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Assemblyman **Michael Cusick** **Community Update**



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Dear Friend:

As your representative in Albany, I continue to work hard to make our community a fantastic place to live, work, and raise a family. Each day, my staff and I connect folks in need of services with local and state programs and work to solve other problems that challenge the people I represent.

This newsletter provides you with the most recent issues we have been discussing and implementing in Albany, along with some of this session's accomplishments. It also contains information on events that are happening in our community. Your thoughts on these important issues are valuable to me and I welcome any input you may have. Please feel free to contact my district office should you have any questions or concerns.

I am proud to continue to represent you in the New York State Assembly and I will continue to fight hard for the quality of life issues that are important to all Staten Islanders.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick
Member of Assembly
District 63

TOLL RELIEF



Verrazano-Narrows Bridge

This year's state budget enacted on April 1, 2014 included long-awaited toll relief for Staten Island residents and commercial drivers with New York State E-ZPass tags. Senator Lanza and Assemblyman Cusick negotiated the deal with the Governor's office and respective leaders in each house to make this discount happen. Staten Island E-ZPass drivers now pay \$5.50 per trip over the Verrazano. Drivers of commercial vehicles who use the New York State E-ZPass are now eligible for a toll break as well. A 20 percent discount will be given once they make more than 10 trips over the bridge per month. The bipartisan effort was a result of hard work by the Senator and Assemblyman Cusick, but their tireless hard work paid off.

For more information: (SIR) E-ZPass/MTA Discount: Call 800-333-8655 or visit <https://www.ezpassny.com/en/about/plans.shtml>.

REMINDER TO SIGN UP FOR THESE DISCOUNTS

Goethals, Bayonne, Outerbridge Crossings

A toll relief plan negotiated last year by the Senator and Assemblyman Cusick gives E-ZPass holders a reduced toll on their third trip over New Jersey spans in a 30-day period. Once the third trip is taken, the first two trips paid at a peak rate of \$10.25 are rolled back to \$5.50. To sign up for the three-trip plan, call the Port Authority at 1-800-333-8655, or visit www.panynj.gov. You can also go to the New York E-ZPass Customer Service Center at 1150 South Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314. Those enrolled in the 10-trip plan will be automatically absorbed into the three-trip plan.

MTA MetroCard Discount

Customers who are 65 years of age or older or have a qualifying disability are eligible for this discount. The base subway or local bus fare is \$2.50. With a Reduced-Fare MetroCard discount, customers will pay half the base fare, \$1.25 or less. For more information, call 311, or visit any MetroCard Customer Service Center. Applications for the Staten Island Resident discount sticker can be accessed at web.mta.info/nyct/fare/rfindex.htm. Applications for the Staten Island Resident discount sticker can be accessed at web.mta.info/nyct/fare/rfindex.htm.

UNCLAIMED MONEY

The New York State Office of the Comptroller may have money that belongs to you! There is over \$12 billion dollars of unclaimed money from bank accounts, stocks and bonds, utility deposits, income tax refunds, and inheritances to name a few. To see if New York State has money that belongs to you, go to the Comptroller's website and click on Unclaimed Funds. All you have to do is enter your name and your city.

www.osc.state.ny.us

DISCOUNT PROGRAM FOR VETERANS



Assemblyman Cusick partnered with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to initiate a discount program for veterans of the United States military who live in Staten Island. To join this program and receive reductions on goods and services at participating businesses, sign up at Assemblyman Cusick's office (1911 Richmond Ave., 718-370-1384). Bring your discharge papers (DD-214) to receive the Staten Island VETS card. You will be given a listing of participating businesses that offer discounts at their establishments. The application for businesses is available at the Chamber's website; www.sichamber.com/about/VETS_Program.



NEW YORK JOBS FOR VETERANS

To help veterans find meaningful employment upon completion of their tour of duty, we enacted a crucial piece of legislation in the State Assembly this year that will create a preference in state contracts for service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses. Veterans who are currently seeking employment or training can visit the state Department of Labor's Career Services for Veterans page at <http://www.veterans.ny.gov/content/new-york-state-department-labor-employment-services>.

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS

Qualified veterans living in a private house, condominium, or cooperative apartment who served during specific periods of conflict in the armed forces during one of the following: Persian Gulf Conflict (beginning Aug. 2, 1990), Vietnam War (Feb. 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975), Korean War (June 27, 1950 to Jan. 31, 1955), World War II (Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946) are eligible for a property tax exemption.



Other owners who are eligible: wife or husband of a qualified veteran, surviving spouse of a qualified veteran (who has not remarried), and Gold Star parents. For more information and to register visit the New York State Tax Department's website at <http://www.tax.ny.gov> or by calling 518-457-2036.

ALBANY 2014 SESSION HIGHLIGHTS Fighting Every Day for Staten Island Families

Tax Relief

- \$85 million in tax credits for homeowners, condominium, and co-op owners and renters by adding a "circuit breaker" plan for those with household incomes under \$200,000.
- Accelerating the phase-out of the 18-a utility surcharge imposed on energy bills by lowering the rates by \$200 million annually for both residential and commercial customers and \$600 million over the next three years.
- Reformed the New York State estate tax by raising the income threshold from \$1 million to \$5.2 million over the next four years saving taxpayers \$355 million when fully phased-in.
- Expanded the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE).
- Tax incentives for manufacturers offering a credit equal to 20 percent of their property tax cost.

