



News from Assemblywoman

Summer 2016

Sandy Galef

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END OF SESSION UPDATE

Dear Constituent,

This past legislative session was a crucial year for ethics reform, which, as many of you know, is a top priority subject for me. On the heels of convictions for two of the most powerful men in state government, New Yorkers looked to their representatives in the Legislature to provide remedies against political corruption. We started off the year with some big plans from the Governor in his January State of the State address, while I worked hard trying to pass my own package of good government bills that tackled issues involving ethics, the balance of power and transparency. In early June, I hosted a press conference on the steps of New York City Hall with lawmakers from various levels of government and advocates calling for the need to end the pay-to-play culture that dominates our political landscape.

In the end, I am pleased to report that of the ethics proposals that managed to get through our session, two of them were measures that I had either originally introduced or currently sponsor through similar legislation.

PENSION FORFEITURE FOR CONVICTED PUBLIC OFFICERS

We passed new legislation that prohibits public officers—elected and appointed policy makers—who have been convicted of corruption relating to their public position from collecting pensions they earned while in office. For me, this issue goes back to 2012, when—after a raft of high-profile cases of political corruption—I introduced the first pension forfeiture bill in the Assembly. I wholeheartedly believe that you, as a taxpayer, should not have to fund the retirement of public officers who have violated public trust.

DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR POLITICAL CONSULTANTS

Political consultants who provide services for election campaigns will now, for the first time, have to register with the state and disclose the names of their clients. The intended goal of this legislation is to log into public record the relationship between consultant and client that may become muddy after that client is elected to public office, as it is not uncommon for a political consultant to turn to lobbying in the “off years” between elections. While this bill is a step in the right direction, I will continue my efforts to pass my other bills that would prohibit political consultants from lobbying former clients and using those close ties to influence policy decisions.

I was able to pass my legislation in the Assembly that closes a loophole in the law that requires public officers to file comprehensive financial disclosure statements. Under current law, elected officials and policy makers who do not expect to be in public office on May 15th of the following year are not required to file statements listing all financial relationships and interests for the preceding year, thus allowing some potential conflicts-of-interest to go undetected. I have great hope that we will get this measure passed in the Senate during the next session and correct this loophole.

Other major ethics reform wins include tightening campaign finance laws that target independent expenditure committees to severely curb the flow of “dark money” into politics, restructuring of guidelines for lobbyists, and shedding sunlight onto the identities of those groups who fund advocacy efforts.

As your state representative, I am committed to representing your interests and to ensuring you have a voice in an open and transparent government.



The legislature was visited by the Mets' and Yankees' Lee Mazzilli and TV and Film star Torrey DeVitto, seen here with Speaker Heastie. (Photo by Sandy)



Sandy on the steps of the New York City Hall with other leaders, promoting the elimination of pay-to-play through local and state legislation.

Sincerely,

Sandy Galef

Legislative Steps Toward a Healthier New York

Detecting Breast Cancer Sooner

This year, Governor Cuomo highlighted breast cancer screenings as a priority for this legislative session in his State of the State address. The importance of breast cancer screenings is well known and documented, however, many roadblocks exist for women seeking routine screening and diagnostic imaging. I co-sponsored a bill (A10679) which passed both houses and was signed into law by the Governor on June 27th that aims to make the process of diagnostics easier.

The new law prohibits insurance companies from charging deductibles, co-pays, and coinsurance for mammograms and other diagnostic imaging and screening (including MRIs and Ultrasounds), requires mammography facilities to provide extended hours, and allows some public employees up to four hours of paid leave each year for the purpose of breast cancer screenings. These provisions should decrease the cost to the patient of receiving care, and make it easier for the patient to schedule appointments that do not affect their employment.

Breast cancer screenings are important for many women, as they facilitate early detection of cancers, which improves the prognosis and treatment options for many patients. The American Cancer Society recommends annual screenings for all women, starting at age 45, or earlier if the patient is considered to be at a higher risk.

Insurance Coverage of Wellness Programs

Obesity is a rapidly growing public health, social, and economic concern that is especially troubling in its effects on children. It has been linked to many health conditions, including diabetes, chronic coronary conditions, and respiratory illnesses that are overtaking the conditions caused by smoking tobacco as a preventable cause of death. In order to better equip New Yorkers to get and stay healthy, we passed a bill (A9067) to establish a more comprehensive inter-disciplinary approach to combating obesity by promoting more wellness and physical fitness programs.

