



# Community Newsletter

## ASSEMBLY MEMBER DANIEL O'DONNELL

Manhattan Valley ■ Morningside Heights

Upper West Side ■ West Harlem

WINTER

■ SERVING NEW YORK'S 69<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT ■

Dear Neighbor,

I hope you have had a wonderful beginning of winter and a warm holiday season. As this newsletter goes to print, the Assembly is preparing to return to Albany for the 2012 legislative session, and wrapping up the past year's work.

2011 brought a number of exciting and significant events for the Assembly and for our State. In June, as you may know, I led the Marriage Equality Act to passage in the Assembly for the fifth time. After passage by the State Senate and signature by the governor, it is now the law of the land in New York, and thousands of same-sex couples have been able to take advantage of this long-deserved right. I myself will be marrying my partner of 31 years, John Banta, at the end of January!

The Assembly also passed a far-reaching bill that reformed the laws governing legislative ethics, including a new requirement of greater income disclosure by lawmakers, a mechanism to strip elected officials of their pensions should they commit a crime related to their public office, and the formation of an independent, bipartisan Commission with broad power to investigate wrongdoing in state government. As Chair of the Assembly Ethics Committee, I led debate on the Assembly floor of this significant legislation. Additionally, my anti-bullying bill, the Dignity for All Students Act, is in the process of being implemented statewide and will come into full force in 2012. More information about this process can be found later in this newsletter.

More recently, the Assembly met in a "special session" at the beginning of December; we passed a bill that will substantially reform our state's income tax structure. The legislation partially extends the income tax surcharge, or "millionaire's tax," on our state's wealthiest individuals, while reducing the tax rates of the vast majority of New Yorkers.

This action was an important first step toward a more just tax structure for our state, but I believe there is still work to be done on this front. We must continue to build more progressivity into our tax system to ensure those best able to pay do so, while avoiding further cuts to funds used to educate our children, protect our environment, maintain our infrastructure, and otherwise serve the citizens of New York State in vital ways.

On a more personal note, over the past few months I was honored to receive a number of awards for my leadership in the successful fight for Marriage Equality. These included the **Equality Leadership Award** from Equality California (the leading LGBT rights group in California), the **Ned Pattison Award** from the NYCLU, and inclusion in **Out Magazine's** "Out 100," the publication's list of the 100 most inspiring individuals in 2011.

In our community, I was proud to sponsor a successful flu shot clinic with other local elected officials where over 60 individuals were able to receive the vaccine. I am sponsoring several more events and programs in our community in coming months, including my annual drives for cell phones and children's books, my annual Community Reading Challenge, as well as a number of legal clinics for tenants. Watch for these and other events in 2012 updates!

My community office is located at 245 W. 104th Street, just off Broadway. My staff and I are always available to assist you, including three bilingual staff members able to help in either Spanish or English. I encourage you to call, write, or visit us, Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. For those with specific housing problems, I have a dedicated housing specialist on staff.

I hope you will find this latest newsletter informative and useful. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call my community office at 212-866-3970.

Very truly yours,

*Daniel O'Donnell*

## Historic Preservation Efforts Continue

The historic fabric of the Morningside Heights and Upper West Side communities continues to be threatened by large-scale developments, both by institutions and other entities. O'Donnell firmly believes over-sized and non-contextual developments are inappropriate and strongly supports city government efforts to prevent such ill-advised projects. These important mechanisms include designation as a Historic District by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, as well as changes in the city land-use and zoning codes to maintain open space and ensure contextual construction.

O'Donnell was proud to testify in strong support of the proposed West End Avenue-Riverside Drive Historic District on October 25th at the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) hearing. This potential district continues to move forward in the LPC review process.

A possible Morningside Heights historic district is also gaining momentum. In response to overwhelming community feedback in favor of this designation, LPC is evaluating the Morningside Heights area. A grassroots community group, the Morningside Heights Historic District Committee, has spearheaded the local efforts toward establishment of a comprehensive historic district that reflects the area's clear architectural merit. The group has also sponsored a number of events to raise awareness of the process and of the necessity of a city-designated historic district to prevent wanton alteration or demolition of the neighborhood's historic structures.

If you are interested in receiving more information or getting involved with the efforts toward Historic District designation, contact Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office at (212) 866-3970 or email [odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us).



Assembly Member O'Donnell speaking with Community Board 9 at the Board's monthly general meeting.

**¡Atención!** La oficina de la comunidad del asambleísta O'Donnell tiene disponible empleados que hablan español para asistir al público tiempo completo, lunes a viernes de 9:00 AM a 5:30 PM. La oficina está localizada en el 245 West 104th Street, cerca de Broadway. También pueden llamar a la oficina en horas laborales al (212) 866-3970.

Recuerden que nuestro boletín informativo está disponible en español. Para obtener una copia favor de comunicarse con la oficina del asambleísta Daniel O'Donnell.

## Assembly Member O'Donnell's Annual Book Drive

Assembly Member O'Donnell is sponsoring a book drive to benefit Project Cicero, an organization which distributes books to public school teachers and classroom libraries. For more information on Project Cicero, please visit [www.projectcicero.org](http://www.projectcicero.org).

