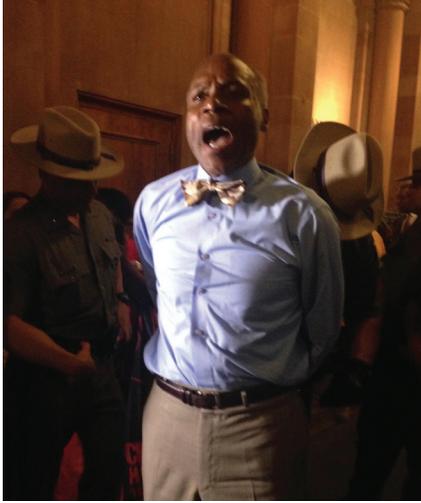
In August, Senator Perkins offered detailed testimony at the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) Annual Plan Public Hearing that strongly questioned the concept of “Infill Development” whereby public land owned by the Housing Authority is turned over to private developers to construct market rate housing. Our community successfully fought back a Bloomberg Infill effort in 2013 that involved Douglass, Washington and Carver Houses. That plan would have erected multiple market rate luxury towers on open space, parking lots and a community center that would have forever marred our neighborhoods.

The testimony of Senator Perkins read, in part: “NYCHA now speaks of a new “business model” that “attracts outside financing” within a portfolio that “holds enormous untapped potential.” These buzzword phrases are of the type normally deployed by developers who exist to make a profit, not provide a public good. These words—and more importantly the plan behind them—strike within me a sense of pause and signal that we must view many of the changes contemplated by the Authority with the strictest of scrutiny. As always, the specter of transformation that brings privatization and gentrification concerns me greatly. The one thing that separates NYCHA from private developers is that they serve the public good; they are a mission-based not-for profit organization. Privatizing any aspect of NYCHA—no matter how unique or nuanced, raises a red flag. By definition, private developers serve a private interest; they exist to make money, whether off of exorbitant market rate rents or generous tax credits and subsidies, or both. Adding the profit motive to even one development or building in NYCHA is a step that is simply inconsistent with the mission of the Authority. So many

examples exist of the public good being diluted and compromised by private greed; the funding structure of Charter Schools and the Puerto Rican debt crisis are two prime examples of the colossal ramifications of greed—guised as generosity—that supposedly serves the public good.”

I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that NYCHA exists to serve the public and always keeps the “public” first in public housing. **To sign a petition to Mayor de Blasio urging him to keep public housing public, please visit our website at: <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/bill-perkins>.**

Senator Perkins Advocates For Stronger Rent Laws



Senator Perkins is arrested alongside residents from the District and other New Yorkers, as they demanded stronger rent laws and permanent protections to keep their homes

Senator Perkins fought for months in Albany to strengthen the rent laws, turn the tide against gentrification and empower residents who are being harassed and taken advantage of by profiteering landlords. The Senator joined with advocates who called for a full “rent freeze” and an end to the decontrolling of any apartments. In the end, we made some progress, in spite of a Republican-controlled Senate who stood in lock-step with big money developers and landlords. We increased the vacancy decontrol threshold from \$2,500 to \$2,700; we reduced the amount of Major Capital Improvement (MCI) costs that a landlord can pass on to residents; we increased the penalty for tenant harassment to a \$2,000 fine; and we made it more difficult for landlords to raise preferential rents. Ultimately, this fight is a marathon and I believe that the people united will never be defeated; thus we must fight for stronger rent laws each and every year.

Fundamental Reforms | Empowering Tenants:

Senator Perkins believes that the affordable housing crisis we face must be met head-on with legislative changes that address runaway gentrification, landlord harassment, the affirmative right of tenants to take action on issues of habitability, abuse and unethical treatment and the right of New York City to govern its own affairs in the realm of housing.

To this end, the Senator sponsors/co-sponsors legislation that will:

- End vacancy decontrol, keep all apartments in the rent stabilization program and re-regulate “lost” apartments (Senate Bill 4474)
- Cap rent increases allowed for multi-apartment capital improvements and individual apartment improvements; and ensure the improvements are necessary and completed, not undertaken simply to swindle residents (Senate Bill 2855; 4423)
- Repeal the vacancy bonus, which perversely gives an incentive to landlords to turn over units by forcing tenants out (Senate Bill 951)
- Expand and empower tenant protections; increase fines for harassment; prohibit warehousing of apartments; allow tenants to repair conditions in apartments and offset such costs against current/future rent (Senate Bills 2420; 2461)
- Repealing the Urstadt Law of 1971 which will give New York City back total control and home rule over their own rent laws, instead of being held captive by the State and big real estate interests (Senate Bill 2831)

