



Assemblymember
Jo Anne Simon

52nd District



Announcements & Upcoming Events

July 2021

A Message from Jo Anne...

As many of you know, I am a former teacher of deaf and deaf-blind students, a former university disability services provider, and disability civil rights attorney for many years, so Disability Pride month is very important to me.

We've come a long way in the thirty-one years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), yet we haven't come nearly as far as we should. I look back on things I advocated for 30 years ago and notice we are fighting for many of the same things today. People with disabilities still struggle to access basic needs such as public transportation, employment, digital services, mental health resources, and more, despite the ADA's regulations. The purpose of the ADA is to ensure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic security for individuals with disabilities. A more inclusive world is a better world for everyone. And, let's face it: most of us will have access and ability issues at some point due to age or other life events.

Navigating the world with a disability can be complex, in part because of physical and communications barriers, but some would argue even more so because of attitudinal barriers. People's assumptions about disability lead policy; people's assumptions about disability relegate people with disabilities and their needs to afterthoughts. We see that in the built environment. Technical compliance to codes [may not yield usability](#) - the whole point of the codes! Moreover, many disabilities are "invisible." This includes cognitive disabilities, like dyslexia or ADHD, or hearing loss.

The history of disability discrimination has a long and often sordid past. From the institutions where those with mental illness were imprisoned to the notorious case of Buck v. Bell at the height of the eugenics movement in the United States. Carrie Buck was sterilized by the state of Virginia in 1927 because as Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes decreed, "three generations of imbeciles is enough." Apparently having been born out of wedlock and then being impregnated by her rapist and delivering her child out of wedlock made her and her daughter "feebleminded" (her daughter made the honor roll before her untimely death from a childhood disease).

Today states aren't forcibly sterilizing people for being "feebleminded," but they are approving conservatorships giving total control over a person's every decision, including the decision to have a child, often without counsel protecting the subject of the conservatorship - like Brittany Spears - in violation of her most fundamental rights to due process, bodily autonomy and procreation. In New York, we have a progressive law governing guardianships under Article 81 of the Mental Hygiene Law which provides for the least restrictive grant of authority to a guardian according to the Alleged Incapacitated Person's - usually an elderly person - needs. We also have a law that needs reform - Article 17 of the Estate, Powers and Trusts Law - most often utilized by parents of children with significant disabilities, and which can be as problematic as the Spears conservatorship.

Disability Pride celebrates both the differences between people with disabilities and those without, while also celebrating the universality of being human. This month, let's check our assumptions at the door and celebrate the myriad ways in which inclusive design benefits everyone. Let's embrace the pride of our diverse disability community - and resolve to do it all year long.

Sincerely,

Jo Anne Simon

My OpEd on Structural Reforms Needed at the BOE: The latest local election debacle of result delays and inaccurate balloting results is inexcusable. A structural overhaul to the BOE is necessary to create an accountable and transparent 21st century agency and restore voters' faith in the city's election system. Please read my Opinion Article in [Gotham Gazette](#) on this matter.

The Senate, led by elections Committee Chair Senator Zellnor Myrie, is holding hearings that focus on improving our elections and protecting the rights of voters, the first of which will take place right here in Brooklyn on July 28th at 10am. To submit written testimony or request to speak at the hearing, [please complete this form](#). For more information on the hearing, [click here](#).

The Assembly is holding a [hearing on ranked choice voting this Monday, July 19th](#) at 10:30am. You can [view the hearing online here](#) and submit comments or testimony to Assembly Committee on Election Law, email: philoc@assembly.state.ny.us fax: (518) 455-7250.

Small Business Recovery Grants. NY State is accepting applications for its COVID-19 Pandemic Small Business Recovery Grant Program, where your business might be eligible for a grant of up to \$50,000. You can [review grant details and apply online here](#).

- Need Help? Contact the state's Call Center: 877-721-0097 Mon - Fri, 8AM - 8PM.
- The Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce is also hosting informational sessions on the program during July on Tuesdays at 4:00pm and Fridays at 9:00am. [Register & check this link for more details](#).