During the months of January and February, please donate new or gently-used hardcovers and paperbacks for children and young adults at:

**Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office**  
**245 W. 104<sup>th</sup> St. (bet. Broadway & West End Ave.)**  
**9:00 A.M. – 5:30 P.M.**

Last year, Assembly Member O'Donnell's book drive collected over 1,000 books for New York City's children. Let's try to beat that record!

**January and February 2012**



*Assembly Member O'Donnell calling for a fair labor contract at an SEIU 32BJ rally.*

## Implementation of the Dignity for All Students Act

Assembly Member O'Donnell successfully passed the Dignity for All Students Act, New York's anti-bullying law, in 2010. It will take effect on July 1, 2012, and O'Donnell has been working with advocates and education organizations to ensure it is ready for implementation. Dignity's goal is to give students an environment free of harassment and discrimination based on actual or perceived race, national origin, ethnic group, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or sex. It does so by prohibiting discrimination and harassment on school property and at school functions, and requiring the State Education Department to support this effort by developing model anti-harassment policies for schools to follow, as well as holding school districts responsible for adopting procedures and guidelines that train staff to achieve the Dignity Act's goals.

Assembly Member O'Donnell's office is part of the Dignity Task Force, which is making recommendations to the State Education Department (SED) about ways to implement this timely and critical legislation most effectively. The Dignity Task Force's role is to bring together a broad cross-section of advocates and education professionals to develop and draft model policies, training materials, and other resources that will be submitted to the SED for its review and approval, and that can then be used by local districts to address bullying in schools throughout New York.

The members of the Dignity Task Force include a wide range of professional associations representing school administrators, school boards, teachers, parents, health and mental health professionals who work in schools, advocacy groups representing the interests of a variety of marginalized populations, and the State Education Department as well as other State agencies. The representatives of these organizations bring a wealth of knowledge, experience and different perspectives to the work of the Task Force, which has been meeting regularly since April 2011.

The Task Force's five work groups are in the process of drafting and revising a variety of documents for use by school districts, such as: a lesson plan template, specific lesson plans, a model code of conduct that will incorporate Dignity's requirements into existing codes of conduct, model local policies, training materials for school employees, a best practices guide, resource compilations, and a "frequently asked questions" guide. Some of these draft documents have already been submitted for SED review, and others will be ready for submission soon.

The Dignity for All Students website ([www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/dignityact/)) was launched in October 2011. Materials already on the website include an informational brochure that can be downloaded and printed for distribution, a fact sheet, a power point presentation, and links to anti-bullying materials. New materials will be added to the website as they are finalized and approved by the State Education Department.



*O'Donnell discussing his work as an Assembly Member with a government class at LaGuardia High School.*

## Free Legal Clinic for Tenants

Assembly Member O'Donnell hosts a monthly opportunity for constituents with housing issues to consult with a volunteer attorney. To make an appointment for one of these evening clinics, call **Joyce** at **(212) 866-3970**.

**Upcoming clinic dates:**

**January 26th**

**February 23rd**

**March 29th**

**April 26th**

# Welcome!

Assembly Member O'Donnell welcomes a new staff member, **Callie Wilson**, to his community office. Callie will be serving as a Community Liaison.

## TENANT'S CORNER: Programs That Help Keep Rent Affordable

Two programs that help keep rent affordable for qualified New York City residents are SCRIE (Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption) and DRIE (Disability Rent Increase Exemption). Those approved for these benefits do not pay rent increases or fuel cost adjustments, and they are not subject to increases associated with Major Capital Improvements (MCIs).

**To qualify for SCRIE, the head of household must:**

1. Be a rent controlled or rent stabilized tenant.
2. Be sixty-two years old or older.
3. Have a household income of no more than \$29,000.
4. Be paying more than one-third of the household income for rent.

**To qualify for DRIE, the head of household must:**

1. Be a rent controlled or rent stabilized tenant.
2. Receive any one of the following forms of financial assistance:

- a. Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
  - b. Federal Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
  - c. US Department of Veterans Affairs Disability pension or compensation
  - d. Disability-related Medicaid
3. Have an annual household income of no more than \$19,284, if the head of household is a single person living alone, or, no more than \$27,780 if the household consists of two or more members.
  4. Pay more than one-third of the household income for rent.

SCRIE and DRIE are administered by the New York City Department of Finance. If you have any questions about eligibility or need help obtaining an application, please contact Assembly Member O'Donnell's office. O'Donnell has a dedicated housing specialist on staff who can assist you with the process.

## An Update on Hydrofracking in New York

As we enter the New Year, it becomes even more important that we continue the fight against allowing the hazardous practice of hydraulic fracturing, or "hydrofracking," in New York State. The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has again granted an extension of the public comment period, this time until January 12th, but Governor Cuomo has not made any further commitments to stop hydrofracking operations from occurring in our state.

