



News from Assemblywoman

FALL 2015

Sandy Galef

Like me on Facebook

2 Church Street, Ossining, NY 10562 • Phone: 914-941-1111 • Fax: 914-941-9132
Email: galefs@assembly.state.ny.us • Website: www.assembly.state.ny.us

Dear Constituent,

I am pleased to report our accomplishments during the last legislative session from January to June. As you know, one of the biggest issues we tackled was education, from electing new Regents, to unprecedented increases in state aid for schools, to debating the issues surrounding testing and curriculum, to maintaining the spending cap and requiring efficiency plans.

Also, for the fifth year in a row, we passed an on-time state budget by April 1st, including a record \$1.6 billion increase in education aid.

We voted for historic protections for women which further guard them from sexual harassment in the workplace and from discrimination based on pregnancy. We also put in place gender pay equity, strong protections for rape victims on college campuses, stronger penalties for human traffickers, and other protections for women.

We increased property tax relief from the state so that benefits to homeowners and renters go up steadily through 2019. This includes requirements for local governments and school districts to have state approved efficiency plans in place and stay under a spending cap.

Locally, I have been working hard to oppose the siting of Spectra's high pressure gas pipeline on Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant's property because I do not believe a proper peer-reviewed independent analysis of the risks associated with this location has been completed.

On this page, I invite you to an upcoming pro and con panel discussion about the Death with Dignity legislation that some other states have passed. See more from me about this event on page 2 of this newsletter. Also, I have included the results from my last questionnaire so you can see what respondents think about a variety of issues being discussed in the state legislature.

I look forward to seeing you out at local events around my district. Please feel free to stop by my office or attend my meetings to say "hi" or share your opinions with me.

Sincerely,



Judith Johnson, the newly appointed Regent for the 9th Judicial District, joined me on my television show, "Speak Out" to bring everyone up to date on the Common Core and the implications it has for education in New York State. If you missed the show and would like a copy of a DVD, please contact my district office.

Assemblywoman Sandy Galef invites you to attend

Choosing Your Last Day: DEATH WITH DIGNITY FORUM

A Pro & Con Discussion to Consider New York State's Approach to Physician-Assisted Suicide

Wednesday, October 14th

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Cortlandt Town Hall

1 Heady Street

Cortlandt Manor, NY 10567

Panelists Include:

Dr. Ira Bedzow

Director, Biomedical Ethics & Humanities
New York Medical College

Corinne Carey

New York Campaign Director, Compassion & Choices

Bruce Darling

CEO, Disability Rights, Not Dead Yet

Dr. Mildred Solomon

President & CEO, The Hastings Center

I encourage you to bring your friends, family, neighbors and anyone else you think would be interested in this complicated issue that affects all of us.

Early Co-Sponsors:

Westchester Independent Living Center
Hudson Valley Gateway Chamber
Buchanan Seniors



I was honored to have Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul speak to my constituents at my annual Senior Forum in July.

Why Debate Physician Assisted Suicide?

Physician-Assisted Suicide has been on the national stage for 20 years. As New York State moves to consider legislation that has been titled “Death with Dignity,” it is important to consider the history of this issue and understand the context in which we are discussing it at the state level.

Oregon was the first state in the country to introduce and enact “Death with Dignity” legislation in 1997. Since then, Washington and Vermont have also enacted Death with Dignity bills, while Montana and New Mexico have legalized Physician-Assisted Suicide through court decisions.

Many have voiced their opinions on this controversial issue, spurring the need for my public forum. By hosting a pro and con discussion on this topic, I hope that we are able to dig deep into the issue and come away enriched and more knowledgeable.

Advocates have long argued that those with terminal diagnoses and in considerable pain should have the right to end their lives, the argument being that patients have no alternative to their current situation as they continue to deteriorate in their condition. Death with Dignity, some argue, is a last resort once all other options have failed, which allows people in such conditions to choose death on their own terms. Five states allow patients, with the assistance of their physician, to do just that.

Those opposed, however, see the issue differently. Many see a dramatic shift in the role of a physician away from that of a healer to that of a destroyer of life. Physicians, they argue, are to preserve life at all costs. Additionally, many have concerns about other implications of the laws. Those in the disability community fear such legislation would establish incentives to rid society of those deemed to be a “burden.” Disability advocates argue that financial considerations could end up superseding health and wellness considerations. Many religious communities believe that willingly aiding in the death of a person, no matter how ill, is murder.

Both sides, however, want to improve the lives of those suffering greatly, prompting such fierce discussion of the issue across the country. Many in favor of physician assisted death describe the Oregon law as working appropriately, citing that it has led to fewer than 1,000 deaths in the more than 15 years of being legal. Opponents point to The Netherlands, where a different end of life law exists, that allows for direct euthanization of patients by doctors, as proof of the possible extremes, with those who no longer want to be a burden simply ending their lives. While that is not permitted in any state in the U.S., it must be considered as a valid concern.