The legislation expands the kinds of programs that can be covered by insurance law to include programs to quit substance and alcohol abuse, and pain management programs. It will also provide for a larger availability of programs, such as ones for stress, hypertension, worker injury prevention, and nutrition education. Addressing these issues have been known to increase one's well-being, enable them to do more physical activity, and reduce the incidence of obesity.

Sandy worked with Speaker Heastie to pass a bill in June allowing for a redevelopment of the property at Charles Point in Peekskill.

Preventing Opioid Abuse

Opioid abuse is a nationwide epidemic, with 2,300 deaths due to opioid overdose in 2014, a number which is still rising. New York has been on the forefront of fighting prescription drug abuse, a standing that many, including those of us in the Legislature, would like to strengthen. This issue hits close to home for many in our area, as recent deaths throughout Westchester and Putnam Counties have devastated many families and communities.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has made it a priority to encourage the use of abuse-deterrent drugs in place of standard medications that are, unfortunately, easily abused. New York State has made this a priority as well—we have passed a bill, A10478, to ensure patient access to the newly approved abuse-deterrent opioids. The bill requires insurance plans to cover at least one abuse-deterrent drug for every opioid analgesic active ingredient and to cover the new abuse-deterrent drug even if a patient has not used the standard drug.



Susan Salomone and Ray Dorritie, of the organization "Drug Crisis in Our Backyard" discussed the opioid epidemic in New York on Speak Out with Sandy Galef. Stay Tuned to Patch.com for viewing information.

Donation and Redispensing of Unused Prescription Drugs

Across America, it is estimated that 50 million people are not filling their prescriptions due to cost, while 13% of prescription medications go unused in health care facilities every year. Currently, it is required that prescription medications be destroyed when left unused or unwanted, which has significant environmental and public health impacts.

The new program as outlined in A9905 would allow authorized health care facilities to donate unused prescription medications to be redispensed by a pharmacist or prescriber to uninsured or underinsured patients, when signed into law. The donations would be only from certain health care facilities to ensure safety, and would be donated in tamper-evident packaging. Similar programs are in place in 38 other states, and will help to provide necessary health care to those who may not have been able to afford it otherwise.



Legislative Wrap Up

Expanding Organ Donation

Until now, New York has been one of only five states in the country that requires an individual to be 18 years or older to enroll in an organ or tissue donor registry. New York also has one of the lowest organ donation enrollment rates in the country, at 27%, while the nationwide average is 50%. This session saw the passage of a bill, A4990, which allows 16 and 17 year olds to register as organ and tissue donors in the NYS Donate Life Registry.

The legislation, when signed, will hopefully provide an easier avenue for individuals to register as organ donors, while also providing protections for their parents. Although a 16 or 17 year old can register as a donor, the parent(s) or legal guardians of the potential donor can rescind the authorization at time of death if the potential donor is still under the age of eighteen.

A major argument in support of the bill is the thought that this program may increase the number of donors in the state, as most individuals are under 18 when they apply for their first driver's license, and the renewal process does not provide another opportunity for these drivers to complete the organ and tissue donation section on the application for a renewed license until they are in their late twenties. Hopefully, this new legislation will create a simpler path for individuals who would like to donate their organs and tissues than the ones that are currently in place.

Lead in School Water

We have seen the devastating effects of lead tainted water on health and safety in many instances in the country. Schools in New York State were not required to test their water for lead, which is in line with the laws throughout the U.S.

However, New York will become the first state in the country to put a requirement in place that mandates periodic testing of drinking water in our schools, along with requiring reporting to parents and local and state entities, so that the results of the testing are known to the public. The state has also provided guidance for remediation, in order to facilitate safe drinking water for our students.

In order to lessen the burden on school districts, the state will fund a portion of the testing and remediation costs, and will have an expedited reimbursement program for these costs in the case of an emergency situation.



Sandy and other community leaders attended a ribbon cutting for Ossining's new Gourdine Park, alongside the new Harbor Square apartments.

Helping the Families of the Developmentally Disabled

There are many pressures on families of developmentally disabled individuals. In order to try to better alleviate some of the financial stresses, we have created the New York Achieving a Better Life Experience (NY ABLE) savings account.

Recent legislation, A10206, authorizes the Comptroller to enter into a contract with the third party administrator of the existing NYS College Choice Tuition Savings Program in order to administer the NY ABLE program. This takes advantage of President Obama's 2014 decision to sign the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, which authorized states to establish these savings account programs.