Assembly Member O'Donnell remains committed to protecting New Yorkers from the damage hydrofracking may cause and has continued to pressure the Governor and the DEC to delay hydrofracking until comprehensive studies of the practice have been completed and all possible ramifications are understood. Most recently, the Assembly Member submitted testimony at the DEC's public hearing in New York City on November 30th. The testimony detailed his position on hydrofracking, and discussed the measures that must be in place before New York State can proceed in this area.

Additionally, on November 29th, Assembly Member O'Donnell authored a letter to the Delaware River Basin Commission (DRBC), an organization comprised of the Governors of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, along with a representative of the Army Corps of Engineers, to express his concerns over their haste in potentially allowing hydrofracking in the Delaware River Basin. The Delaware River Basin supplies water to over nine million New Yorkers, who all depend on the quality of this water. The DRBC is organized to provide oversight for the Basin, and ratifies its own set of regulations for drilling in the area. Assembly Member O'Donnell wrote to urge the DRBC to further

research the effects of hydrofracking before voting on the regulations, and he is pleased that the vote has currently been postponed until further notice.

In past weeks, further evidence has emerged implicating hydrofracking operations in two types of serious environmental damage previously discussed by Assembly Member O'Donnell and his colleagues in public testimony to the DEC and in the Assembly Committee on Environmental Conservation. First, information from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) cited hydraulic fracturing as a possible cause of the contamination of water supplies in Wyoming. This link has been made in other states, including Pennsylvania, but is the first time that such a direct connection has been made by the EPA itself. Second, there are continued reports of seismic activity in areas that have been inactive for centuries. In many of these areas, hydrofracking operations are underway and many of the earthquake epicenters are close to where wells have been drilled.

In December, Assembly Member O'Donnell signed onto Assembly Member Barbara Lifton's (D – Ithaca) letter to Governor Cuomo calling for the DEC to withdraw the Marcellus Shale revised draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (rdSGEIS). O'Donnell firmly believes that hydraulic fracturing remains too poorly understood and potentially damaging a process to allow in New York State. We must give ourselves more time to understand the consequences of hydrofracking so that we can ensure the safety of our water supply and environment for ourselves and for future generations.

## Education News

### New Dual Language Option Proposed

Seven schools in District 3 offer dual language programs. All seven of these schools offer Spanish-English, and PS84 offers French-English as well. These programs instruct students in both languages on all subjects, usually dividing the day or the week evenly between the two. Now, a group of over 50 families is looking to start a Russian-English program in District 3. For more information on which schools have these valuable programs, go to <http://schools.nyc.gov/> and search for "dual language" to access the PDF listing, "New York City Dual Language Programs."

### District 3 Has a New Superintendent

Esther Klein Friedman, Ph.D., became the new Superintendent for Community School District 3 on November 28th. She has worked for the Department of Education for the past six years, and has experience as a teacher, a principal, and a school administrator in many areas of New York City. With eleven years of experience spent as the staff director of special education at a District 3 school, she already has knowledge of our community's district.

### Mark Your Calendars: Upcoming Kindergarten Admissions Deadlines

This year, all families must submit an application for kindergarten admission, even if they are applying to their zoned school. Between January 9 and March 2, 2012, families should visit their zoned school and any other school(s) of interest for which they are eligible to apply. The Department of Education will post more information on their website (<http://schools.nyc.gov/>) in January.

### Relevant Dates:

- January 9 – March 2, 2012: Kindergarten admissions period.**
- March 19 – March 23, 2012: Assignment notification period.**
- March 26 – April 20, 2012: Pre-registration period.**

## Internship Opportunity with the Community Office of Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell

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An internship with the Community Office of Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell provides students interested in public service with the opportunity to gain direct experience with an active government office. Interns in our office conduct legislative research, provide administrative support, and gain experience in constituent services. Our staff strives to create a program tailored to individual interests while exposing students to the dynamic day-to-day work of elected officials. If you have any questions, please contact **Michael Elias**, our internship program coordinator, at our Community Office at **(212) 866-3970**. To apply, please submit a cover letter and resume to Michael at [eliasm@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:eliasm@assembly.state.ny.us).



*Michael Elias and Dominic Lee (center), two Community Liaisons in Assembly Member O'Donnell's office, with participants in O'Donnell's annual Frederick Douglass Houses Health Fair.*

## FREE CANCER SCREENING

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The New York State Department of Health Cancer Services Program (CSP) offers **FREE** cancer screening tests to the uninsured throughout Manhattan, including screenings for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and colorectal cancer.

These free screenings are available to New York State residents who do not have medical health insurance, and have not had a recent test for the aforementioned typed of cancers. Free screening age minimums vary.

The program also facilitates the Medicaid application to secure **coverage for treatment** for eligible patients diagnosed with cancer through the program. Individuals are not required to be United States citizens to participate in the screening program. If you are interested, please call **212-851-4516** for more information.

## E-Newsletters

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Do you want more frequent updates about interesting community events, important government information, and what Assembly Member O'Donnell has been working on? Sign up to receive his monthly electronic newsletters by sending an email to [odonnelld@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:odonnelld@assembly.state.ny.us).