

# COMMUNITY NEWS

Summer 2014

from Assemblyman

## J. GARY PRETLOW

89<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

### INVESTING IN OUR CHILDREN—INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Our children deserve a quality education and investing in education is the key to unlocking our children's full potential. Schools are the foundation of knowledge for our whole society and sufficient funding of our schools to ensure academic excellence is a top priority.

The 2014-2015 budget continued its commitment to invest in our kids' education in addition to making much-needed reforms to Common Core. I have always fought for education aid increases and this year is no different. I am excited to share that the City of Mount Vernon will receive a total of \$78,739,768 in state aid, an increase of 8.31% from last year.

In addition, the future success of our children is dependent on how we prepare them for it today. All of us want higher standards for our children, and while the intent behind Common Core is laudable, there is no question that the rollout has been seriously flawed. The 2014-2015 budget incorporates recent legislation passed by the Assembly that helps fix the flawed implementation of Common Core. It protects students from unfair consequences based on test results and

ensures the security of sensitive student data. Some of the changes include: prohibiting Common Core test scores from solely or primarily determining grade promotion; delaying test results from becoming part of the permanent record for students in grades 3-8; and significantly limiting the amount of classroom time used for test preparation and assessment. As students continue to adjust to the Common Core, it's important to remember that teachers are also adjusting and learning how to effectively implement the curriculum and therefore, it's essential that they are not penalized if they are legitimately trying to provide a good education to the best of their abilities.

Every child in New York State and in particular, the City of Mount Vernon, deserves to benefit from a great education. With an increase in school aid, this year's state budget represents New York's largest investment in our children's future and with this important step toward meeting our children's needs, we're telling, and more importantly, showing them that they are our top priority.

### Spotlight on Reading

When school lets out for the summer, we encourage our kids to continue learning by picking up a book. Reading can be fun—books can immerse children in far-off worlds, new characters, and thrilling narrative. This year, I'm sponsoring a Summer Reading Challenge in coordination with the New York State Library, to inspire kids to read on a regular basis throughout summer break.

Here's how the challenge works: Mark a calendar for each day in August that your child reads with you, someone else, or alone. Once you have marked off 25 days or more, please contact my office and I will award your child with a New York State Excellence in Reading Certificate. Thank you and happy reading!



Meet and Greet with Baruch College—The City University of New York (CUNY) students.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES

Unfortunately, it has become nearly impossible for working families to find affordable and reliable child care. To help these families, the 2014-2015 state budget provides funding to increase access to quality, affordable child care. The provisions include \$34 million for more than 4,500 additional subsidized child care slots; disregarding the earned income of teenagers under 18 in the household for purpose of determining a family's child care subsidy eligibility; and requiring child care providers to post their most recent inspection report in a prominent place.

These additions and changes address New York's child care crisis so families don't have to break the bank to afford safe, nurturing care for their children.

The 2014-2015 budget was also passed with vital tax relief for hardworking, middle-class fami-

lies. This year's budget provides significant tax relief for homeowners across the state by offering a two-year property tax credit in the form of a direct check, provided that a local government and school district stay within the 2 percent property tax cap. To benefit for a second year, schools and localities would have to propose a detailed cost-cutting plan. This measure will not only help families save money but will also incentivize efficiency, saving taxpayers over \$1.5 billion over the next 3 years.

In a time where many are already struggling to get by, property taxes shouldn't be pricing families out of their homes. This essential relief will help lower the property tax burden on Mount Vernon families and help make our community more affordable.

## WOMEN'S ISSUES

It's been over a year since the governor sent the Legislature his measure to protect women's rights. Since then, **the Assembly has passed the full 10-point Women's Equality Act not once, but twice**, while the state Senate has failed to even bring this omnibus legislation up for a vote.

**The Women's Equality Act contains key protections for women**, including pay equity, safeguarding reproductive rights, combating sexual harassment, strengthening human-trafficking laws, and helping domestic violence victims. These issues are all important priorities for the Assembly Majority and I will continue urging the state Senate to pass the full Women's Equality act. **New York women deserve nothing less.**

While we keep up the fight for women's rights, it's also important to note progress that's been made. This year, the state **budget expanded child care eligibility** and increased the number of slots available. We've also made a commitment to make full-day Universal Pre-Kindergarten a reality.

In an increasingly technological world, it's vital to provide parents with the tools to keep their children's information safe. **A new "Parents' Bill of Rights" has been created to give parents or guardians control of what student data schools can share.** I also fought to protect our kids from identity theft by allowing parents or guardians to freeze the credit records of their children, even when no file yet exists, in order to stop child identity theft before it occurs. This measure has passed the Legislature and will soon be sent to the governor for final approval.



