



Assemblyman
Michael Cusick

**UPDATE
FROM ALBANY**

SUMMER 2012

A YEAR OF PROGRESS AND SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Dear Neighbor:

I am pleased to present you with this newsletter containing important information for Staten Islanders.

As your representative in Albany, I am encouraged by the progress we made this year putting new laws in place and passing important legislation to enhance our quality of life. I will continue to fight hard for the issues that are important to Staten Island.

Should you have any questions about this information or any other topic, please feel free to contact my office at 718-370-1384 or by email at cusickm@assembly.state.ny.us. We are always available to help.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick
Member of Assembly
District 63



PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Illegal prescription drug distribution and abuse remains a critical issue in the Staten Island community.

Two years ago, I initiated roundtable discussions with our local physicians, pharmacists, law enforcement, and a wide variety of community organizations for input on how to combat this problem. From those discussions, I authored legislation that was negotiated with the Governor, the Attorney General, and Senator Andrew Lanza with the goal of mitigating addiction and proliferation of controlled substances.

The law, known as I-STOP, simultaneously hinders illegal distribution of drugs while identifying those individuals who may require treatment for an addiction. Concurrently, I-STOP will introduce a statewide real-time database to assist physicians and pharmacists in their treatment of a patient and ensure there are no egregious patterns of drug dependence.

This important piece of legislation will be instrumental in combating prescription drug abuse statewide and puts New York State on the forefront of having the most sophisticated system in the country.



Assemblyman Cusick speaks at a press conference about his legislation, I-STOP, to combat prescription drug abuse. Senator Andrew Lanza and Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, joint-sponsors of the legislation, attend.

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ASSEMBLYMAN MIKE CUSICK
Leadership That's Working For Staten Island



Assemblyman Michael Cusick stands with Senator Andrew Lanza and New York City Schools Chancellor Dennis Walcott to announce the restoration of yellow school bus service for Staten Island 7th and 8th graders.

PROTECTING OUR KIDS BY RESTORING YELLOW SCHOOL BUS SERVICE

Assemblyman Cusick, along with Senator Andrew Lanza, formulated legislation that restored yellow school bus service to Staten Island's 7th and 8th grade students.

In September of 2009, the New York City Department of Education revoked a variance that allowed 7th and 8th graders to be eligible for yellow school bus service. This decision affected 4,600 general education students at public and non-public schools citywide. Of those students, nearly 3,000 lived on Staten Island, where mass-transit options are limited. The Cusick/Lanza law reinstating school bus service has taken children out of harm's way and provided peace of mind to parents.

"Parents and students can securely and confidently know that, beginning this September, Staten Island 7th and 8th graders will be provided yellow school bus service. This is of paramount importance in regard to the safety of our children, and I am pleased that we were able to restore this necessary service," said Cusick.

Assemblyman Cusick is also the author of a bill, A.250, which would increase penalties for the violation of overtaking and passing a stopped school bus. Those penalties range from having one's license revoked, to a class E felony of vehicular manslaughter if the death of a child occurs.

"Keeping New York's schoolchildren safe is a top priority for me," said Cusick. "Failing to stop when children are boarding or departing a school bus is dangerous and irresponsible, and we hope that by creating tougher penalties for this dangerous behavior, we will bring about a safer environment for our children."



LOWERING INCOME TAX RATES FOR MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES

A middle income family paid the same tax rate—6.85%—as a family earning a significantly higher amount. To address this discrepancy, Assemblyman Cusick helped pass legislation to lower the tax rate for middle-class families in New York. As a result, 4.4 million families will see a decrease in their tax rate beginning next year, resulting in a New York State income-tax reduction of approximately \$690 million. Under the legislation pushed by Cusick, middle-class residents will see their tax rate drop from 6.85% to 6.45%. As a consequence of this, tax rates for New Yorkers will be at their lowest in 58 years.

Assemblyman Cusick is also the author of a bill which would control the ever-rising property tax by limiting the amount by which the City of New York may increase property taxes each year (A.4741). Under this legislation, the City would not be able to raise the property tax levy by more than 2%, or the rate of inflation (whichever is less). This measure will limit the City from placing unfair burdens on property owners with outrageous increases while aiding the property owner with a clearer sense of how to budget for their expenses.

WATER BOARD & WATER BILL FEE INCREASES

A bill introduced in Albany by Assemblyman Cusick would change the membership of the water board to include all five borough presidents (A.10291). This proposed change would ensure that all New York City boroughs have input with regard to fee increases, and thus could effectively counter the seemingly impetuous raise in rates.