To learn more about the important issues before us and take action, please visit the Real Rent Reform Campaign website at: <http://www.realrentreform.org/p/about-r3.html>

Update On Important Criminal Justice Reforms



Senator Perkins demands justice for Samuel Harrell, who had his life taken by the “Beat Up Squad” of Fishkill Correctional Facility

Corrections Reform

This September, I stood in solidarity with the family of Samuel Harrell, who—according to court filings and a New York Times expose—was murdered by the notorious “Beat Up Squad” of Fishkill Correctional Facility. We had a press conference with Mr. Harrell’s family to demand justice and also released a letter to Governor Cuomo asking him to intervene, investigate and join us in an effort to reform a system that is so clearly broken.

The letter read, in part: “I respectfully submit to you that it is time for a change in how the entire state approaches corrections and how we judge and evaluate the system. The system is supposed to rehabilitate individuals when all it appears to do is crack them on the skull. The mission of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) is clear: ‘To improve public safety by providing a continuity of appropriate treatment services in safe and secure facilities where offenders’ needs are addressed and they are prepared for release, followed by supportive services under community supervision to facilitate a successful completion of their sentence.’ With each personal story I hear, each family member that comes into my office and each expose in the Times runs, I question our entire system of corrections and the commitment and fidelity to their stated mission.”

Our office has currently drafted a comprehensive Corrections reform package to be introduced in early 2016 that will:

- Provide for an immediate external and independent investigation of our Correctional system by the United States Department of Justice.
- Totally overhaul the recruitment, training, composition and qualifications for Corrections Officers.
- Implement the use of independently monitored cameras in Correctional facilities—both stationary and body cameras.
- Provide that medical and crisis intervention staff must be on call all of the time at Correctional facilities; while providing enhanced, therapeutic and rehabilitative mental health treatment therein.
- Require all those who work in Correctional facilities to be deemed mandatory reporters of abuse.
- Require that any Correctional facility that is the site of a confirmed homicide by an officer on individual—as is the case in Fishkill, with the death of Mr. Harrell—will be automatically decommissioned.
- Provide independent legal and investigative professionals to individuals in prison that guarantee their rights and due process.
- Extend the current Executive Order (Number 147) for a Special Prosecutor to include incidents where correctional officers are involved in the deaths of individuals under their guard.

If you, or a friend, family member or loved one has experienced abuse at the hands of Corrections officials, please get in contact with our office at 212.222.7315.

Solitary Confinement Reform



Senator Perkins joins members of the Campaign For Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC) during their Lobby Day In Albany

We continue to make incremental but encouraging progress in the fight to end state-sanctioned torture, in the form of solitary confinement. Right now, as we speak—over 4,000 individuals in New York State’s criminal justice system are denied the basic provision of light, air and human contact for 23 hours each day. The United Nations has declared solitary confinement as torture and it is time for New York to follow suit.

Solitary confinement is a failed policy on all levels; it does not make our prisons safer, it does not rehabilitate or help individuals, it does not save the state money. All it does is exacerbate suffering and stunt the growth of individuals who need support and rehabilitation.



Senator Perkins is joined by members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus in a show of support for ending Solitary Confinement

We held multiple events in Albany this Spring to garner further support for the HALT Solitary Confinement Act (Senate Bill 2659 | Assembly Bill 4401) that I proudly carry with Assemblyman Jeff Aubry. Our legislation will do five essential things: (1) Stop isolating and start rehabilitating; (2) Target intensive rehabilitative treatment to those who need it most; (3) Restrict placement in isolation to the United Nations standard (no longer than 15 consecutive days and no more than 20 days in any 60 day period)—with the goal of one day going from 15 to 10 and 10 to 5—with the ultimate goal being the total end of solitary confinement; (4) Protect special populations—such as youth, seniors, pregnant individuals and those with mental health issues—from isolation in the first place; and (5) Enact a corrections culture change by requiring due process, review and enhanced training.

In addition, local events occur on the 23rd of each month all across the state with the goal of building the movement to end torture. The 23rd is selected to represent the number of hours each day individuals are forced to spend in solitary. For more information on these events visit our website or that of the Campaign for Alternatives to Isolated Confinement (CAIC)—<http://nycalc.org>.