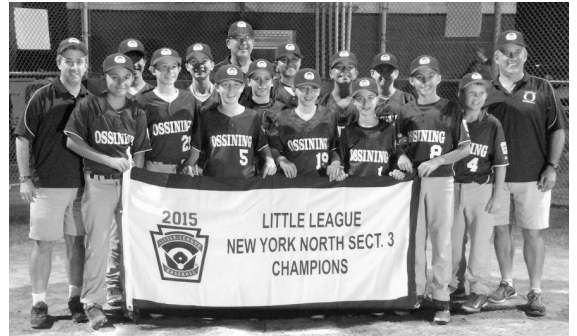
As you can see, this is indeed a complicated topic. I hope you will agree that the panel discussion I have organized at 7 p.m. on October 14th at Cortlandt Town Hall in which you are invited to participate should be a very engaging evening. Please join me as we attempt to dive into this issue.



During session I was “shadowed” by Ijangmarie Abam-DePass, of Croton, who was chosen by the League of Women Voters of the Rivertowns to attend the Students Inside Albany program hosted by the League’s Education Foundation. The program is designed to increase student awareness of their responsibility in representative government and provide tools necessary for meeting that responsibility. Ijangmarie has since been interning in my office.



In July, I met first grader Princess at the Ossining Public Library where I recognized her with a certificate of merit for having read 1,000 books, achieving the Ossining School District’s 1,000 Books Project goal.



I was so proud of the Ossining Little League 12-11 year old team, including both of my grandsons, who advanced to the New York State finals in July. Following the team’s victories kept me busy for many hot summer nights.

Getting Married? Congratulations!

Who doesn’t love a wedding? I do. They are celebratory milestones, occasions of love, hope and community. Weddings are also marriages, legal contracts that have momentous and lifelong impacts.

Contemporary couples are increasingly choosing marriage officiates who have been ordained as Universal Life Ministers. In many cases, they have asked a friend or relative to become ordained to perform the marriage. The practice is spreading to other online ordinations. The New York Times Sunday Style Section Wedding Announcements reveals that there are just as many online ordained ministers officiating weddings as those from traditional religious faiths.

There is a looming problem for those who are married by such ministers. These online ordained ministries are not legally recognized in New York State Domestic Relations Law. The marriage’s validity can be challenged when there are separation, divorce, alimony and child custody hearings. There have been court cases focused on such legal questions, and case law has not settled the matter.

I am frequently contacted by people who want to officiate as Universal Life Ministers or those who are choosing to have their marriages solemnized by an online ordained minister. They want to make sure that

the marriage is legal. I advise them to have their marriages solemnized by those listed in the New York State Domestic Relations Law.

I believe that all of us should have the right to have our marriages solemnized by someone of our choosing. One bill (A5223) I introduced would allow people to officiate as a ‘justice for a day,’ modeled upon Massachusetts law. The second (A6957) expands the definition of marriage officer so that municipalities throughout the state can appoint a marriage officer to solemnize a marriage within the municipality’s county.

I will push my legislation in the 2016 Legislative Session. I will advocate for the right to be married by someone of one’s choosing, not by someone who is affiliated with a limited number of religious faiths.

I would be interested in hearing from you on this matter. You can email me your comments and questions: galefs@assembly.state.ny.us.

“Speak Out” and “Dear Sandy” TV Shows

I currently host two local television programs, *“Speak Out with Sandy Galef,”* and *“Dear Sandy,”* about local and state initiatives and programs, and where you can hear from some of your notable neighbors. These shows air on public access channels across my district. I hope you will tune in.

Cablevision

“Dear Sandy” on Fridays at 9:00 p.m.

“Speak Out” on Wednesdays at 8:00 or 8:30 p.m.
(8:00 until 9/30, 8:30 after 10/1/15)

Peekskill/Ossining Channel 15: Briarcliff, Ossining, Scarborough, Buchanan, Cortlandt, Croton, Garrison, Montrose, Peekskill, Philipstown South, Verplanck

Wappingers Falls Channel 21: Cold Spring, Philipstown North

Comcast

“Dear Sandy” on Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

“Speak Out” on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Channel 8: Carmel, Kent



Pictured above, some of my summer interns joined me as guests on my Dear Sandy TV Show. From left to right: top row: Charles Lin-Ossining, Gerardo Alvarez-Putnam Valley; bottom row: Sampson Oppedisano-Ossining, Barry Falk-Cortlandt, and Andrew Liebert-Briarcliff Manor.

Cablevision Upcoming Shows:

“Speak Out: Gary Brown Asst. Attorney General”

September 30, October 17, 14 and 21

“Speak Out: Changing Health Care”

October 28, November 4, 11, and 18

“Speak Out: Neighbors Link Builds Community”

November 25, December 2, 9 and 16

“Dear Sandy: Taconic Opera”

September 25 and October 2

“Dear Sandy: Interns 2015”

October 9, 16, 23 and 30

“Dear Sandy: HRHCare in Peekskill”

November 6, 13, 20 and 27

Comcast Upcoming Shows: *Specific shows air on Comcast on dates as above, but for only the first three of the four weeks.*

More Property Tax Cuts Coming to You from New York State

It may be confusing but the good news is that there are many property tax cuts coming your way. Here is a brief overview of what to expect in the next few years:

Fall 2015 – STAR (NYS School Tax Relief program) and Enhanced STAR programs which are already in place both lower your school property taxes. Participants must have incomes of \$500,000 or below to receive the Basic STAR benefit, or be 65 or older with an income of \$83,300 or below (in the qualifying year, which is 2013 for the 2015 taxable year) to be in Enhanced STAR.