Qualified individuals with developmental disabilities can, through this program, save funds for non-Medicaid reimbursable expenses in their adult lives. The money accrues tax-free interest and does not count as a factor in Medicaid eligibility. This program aims to promote independence and provide access to community-based services and allows the Comptroller to set up this program immediately.

Zombies: Housing or Television?

It seems impossible to turn on the television without seeing some form of zombie or other portrayal of the undead. Unfortunately, some of these zombies are real...in house form.

New York has been experiencing a rise in the numbers of abandoned residential properties. Despite economic steps toward recovery, the foreclosure rates in the state continue to be high. To try to combat predatory foreclosure practices and provide for a more expedient process for transitioning foreclosed upon properties, we passed legislation (A10742) to codify the obligation of banks, mortgage companies, and credit unions under a best practices agreement with the Department of Financial Services. The bill also ensures more protections for homeowners who are brought into court by mortgage lenders seeking to foreclose against them.

Specified in the legislation are measures to:

- Require mortgage lenders, bank owners, or their agents to maintain the vacant residential property;
- Require inspections to determine if a property has been abandoned;
- Create penalties against lenders that do not maintain "Zombie" properties;
- Authorize municipalities to enforce maintenance provisions of the law;
- Create a statewide registry for abandoned residential property and a toll-free hotline for community residents to report such properties;
- Make information about the Zombie properties available to public officials and local governments in order to better evaluate and remedy issues in their communities that may be causing unusual numbers of foreclosures;
- Require the court to give homeowners in foreclosures a consumer bill of rights.

The Toll-Free Zombie Reporting Number is (800) 342-3736.

Missing is Missing – No Matter How Old

When someone in your life goes missing, there are many questions and fears going through your mind. These fears can be escalated when police agencies will not or cannot take a report of the absence of your loved one for an elongated period of time after the absence is discovered.

This session, we passed legislation, A9957, to require police agencies to take reports of missing adults whenever the adult is reported to be missing. This should assist in creating a faster response time for a search for the missing person. In the case that the individual who is missing is injured or in danger, the new reporting timeframe may allow law enforcement to prevent further harm and provide protection where indicated.

The bill will also add missing adults to the National Crime Information Center Register, which creates a permanent record of missing persons. In the event that the missing person is found in either a hospital or morgue, the registry will help to identify the individual and inform the family.



Sandy introduces her panelists at her annual Senior Forum on July 14th. From Left: Assemblywoman Sandy Galef, Harry Campbell of BioFeedback Resources International Corp, Laura Palmer of the AARP, Meryle Richman of Ivyrehab Physical Therapy, Kendra Negrón of Dragonfly Wellness Yoga Studio, singer-songwriter Adam Love, State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, and Putnam County Sheriff Don Smith..

Overturing Old-Fashioned Laws

A number of laws were re-evaluated this session regarding the way alcohol is made available and consumed in New York.

A major part of one alcohol-related bill, A10728, was adding new licenses and permits for breweries, cideries, wineries, and distributors. The new licenses, one for craft manufacturing and the other for importers of various liquors, will help to further the goals of the state to emphasize New York as a state that has a variety of specialty goods. The legislation also allows for the sale of wine in open containers, such as growlers, by wineries and farm wineries, as well as allowing patrons of these establishments to take opened but unfinished bottles of wine away from the premises. This may serve to widen the breadth of customers and sales of local wines.

In a step to overturn one of the “blue” laws on the books in New York State, the legislature voted to allow alcohol sales starting at 10 am on Sundays. This allows restaurants and bars that serve brunch to also serve alcoholic beverages earlier than the previously allowed noon start time.



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END OF SESSION UPDATE

SUMMER 2016

\$\$ More Property Tax Cuts Coming to You from New York State \$\$

There are many property tax cuts coming your way in the next few years. Here is a brief overview of what to expect in the next few years:

Fall 2016 – STAR and Enhanced STAR continue.

Property Tax Freeze rebate check is based on whether or not your municipal budgets stayed within the 2% property tax cap and there are approved efficiency plans in place for all government entities. NYS pays your property tax increase from the prior year.

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 \$135 who are registered in the STAR or Enhanced STAR program and reside in the metropolitan area.

The checks will be distributed throughout the fall and winter, and differ-

ent municipalities will see the checks at different times—so even if your friend in another town received their check, it may be a while before yours arrives.

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 for 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.