Universal Pre-Kindergarten

- \$300 million per year for two years for Universal Pre-K to ensure every child has an opportunity to succeed with a sound education.

Common Core

- Made changes to fix the flawed implementation of Common Core by banning standardized tests for students in grades K-2; prohibiting Common Core test scores from solely or primarily determining grade promotion; and delayed the use of test results from becoming part of the permanent record for students in grades 3-8.

- Directed the State Education Department to provide necessary tools, resources, and materials to assist teachers in developing new standards.

Legislation introduced by Assemblyman Cusick Awaits Approval by Governor

- **A.9403/S.7000** would establish a NYS Physical Fitness and Activity Campaign to encourage folks to engage in activities that will improve their health and enhance their quality of life. Supported by the American Heart Association, the New York Academy of Medicine, the Alliance of NYS YMCA's and Nourishing Science.
- **A.6350-B/S.4719-B** would require counties and cities with a population of one million or more to adopt a comprehensive emergency management plan to include a provision for the deployment of home health care and hospice personnel during local emergencies. Supported by the Home Health Care Association of NYS, the Continuing Care Leadership Coalition, and various home health care agencies.
- **A.8862/S.6656** which would extend the authorization of residential property owners in high risk brush fire areas of Staten Island to cut and remove invasive reeds. These reeds, known as phragmites, are highly combustible plants and have caused numerous brush fires on Staten Island.



Education Investment Incentives Act

- **A.1826-D** introduced by Assemblyman Cusick would provide incentives in the form of tax credits for donations to public education entities, local education funds, school improvement organizations, and educational scholarship organizations, as well as tax credits for certain expenses incurred by qualified educators who purchase materials and supplies for classroom use. This legislation gained momentum this session, so the push will continue to pass it in the near future.

Assemblyman Cusick and Cardinal Dolan push passage of Education Investment Incentives Act.

CRITICAL LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW TO COMBAT THE HEROIN, OPIOID AND PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE EPIDEMIC



Heroin abuse is a public health crisis in Staten Island and across the state. That is why I made sure we addressed this during the 2014 Legislative Session in Albany. With the first signs of prescription drug abuse becoming a problem in our community back in 2010, I drafted legislation to curb the abuse and began to work with physicians, pharmacists, and professionals in the State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. The result produced a law in 2012 that I authored with Senator Lanza known as I-STOP, which is the Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing Prescription Monitoring Program.

The next logical step was to continue this fight against abuse and provide for real treatment programs for addicted individuals. That is why we enacted more laws this year to include new programs and insurance reforms that improve treatment options for individuals suffering from heroin and opioid addiction. These measures strengthen penalties and put in place additional tools for law enforcement to crack down on the distribution of illegal drugs. There are also provisions to ensure the proper and safe use of naloxone and support for enhanced public awareness campaigns to prevent drug abuse.

The package consists of 11 bills. One of the bills, A.10164, is a bill I introduced which requires health insurance coverage for substance use disorder treatment services and creates a work group to study and make recommendations for its implementation. It was signed by the Governor (Chapter 41 of the Laws of 2014).

In addition, District Attorney Daniel Donovan along with Senator Lanza and myself have called upon the Commissioner of the State Health Department to create an intrastate drug database to crack down on “doctor and pharmacy shopping” as well as overprescribing for those who cross our state borders.

Getting a handle on this crisis will remain a top priority for me as we continue to curb the abuse of prescription controlled substance abuse as well as make sure these individuals have access to appropriate treatment.

PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release on July 7, 2014

Elected officials seek measures to curb interstate doctor and pharmacy shopping, as well as overprescribing

STATEN ISLAND, NY – Richmond County District Attorney Daniel M. Donovan, Jr., Assemblyman Michael Cusick, and Senator Andrew Lanza have renewed their call for the NYS Dept. of Health to create an interstate drug database to help crack down on overprescribing, ‘doctor shopping’ and ‘pharmacy shopping’ in New York State as it continues to deal with a growing drug crisis.

In a joint letter sent June 23 to State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard A. Zucker, the elected officials have asked the commissioner to enter into collective agreements with New York’s neighboring states—New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and Vermont—to monitor and share all controlled substance prescription activity.

Unfortunately, a letter on this issue sent six months ago on Jan. 27 to then Commissioner Dr. Nirav R. Shah, who resigned from the post in April, did not receive a reply.

The renewed call was spurred by an announcement three weeks ago by the governors of five New England states that they will explore and develop a new cross-border Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) as a way to combat increased opioid abuse and overdoses.

DA Donovan, Assemblyman Cusick and Senator Lanza would like to see something similar implemented between New York and its surrounding states. The Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing (I-STOP) Act enacted in 2012 has been very successful in curbing overprescribing, ‘doctor shopping’ and ‘pharmacy shopping’ in New York. However, prescription pill abuse does not stop at the state line and Staten Island has three crossings into New Jersey.

