

# Assemblyman **TOM ABINANTI**

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Assemblyman Abinanti and other Assemblymembers supporting increased State education funding.

## 2014-15 BUDGET

The Legislature passed the State's fourth consecutive on time budget - the first time in over forty years. The \$142.8 billion budget holds spending growth below two percent for the fourth year in a row.

This year, the Assembly again improved the proposed Executive Budget to enhance funding critical to Westchester residents. The budget contained some good measures and some disappointments.

**EDUCATION** – The budget makes a record high investment in elementary and secondary education. It establishes a new statewide full-day universal pre-kindergarten program. It provides enough State funds to meet all of New York City's pre-k needs, but unfortunately, only enough to start the program elsewhere.

**TAXES** – The budget continues the lowest middle class income tax rate in over fifty years. However, it grants significant additional permanent tax breaks to wealthy individuals and businesses.

**PROPERTY TAX RELIEF** – To lower property taxes, the State needs to pay more of the cost of education. The Assembly proposal to increase aid to localities was not included in the final budget. The budget gives homeowners certain property tax reimbursements for two years if the local government or school district meets specified conditions.

The constitution empowers the Governor to shape the budget and restricts the Legislature's ability to change the Governor's proposals. The Assembly and Senate hold joint hearings on the Governor's proposed executive budget and then pass resolutions reflecting their priorities. After negotiations to reconcile these different priorities, both houses pass a final budget and the Governor can sign it, veto it or eliminate any item through a "line item" veto.

## COMMON CORE

Assemblyman Abinanti has been an outspoken critic of the unprofessional rollout of the "Common Core." Common Core standards designed to educate New York's children created confusion and anxiety. The Legislature responded:

**High Stakes Testing** – The Legislature prohibited: standardized tests for pre-k - grade 2, the use of standardized test scores to determine student placement and recording these scores on permanent records for students in grades 3 - 8.

**Data Sharing** – The Legislature instituted data privacy protections. It limited the use of third parties to collect or store student data, required deletion of previously stored data and allowed school districts to opt-out of data sharing programs.

**Teacher Evaluations** – To address concerns that teachers weren't given enough time or guidance to teach to the new standards, the Legislature postponed teacher reviews based on Common Core test scores until the 2015-2016 school year.

## ABINANTI PROPOSES "AVONTE'S LAW"

Assemblyman Abinanti proposed a New York version of "Avonte's Law" to establish a statewide network to facilitate locating missing vulnerable persons. The need for the initiative was highlighted by the recent tragedy where Avonte Oquendo, who had autism, wandered away from his school and was never found alive. Abinanti based his legislation on a successful Westchester County program that fits vulnerable people with a special bracelet, enabling police to locate them using special equipment.

# 2014 LEGISLATION

## EDUCATION

*Assemblyman Abinanti stands up for our suburban schools. Everyone deserves the opportunity for a good education – the first step to a better future. We need to replace the property tax as a primary source of education funding.*



Assemblyman Abinanti with two Westchester students on League of Women Voters Albany Day.

### EDUCATION AID

The budget makes a record \$22.3 billion investment in public education, increasing school aid by \$1.15 billion or 5.4% - \$551 million more than the Governor proposed. This includes an additional \$250 million Foundation Aid and an additional \$600 million restoration of the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA).

Assemblyman Abinanti's advocacy insured that his school districts benefited from additional Foundation Aid and restoration of the GEA.

### MORE AFFORDABLE HIGHER EDUCATION

The budget increases Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) awards and establishes a new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) scholarship program. The Assembly secured \$25.7 million for the 2014-15 academic year - the first TAP increase in 14 years. The budget also increases aid to community colleges.

### HIGHER EDUCATION LOAN RELIEF

Assemblyman Abinanti has proposed and will pursue in the next legislative session a New York low-interest loan program for students and graduates (without regard to birthplace or citizenship) to pay for higher education or refinance existing high-rate loans. These low-rate loans would be reduced or forgiven if the graduate meets certain conditions, such as working in underserved New York communities.

### UNIVERSAL PRE-K

The budget established a statewide universal pre-kindergarten program, with a \$340 million appropriation – \$40 million for pre-k programs outside of New York City. The Assembly proposal to authorize New York City to fund its own program through higher taxes on its wealthiest residents – leaving more money for pre-k elsewhere – was not included in the final budget.

### ABINANTI: KING SHOULD RESIGN

Assemblyman Abinanti called for the resignation of Education Commissioner John King due to his failure to professionally address the concerns of parents, educators, administrators and elected officials who highlighted serious deficiencies in State Education Department policies.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION OVERSIGHT

The Legislature passed and the Governor signed a law to increase oversight and improve the quality of preschool special education. Previous infrequent audits revealed fraud and abuse.

### SPECIAL ACT SCHOOLS

After years of advocating and with the Assembly's continued pressure, the State has granted special act schools a rate increase.