Special Prosecutor

The legislature deadlocked on a number of important Criminal Justice Reform proposals in 2015, such as Raising The Age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18, requiring body cameras for police officers, enacting a statewide, uniform policy on videotaped interrogations and meaningful Grand Jury reforms. However, Governor Cuomo took executive action in July and appointed Attorney General Eric Schneiderman as Special Prosecutor in matters relating to the deaths of unarmed civilians caused by law enforcement officers. Now, under the Governor’s order, in the unfortunate and heartbreaking case of situations like the murder of Eric Garner, a truly independent entity can conduct investigations, present to the Grand Jury

and ultimately prosecute and secure justice free from local bias, undue influence and a lack of transparency. I have been a strong advocate for a Special Prosecutor and co-sponsored legislation to establish this position in law. Conclusively, I support the Governor’s action as a swift initial step while also continuing to advocate for more sweeping legislative and policy changes that will fundamentally reform the way our system operates.

Fundamentally Reforming The Grand Jury Process

Governor Cuomo’s appointment of a Special Prosecutor to handle cases relating to the deaths of unarmed civilians caused by law enforcement officers is a correct first step in reforming a fundamentally broke and often racist criminal justice system—but it is a modest and limited step. In the Summer, I introduced legislation in partnership with Assemblyman Charles Barron (Senate Bill 6038 | Assembly Bill 8364-A) that will end “secret” grand juries for cases of a shooting or use of excessive force by a law enforcement official.

The relationship between police officers and prosecutors is so close that is it often rife with the inherent potential for conflict. Those who work on the same team and rely upon each other may be overrun by motives or considerations in cases that involve misconduct, excessive force, racism, or flat-out murder by police officers. There is a clear conflict of interest in these cases, and “secret” grand jury proceedings exacerbate this fact because they lack any type of public accountability.

Incredibly, we still do not know the details of the Richmond Country Grand Jury proceedings in the chokehold murder of Eric Garner by Officer Daniel Pantaleo. We know of the existence of video evidence and many first-hand accounts; we even heard Mr. Garner utter the immortal last words “I can’t breathe,” as life was literally taken from him by the police. Yet, there was no indictment and the records of the secret proceedings remain sealed. We don’t know how hard or how tenaciously District Attorney Donovan even pushed for an indictment of a clear murderer; or even if he did at all.

Senator Perkins believes that “Secret” grand juries must give way to preliminary hearings in front of the public, for all to see, presided over by a Judge. Letting the light of day, and the rays of transparency into a once “secret” process—where family members, friends and loved ones of the victim are present—is the bare minimum we can do to ensure accountability in our system, as we continue to work to repair it. **To learn more about this legislation and receive updates on its progress, please visit our website at <https://www.nysenate.gov/senators/bill-perkins>.**

Community Board 10 LGBT Town Hall

I was proud to participate in the first ever LGBT Town Hall organized by Manhattan Community Board 10 in partnership with so many of the wonderful and difference-making organizations in our neighborhoods. I shared my strong record on LGBTQ issues which I believe are quintessential civil and human rights issues.

As a lifelong civil rights activist, I have always felt a special bond and kinship when working on issues of fundamental fairness like Marriage Equality, the Gender Orientation Non Discrimination Act (GENDA), helping to fashion the Blueprint to End AIDS in New York and stopping the harmful practice of Conversion Therapy.

On that evening, I invoked Dr. King’s seminal Letter From Birmingham City Jail by quoting: “I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” I fundamentally believe that Dr. King’s soaring and salient point is as true today as it was over 50 years ago; we must treat all people equally—negative considerations with respect to race and gender identity, or the intersection of the two—have no place in our City, State, Nation or any society of human beings.

Supporting Our Heroic Veterans

This August, we held our 2nd Annual Veterans Resource Fair where we brought together hundreds of veterans from across the City to meet service organizations in an efficient one-stop way. Through the noble work of our outstanding collaborators—Legal Services NYC and the Robin Hood Foundation, as well as Samaritan Village and the Harlem Veterans Center we have worked to connect veterans to services and benefits that are empowering in a tangible way but also in a way that speaks holistically to the heart and the mind.

Senator Perkins believes that our heroic Veterans serve us in our time of need and are called upon to make unbelievable sacrifices born of courage, duty and humanity. When they return to civilian life, it is our job, as a collective community to serve them with open arms and compassionate hearts.



Senator Perkins proudly stands with all those who made our 2nd Annual Veterans Resource Fair a purposeful success



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Senator Perkins Winter 2016 Newsletter

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Senator Perkins and Assemblymember Dick Gottfried at a press conference advocating for New York Health, putting Patients Before Profits because Your Health Is Your Wealth. To learn more, please visit: <http://www.nyhcampaign.org/>