“The I-STOP legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Cusick and Senator Lanza has proven to be a very effective measure. However, those who abuse and illegally deal prescription pills are aware of its limitations,” said Richmond Country District Attorney Daniel M. Donovan, Jr. “I strongly urge the State Department of Health to take the next step and partner with New York’s surrounding states to form a much-needed, multi-state prescription pill tracking database. Let’s work together to devise a comprehensive strategy to beat back the rising tide opioid addiction and associated crime.”

Assemblyman Michael Cusick said: “With the enactment of Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing (I-STOP) Act in 2012, which established a real-time database to track controlled substance prescriptions issued by every doctor in the state of New York, it only makes sense that we expand this resource beyond the borders of our state. Individuals who seek to abuse prescription drugs can still escape identification by I-STOP merely by crossing our porous borders into another state. From our own community of Staten Island, three out of four bridges off the island lead into New Jersey, allowing drug abusers to easily ‘doctor shop’ across state lines. Downstate residents can effortlessly escape into New Jersey or Connecticut to seek additional prescriptions, while upstate residents can cross the border into Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, or Vermont. It is time for the Department of Health to close this interstate loophole.”

Senator Andrew Lanza said: “We’ve taken strong action to combat opiate abuse in New York after signing into law a tool as important as I-STOP but now we must act together as one region to take on this challenge.”



THINGS TO DO IN AND AROUND THE 63RD ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Snug Harbor Cultural Center and Botanical Garden

1000 Richmond Terr.
(Richmond Terr./Tysen St.)
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-448-2500
Fax: 718-442-8534
www.snug-harbor.org

Staten Island Children's Museum

1000 Richmond Terr.
(Richmond Terr./Tysen St.)
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-273-2060
Fax: 718-273-2836
Hours:
Tue. – Sun., noon – 5 p.m. (school year);
10 a.m. – 5 p.m. (schools closed)
www.statenislandkids.org

Staten Island Museum

75 Stuyvesant Pl. (Stuyvesant Pl./Wall St.)
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-727-1135
Fax: 718-273-5683
Hours:
Sun. – Fri., noon – 5 p.m.;
Sat. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
www.statenislandmuseum.org

5050 Skatepark

354 Front St. (bet. Prospect & Water Sts.)
Staten Island, NY 10304
347-857-6007 • Fax: 718-831-8515
Hours: Mon. – Thurs., noon – 9 p.m.;
Fri. 11 a.m. – midnight; Sat. 10 a.m. –
midnight; Sun. 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
www.5050skatepark.com

Greenbelt

700 Rockland Ave at Brielle Ave.
Staten Island, NY 10314
718-667-2165 • www.sigreenbelt.org

Historic Richmondtown

441 Clarke Ave. (Clarke Ave./Arthur Kill Rd.)
Staten Island, NY 10306
718-351-1611
www.historicrichmondtown.org

Staten Island Arts

Culture Lounge
10 Ferry Terminal Dr.
Staten Island, NY 10301
718-447-3329
www.statenislandarts.org

Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art

338 Lighthouse Ave, Staten Island, NY 10306
(718) 987-3500
Wednesday-Sunday 1 p.m. - 5 p.m.
<http://www.tibetanmuseum.org/>

Willowbrook Park and Carousel for All Children

Entrance on Eton Pl, off of Richmond Ave
(718) 698-2186
Monday-Friday 9 a.m.- 5 p.m.
<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/willowbrookpark>

High Rock Park

200 Nevada Ave, Staten Island, NY 10314
(718) 667-2165
<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/highrockpark>

Clove Lake Park

1150 Clove Rd, Staten Island, NY 10301
(718) 390-8000
<http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/CloveLakesPark>

Site Tour & Activities at Fresh Kills Park

Victory Blvd., W. Shore Exwy., Richmond Ave. Bet. Sign Rd., Travis Ave. and Arthur Kill Rd.
Staten Island, New York, NY 10314
(212) 788-8277
<http://freshkillspark.org/tour-information>

Westerleigh Park

Willard Ave., Springfield Ave., Maine Ave., Neal Dow Ave.
Staten Island, New York, NY 10314
http://westerleighpark.com/?page_id=11



Assemblyman Michael Cusick

Community Update

Summer 2014

POUCH CAMP SAVED IN STATEN ISLAND GREENBELT

Several years ago, the Greater New York Councils of Boy Scouts of America warned, due to financial troubles, they might have to sell off portions or all of the 143-acre William H. Pouch Camp. The property would have been worth tens of millions of dollars as prime real estate to private developers. I worked with NYS DEC to secure a conservation easement, which was announced in November of 2012, so that the Boy Scouts and the public could continue to use a 44-acre portion of the camp, which can never be developed. This was Phase I in saving the entire camp. In order to save the 143-acre park, further negotiations with DEC continued. In December of 2013, the State announced the approval of Phase II and III for the conservation easement to preserve an additional 51-acres of open space from development. Approximately \$15 million was secured to keep that land from development. Phase III saved an additional 23.3 acres in 2014. I was committed to saving Pouch Camp from development, and it is now open park space for all Staten Islanders to enjoy.