NY State's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Applications are being accepted now. New Yorkers who have been unable to pay rent due to the impacts of COVID-19 can apply for help through the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Both tenants and landlords can apply for ERAP benefits, and payments are made directly to landlords. To view eligibility details and to apply, [visit this link](#). Please note that you are eligible to apply regardless of immigration status if your household income is below 80% of "area median income," which you can [check here](#). You can direct questions to the State's ERAP call center: 844-NY1-RENT (844-691-7368) or the hearing-impaired TTY number: 1-833-843-8829.

There have been reports of glitches with the online application process and long wait times for the OTDA call center. If you are having trouble, or have questions about the application process, you can call the following local ERAP Brooklyn "enrollers" for assistance:

- [Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc.](#) 718-852-6004
- [Good Shepherd Services \(GSS\)](#) 877-827-7369
- [Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty](#) 929-292-9480
- [RiseBoro Community Partnership](#) 718-547-2800

NYC to Launch Education & Dyslexia Initiative. Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Porter recently announced a new post-COVID academic recovery plan. I applaud them for focusing on improving student literacy and screening for dyslexia, and investing in social emotional supports for students in this post-COVID era. I trust that the next Mayor of New York City will support and continue this long-sought policy.

Reading disabilities go undiagnosed or unaddressed in most communities, but the issue is particularly profound in communities of color. Every child should be screened for dyslexia and learning disabilities because early

identification will allow us to target interventions before kids fall behind to ensure successful educational outcomes and break the school-to-prison pipeline.

As a former president of NY's Dyslexia association, we must ensure that K-2 screening is done and evidence-based interventions are implemented. We must equip principals and teachers with the resources and training necessary to follow these plans. We owe it to our students to ensure that NYC-purchased digital devices have sufficient capacity to run the assistive tech needed for students to succeed.

Literacy is a critical element of social justice. [Read more here about the initiative.](#)

Gowanus Rezoning Update: The next Public Hearing on the Gowanus Rezoning DEIS (Draft Environmental Impact Statement) will be held in person in the NYC Planning Commission Hearing Room, Lower Concourse, 120 Broadway, New York, NY on July 28, 2021, at 10AM. Please note that masks are required to be worn to enter the building and during the hearing. You may also attend remotely - [click here for instructions](#).

Please inform the DCP if you need a reasonable accommodation, such as sign language interpretation, to participate in the meeting. Email accessibilityinfo@planning.nyc.gov or call 212-720-3508 by Jul. 14, 2021. Foreign language interpretation will be provided based on available resources.

Your voice matters and I urge you to submit a comment. You can provide a written comment on the DEIS by emailing 19DCP157K_DL@planning.nyc.gov, with "19DCP157K - Comments on the DEIS" as the Subject field.

Curbside Composting is returning this fall! You will need to sign-up for service starting the first week of August at nyc.gov/curbsidecomposting or by calling 311. Collections in eligible community districts start in October on a rolling basis, based on the number of sign-ups. Service will expand each month as demand grows. If curbside composting is important to you, please sign up, and tell your friends & neighbors to do so also!

Veterans Entrepreneurship Training Program. Applications are open for the free, introductory educational program for US military personnel, US military veterans, and their spouses who seek to learn entrepreneurial skills or pursue business ventures. [Apply online here](#) before the deadline of Sept. 8, 2021.

Summer Reading Challenge for Students: I am once again sponsoring a Summer Reading Challenge, held in partnership with New York State Libraries. The theme for Summer 2021 "Tails and Tales" will encourage children to learn more about their favorite animals and explore the world around them. All elementary and middle school students are invited to participate. You may stop by my office at 341 Smith Street or contact my office via simonj@nyassembly.gov to request a brochure and a summer reading calendar.

The Challenge asks children to read a book for a minimum of 15 minutes a day for at least 40 days during July and August (no worries if you are just starting now!). Children can read on their own or with a partner or caregiver and mark off days on the calendar provided. Once they've completed 40 days or more, they submit the calendar to my office to receive an Excellence in Reading certificate recognizing their efforts and dedication.

Sign up for my Email Alerts. Email simonj@nyassembly.gov to stay informed of community events & policy issues!

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