Assemblyman Abinanti with Mt. Carmel (Elmsford) teachers and students visiting the Capitol.



# TIVE SESSION

## PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

*Assemblyman Abinanti is a strong advocate for people with special needs. People with different abilities are an underappreciated resource – given a chance, they can help better our community.*

### A NEW NEW YORK FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

Assemblyman Abinanti is urging the State reaffirm its commitment to people with special needs: education (sufficient state funding for special education); health care (restore early intervention, require broader insurance company reimbursements); housing and daily living assistance (increased number of and adequate funding for facilities, better staff training); jobs (job training and incentives for hiring); and fair and dignified treatment (appropriate first responder training).

### BUDGET

The budget provides \$4.43 billion to the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), \$8.3 million more than the Governor proposed, but decreasing State spending by \$210 million or 4.7%.

The budget provides \$3.65 billion to the Office of Mental Health (OMH), \$3.4 million more than the Governor proposed, increasing State spending by \$200 million.

The budget increases the minimum amount of funding that must be reinvested for new community services to \$110,000 for every OMH inpatient bed that is eliminated through the closing of large facilities.

### HELPING PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

*Administrative changes have made access to important programs difficult. So, the Assembly acted.*

The Early Intervention program provides needed therapy to infants and toddlers identified with significant physical and developmental disabilities. The Assembly passed legislation to improve the process for paying therapists who provide these services, which is pending in the Senate.

The Assembly and Senate passed legislation intended to set new guidelines to ensure OPWDD timely and efficiently allocates services. The bill awaits the Governor's action.

### WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES TAX CREDIT

To encourage hiring people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the budget includes incentives for employers – tax credits of up to \$5,000 for a full-time and \$2,500 for a part-time worker.



Assemblyman Abinanti with members of the Disability Advocacy Program.

### DISABLED VETERANS BUSINESSES

The Legislature passed and the Governor signed a new law to ensure that service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses are allocated 6% of State contracts. The law creates a Division of Service-Disabled Veterans' Business Development to coordinate the program.

### ABINANTI LEGISLATION

*The Assembly passed Assemblyman Abinanti's legislation to:*

- **Create a Bill of Rights for family members and guardians of people with developmental disabilities.** The Bill of Rights will ensure that family members and guardians have unimpeded access to residential and day facilities and their records to insure that the family member is safe and properly cared for. The bill is pending in the Senate.
- **Study and report on the cost to the State for the early diagnosis, long-term treatment and residential care of people with autism spectrum disorder.** The legislation is designed to assess the resources necessary to properly assist the increasing number of New York State children diagnosed with autism – recently estimated to be 1 in 68 children nationwide. The bill is pending in the Senate.



Assemblyman Abinanti was honored by Heartsong for his efforts on behalf of people with special needs.

# 2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

## LOCAL

### ABINANTI LEGISLATION TO GIVE GREENBURGH FAIR STATE AID

The Assembly passed Assemblyman Abinanti's legislation to allow the State Education Department to utilize a special equalization rate to calculate Greenburgh School District's State aid and rectify a long existing inequity in their State aid. The bill is pending in the Senate.



Assemblyman Abinanti with Greenburgh Supervisor Feiner and distinguished community members at the Greenburgh Library.

### ABINANTI LEGISLATION TO PERMIT LOCAL HOTEL TAX

The Assembly passed Assemblyman Abinanti's legislation to permit Greenburgh and seven villages (Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Elmsford, Hastings, Irvington, Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow) to impose a local hotel occupancy tax. The bill requires that one-sixth of the taxes collected be dedicated to promote economic development and tourism. The bill is currently pending in the Senate.

### ABINANTI ABBOTT SCHOOL LEGISLATION

The Abbott School ceased operating in June 2011. The Legislature passed Assemblyman Abinanti's legislation to dissolve the school district, set up closure procedures and transfer custody of all records to BOCES. The bill awaits the Governor's action.



Assemblyman Abinanti with representatives of Greenburgh and Mount Pleasant Arts organizations.



Assemblyman  
**TOM  
ABINANTI**  
*Reports to the People*

FALL 2014

*Dear Neighbor,*

*This is my third report to you since our 2014 legislative session. In my first two newsletters, I discussed some of my efforts to preserve our environment, make government function better, strengthen New York's transportation system and infrastructure, protect community health and safety and help our workers and families.*

*In this newsletter, I will highlight my efforts to (1) strengthen the education system for all; (2) make changes to the flawed implementation of Common Core; and (3) improve the lives of people with special needs. In these areas, we made some good progress. I look forward to addressing the challenges that remain in the next legislative session.*

*In the meantime, I continue to work here in Westchester for our community. If I may be of any assistance to you, please don't hesitate to contact my office.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Thomas J. Abinanti'.