"After attending a public hearing in April, it became clear that the make-up of the Water Board is stacked by city representatives who essentially control the vote on rate hikes," said Cusick. "My bill will give fair representation on any future water rate increase by realigning the board to include an elected official from each borough. At least the borough presidents are accountable to the voters at election time." He added that "having a say on New York City water rates gives Staten Island residents and business owners a chance to hinder these outrageous yearly hikes."



MIKE CUSICK: Bipartisan Approach. Real Results.



PORT AUTHORITY & TOLLS

Toll Break Resolution

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey commissioners unanimously approved a plan crafted by Assemblyman Cusick and Senator Lanza that will give E-ZPass holders a reduced toll on their third trip over New Jersey spans (Gothels, Bayonne and Outerbridge Crossings) in a 30-day period. Once the third trip is taken, the first two trips paid at a peak rate of \$9.50 will be rolled back to \$4.75. The reduction is set to take effect shortly and will replace the current 10-trip Staten Island Bridges plan.

Islanders who want to participate in the new three-trip plan will have to sign up for it when it takes effect, by going to the Port Authority website (www.panynj.gov) or by visiting the New York E-ZPass Customer Service Center in Travis,

or by calling 1-800-333-8655. Those enrolled in the 10-trip plan will be automatically absorbed into the three-trip plan.

“For the past few months, Senator Lanza and I have been in steadfast negotiations with the Governor to bring toll relief to Staten Islanders. I am pleased we were able to get everyone on board and roll back the tolls to the lowest peak rate in ten years,” said Cusick.

During the course of the most recent legislative session, Assemblyman Cusick introduced a bill to deter arbitrary raises in tolls brought upon by the Port Authority. The bill, A.348, would compel the Port Authority to examine how the proposed toll increase would adversely affect the mobility of Staten Island residents.



FRESH KILLS LANDFILL

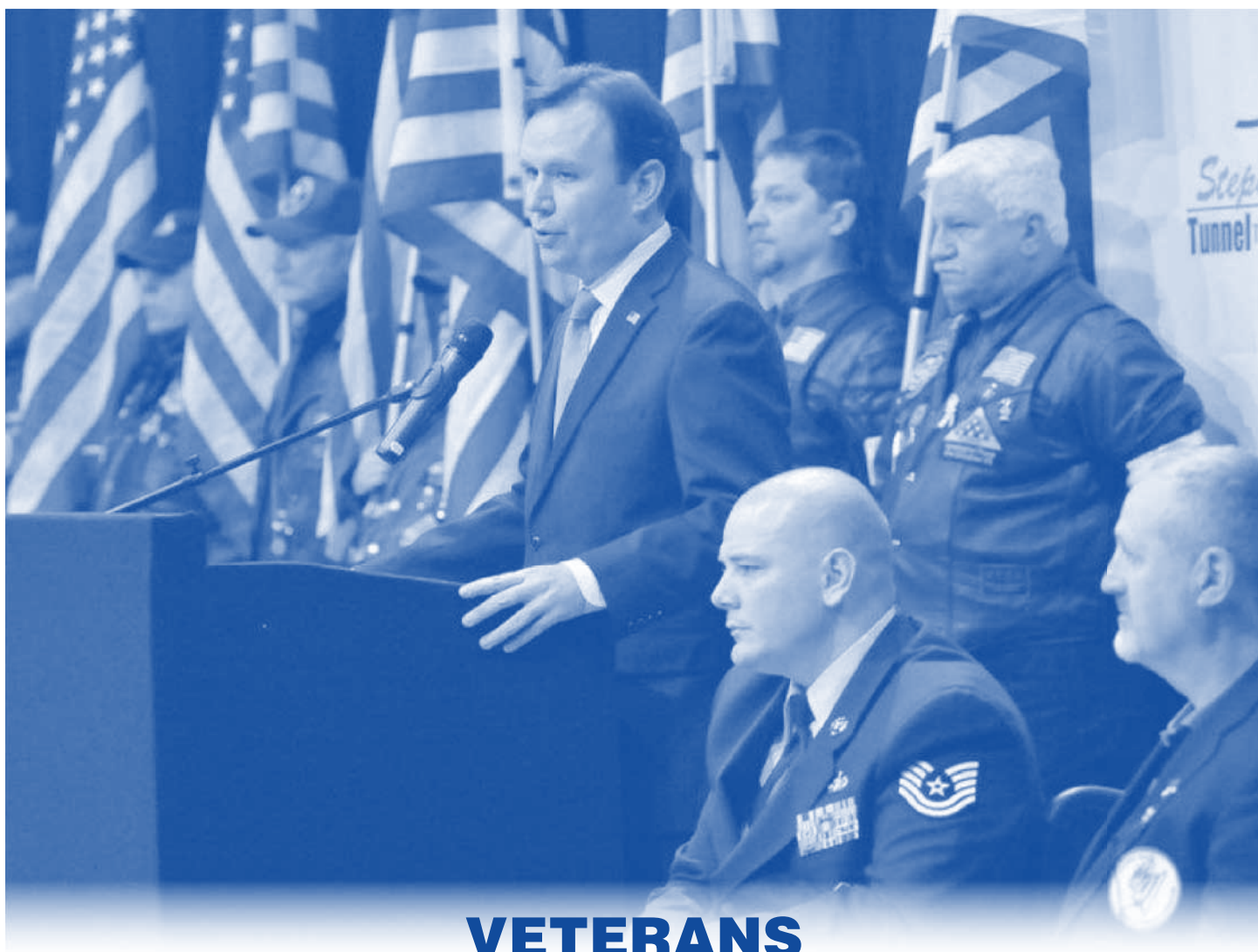
A strong opponent of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s Waste-to-Energy Plan, Assemblyman Cusick voiced his concerns in a letter to the mayor, reminding Bloomberg that a 1996 state law, which he helped craft, “permanently closed the Fresh Kills landfill, effective Jan. 1, 2002.”