The Property Tax Freeze Rebate Check will be in its second year. Homeowners who are eligible for the STAR property tax exemption will receive a check for municipal taxes (including county, town, village and special districts) if the applicable municipality has adopted a budget adhering to the property tax cap. To receive a tax freeze check for school taxes, the school district must have adopted a budget that adheres to the property tax cap, and have a Government Efficiency Plan in place determined to be compliant by the New York State Division of Budget. The tax freeze check will cover the increase in qualifying property taxes over the homeowner’s prior year tax bill. A homeowner’s Freeze Credit for each taxing jurisdiction will be calculated separately and combined in a single check.

Fall 2016 – STAR and Enhanced STAR continue.

Property Tax Freeze rebate checks will continue in the fall of 2016, but will only be available for municipal taxes. To qualify the municipality must adopt a budget that adheres to the property tax cap, and have a Government Efficiency Plan in place determined to be compliant by the New York State Division of Budget. The tax freeze check will cover the increase in qualifying taxes over the prior year tax bill.

For Enhanced STAR in 2016, the program has been further “enhanced” to include those who are 65 or older with a household income of \$84,550 or below (in the qualifying year –which is 2014 for the 2016 tax year).

Property Tax Relief Credit is a new program that begins with all residents receiving a check for \$130 who are registered in the STAR or Enhanced STAR program and reside in the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation District.

Fall 2017 to 2019 – STAR and Enhanced STAR continue.

The Property Tax Relief Credit program includes a schedule of payments to property taxpayers for the Year 2017 and then it continues to grow in financial assistance to property owners in the next three years.

The new rebates will be based on a household’s income and be available to families earning up to \$275,000. It is based on a sliding scale of benefits with homeowners earning less than \$75,000 receiving the highest payments from the state.

The entire program brings a total of \$3.1 billion in property tax relief to New Yorkers. This new tax relief program is based on a concept I have been proposing for many years called a “circuit breaker” to help taxpayers that have less financial ability to pay local property taxes.

If you are more confused after this explanation, do let me know. All these programs are adopted to help property taxpayers, as is the extension of the law to provide for another 4 years of the 2% property cap. Please call if you have questions.

January Questionnaire Results

I received 787 responses to the Constituent Questionnaire in my January Newsletter and I thank those of you who submitted these responses. I value your input, as it allows me to better address the pressing issues of today during the legislative process. Here are the percentage results for the responses:

Question	In Favor		Opposed	
1. Would you support requiring that a defensive driving course be taken every ten years (either on-line or in a classroom) to help ensure our roadways are as safe as possible for passengers and drivers alike?	62% (469)		38% (284)	
2. Do you believe that New York should join other states to protect our environment by imposing a ban on (a) polystyrene and/or (b) plastic bags, to be replaced by paper, recyclable material, or biodegradable products?	83% (611)	76% (496)	17% (129)	24% (154)
3. Do you believe we should institute an independent utility consumer advocate at the state level to represent customers and weigh in on rate and policy changes for utility companies?	78% (550)		22% (155)	
4. The proposed Education Tax Credit would give a boost to private and parochial schools by allowing tax exempt donations to these schools as well as to public schools. Do you think we should allow this, even if it would reduce the taxable income which supports public schools?	41% (292)		59% (425)	
5. In an effort to ensure a well-educated society that can keep up with the demands of the 21st century, do you believe that we should provide financial aid for those trying to get a college education (a) while in prison and/or (b) whose parents may have brought their children into our country illegally?	45% (336)	40% (269)	55% (405)	60% (408)
6. To begin to address voter engagement, should we allow 16 and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote with their county boards of elections so that when they turn 18, they will automatically be added to the voter rolls?	61% (455)		39% (296)	
7. Should we allow partial public financing of campaigns to help offset the influence of large PACS on campaigns and elections?	60% (422)		40% (287)	
8. Should we require that all town and village elections take place in November?	77% (567)		23% (167)	
9. Should we increase the minimum wage to \$10.50 an hour statewide, and \$11.50 in New York City, as proposed by Governor Cuomo?	76% (570)		24% (184)	
10. Do you believe students' standardized test scores should make up a significant part of a teacher's performance evaluation?	31% (218)		69% (494)	
11. Do you believe we should raise the number of charter schools allowed to operate in New York State?	46% (328)		54% (388)	



News from
Assemblywoman
**Sandy
Galef**

Choosing Your Last Day:
**DEATH WITH DIGNITY FORUM
& Help for Property Taxpayers**

FALL 2015



KENT TOWN MEETING

DESMOND FISH TOWN MEETING

I want to thank my constituents for attending my town meetings to discuss New York State issues. Between these meetings and your input on my questionnaire, plus your phone calls and emails, I always learn a lot from you. These photos were taken at the Kent and Desmond Fish Library Town Meetings I hosted earlier in the year.