*Imani Cultural Academy's Annual "Look Who's Cooking" Fundraiser.*

## QUALITY HEALTH CARE

Investing in vital health care programs is of the utmost importance and you shouldn't have to jump through hoops to receive adequate health care. One of my top priorities is to make certain each and every New Yorker has the care they need and deserve. The final budget agreement continues to ensure proper health care is available for most vulnerable populations. The final budget rejected the governor's recommendation to eliminate allowing spousal refusal, restoring \$10 million. The practice of spousal refusal protects healthy spouses from being required to spend their life savings to care for ill spouses in need of long-term care. We work a lifetime to be able to relax, enjoy and have a sense of stability upon retirement. No one should have to lose everything in order to afford care for an ill spouse. We need to show the elderly the respect they deserve by preserving spousal refusal.

Additionally, the budget provides \$4.1 million for the expansion of eligibility for the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program by increasing the income limit for the deductible plan from \$35,000 to \$75,000 for those who are single and \$50,000 to \$100,000 for those who are married. If you are in need of an application or know anyone who can benefit from this program, please give my office a call and we will mail an application to you.



## NEW YORK STATE HEALTH CARE PROXY LAW

Whether to accept or reject medical care in an end of life situation is a very personal decision governed by one's own beliefs. Should a serious accident or illness leave you unable to communicate those wishes, it is necessary to take steps to ensure that they are honored. In New York State, that means having a living will or health care proxy. A health care proxy and living will are similar in that they both clarify what to do only when you lack the capacity to make your own medical decisions. A health care proxy empowers a loved one to make medical decisions for you, whereas a living will is specific written instructions describing your medical wishes in detail-usually crafted by and left with your attorney. You can use these documents in tandem so your health care agent has greater guidance for what you would want in specific medical situations.

If you prefer a loved one to make decisions for you, the New York State Health Care Proxy Law al-

lows you to appoint a competent adult as your health care agent. It is important to note that you must specifically document your wishes about life-sustaining artificial nutrition and hydration or your health care agent will not be able to make these decisions for you. A health care proxy can be filled out easily without a lawyer, and becomes legally binding after you and two witnesses sign it.

Once you complete a health care proxy, hospitals, doctors and other health care providers must follow your agent's decisions as if they were your own. The health care proxy will not only help ensure your wishes will be carried out, but also eliminates any conflict or confusion among your loved ones.

If at any time you change your mind about your end of life wishes, it is important to amend your health care proxy or living will.

If you would like to obtain a health care proxy, please contact my office and we will mail one to you.



*The City of Mount Vernon's Girl Scouts Troops #1632 and #1646 expressing their interests in civic affairs.*

## EARLY VOTING

Voting is a fundamental part of what it means to be an American citizen. Unfortunately, voter participation in November 2012 was amongst the lowest in the nation with only 59 percent of New York voters casting a ballot. I am pleased to announce that I helped pass legislation to allow early voting in New York which is currently allowed in 32 other states and the District of Columbia. It is so important that each of us make our voices heard and this legislation will make it easier for people to participate in the electoral process.

## SAFETY ON OUR STREETS

Red light running accidents are often the worst type of accident. They often involve speed and right-angle impacts, which can lead to the most severe injuries. Locally, traffic accidents at intersections are a major public safety issue in the City of Mount Vernon. At the request of the City of Mount Vernon, I sponsored a bill in the New York State Assembly authorizing the City to adopt a local law to implement a program to install photo violation-monitoring devices at up to twenty intersections in order to provide a significant improvement in traffic safety within the City.

This bill, which has passed both the Assembly and the Senate, is awaiting the Governor's signature.

**CLIP AND RETURN**



*Your questions or comments are important to me. If you have any concerns or issues you would like to discuss with me, please indicate and return to:*

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow, 89<sup>th</sup> District**  
6 Gramatan Avenue, Suite 201, Mt. Vernon, New York 10550

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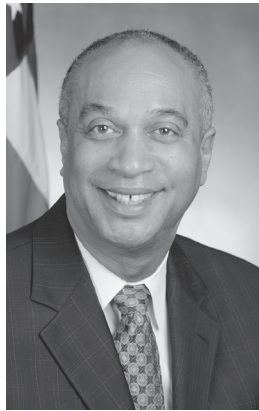
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NEWS**

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**J. Gary  
PRETLOW**

**SUMMER 2014**

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow**



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