“That law,” said Cusick, “did not just halt landfill operations at Fresh Kills, it closed the site to all garbage forever.”

Cusick noted that state statute says Fresh Kills “shall not accept solid waste for disposal beyond 2001,” and that “disposal encompasses the burning of such waste as fuel for the purpose of thermal destruction of waste and...the purpose of recovering reusable energy.”

“The prohibition of solid waste disposal at Fresh Kills eliminates the lawful establishment of a waste-to-energy facility there and the Bloomberg administration should follow the spirit and intent of the 1996 law, which closed the environmental nightmare of Fresh Kills landfill,” said Cusick.

Shortly after receiving Cusick’s letter, the Mayor put a stop to consideration of any project, including, but not limited to, waste-to-energy facilities that involve the transporting of garbage in any form at the former Fresh Kills Landfill.



VETERANS

Assemblyman Cusick is an avid supporter of the United States military and military veterans, and considers it a privilege to represent Staten Island veterans in Albany. A member of the Assembly Veterans' Affairs Committee since 2003, Cusick has shown immense dedication to the well-being of veterans and their families. He has introduced an array of legislation which benefits veterans, many of which have become law throughout his tenure. In recent legislative sessions, he has endeavored on behalf of veterans in the following ways:

Military Funeral Protests

Assemblyman Cusick is the author of two bills designed to further protect against protests at military funerals.

The first bill requires the development and implementation of a permit process for demonstrations at the funerals of veterans - an outgrowth of a U.S. Supreme Court freedom of speech ruling that also said states have a compelling interest to protect mourners.

The second amends the penal law by extending the buffer zone from 100-feet to 300-feet around a funeral service, also mentioned in the Supreme Court ruling regarding protests by the Westboro Baptist Church.

Military funerals should not be used to advance hateful ideology. These new laws establish safeguards and aim to strike the appropriate balance between the liberties guaranteed in the first amendment, and the dignity of the men and women who fight to protect it every day.

Purchasing Military Flags

Assemblyman Cusick authored legislation, A.835, passed by both houses, which exempts from the imposition of sales tax the purchase of military service flags, prisoner of war flags and blue star banners. "At this time in our country, with so many men and women serving on active duty, the purchase of these flags should not be subjected to sales tax. Those who serve, their family members and friends, and any United States resident should be able to proudly display these flags without having to pay tax on top of the purchase price," said Cusick.

Discount Program for Veterans

Assemblyman Cusick recently initiated a discount program for veterans of the United States military who live in Staten Island. This discount program gives veterans reductions on goods and services at participating businesses. "The sacrifices made by our veterans cannot be quantified, nor fully repaid," said Cusick. "Still, I feel there is more we can do on a local level to show our gratitude. This program is a great start."

Staten Island veterans who are interested in the program are asked to sign up at Assemblyman Cusick's office at 1911 Richmond Ave. Please bring your discharge papers (DD214) to receive the Staten Island VETS discount card. This card gives access to discounts at local businesses who have signed up for the program. Veterans will receive a listing of participating businesses that offer discounts at their establishments. Assemblyman Cusick's office provides the local VFW, American Legion, and public libraries with updated lists as new businesses join the program throughout the year. For more information, call Assemblyman Cusick's office at 718-370-1384.