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Cracking Down on Ghost Guns

Over the last several years we have witnessed an explosion in the popularity of ghost guns, do-it-yourself, homemade weapons that are easy to assemble from kits purchased online or at gun shows. When assembly is complete, one has a fully functional, unserialized and untraceable gun without having to undergo a background check.

The bill I introduced and which was just signed into law bans the sale and possession of ghost guns, with an exception for licensed gunsmiths and dealers. It also requires that the gun be assigned a serial number, which enables it to be traced by law enforcement and registered with the State of New York.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, people rushed to panic-buy firearms. According to a Harvard Law Review article, more than 80% of all ghost gun kit manufacturers experienced extreme demand, with one likening the increase in sales to "the Black Friday shopping frenzy."

While the federal government has taken intermediate steps to restrict ghost guns nationwide, final action is still forthcoming. Until then state law will continue to protect New Yorkers against ghost guns.

I am also working to pass my legislation to require that all semiautomatic pistols manufactured or delivered to gun dealers in New York State are capable of microstamping ammunition. Microstamping technology utilizes lasers to make precise, microscopic engravings on the internal mechanisms of a gun. When the gun is fired, a unique code is imprinted onto the shell casing. The code can be used by law enforcement to identify the make, model and serial number of the gun. Many fatal and non-fatal shootings remain unsolved; requiring microstamping technology will provide law enforcement with a powerful tool to help solve crimes and get guns off the street.



Assemblymember Rosenthal's Groundbreaking New Law will Tackle Homelessness

Advocates, many of whom are pictured above, are hailing the signing into law of my legislation that increases the amount of rent covered by a state voucher as a historic and desperately needed step in our battle to stem the tide of homelessness. The Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS) voucher program is designed to help families who are at risk of eviction or those who are in shelter find permanent affordable housing. The program can be a lifeline for many families facing threats to their housing stability, including survivors of domestic violence. Previously, the voucher covered only 85% of fair market rent, limiting a family of four to an apartment with a monthly rent of no more than \$1580.

As a result of this new law, FHEPS vouchers will now cover 100% of fair market rent, as set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This means that thousands of families who are eligible for the voucher will now be able to use it to cover the cost of rent. Increasing the FHEPS voucher amount will have an immediate and positive impact on the number of people in shelters and will help thousands of New Yorkers get into safe, stable and affordable homes.

I am thrilled that this new law will have such a significant impact on vulnerable New Yorkers and their families. As the Chair of the Committee on Social Services, I will continue to work with advocates, policy experts and partners in government to expand the support available to those struggling to find housing in our City and State.

Helping to Keep the West Side Clean and Composting

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my office fielded many trash-related complaints, particularly in the aftermath of the City's inexplicable decision to remove trash cans from neighborhoods across the City. When COVID-19 hit, the City slashed the budget for the New York City Sanitation Department (DSNY) by a whopping \$106 million to help free up resources for our COVID response.

As a result of the cuts, garbage piled up on the streets and sidewalks. To fill the gap, local residents organized volunteers to keep the West Side clean. At a New York City Council hearing, I demanded that the City restore and increase funding to DSNY to improve sanitation in our area. While I am pleased that the budget has been restored, the battle with trash continues.

At my request, DSNY conducted a trash audit of areas constituents identified as the most in need of attention. After the audit, DSNY cleaned the areas, replaced missing trash cans, educated local businesses about their legal duty to keep the sidewalk in front of their stores clean and promised to carefully monitor those areas in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also contributed to a dramatic increase in the number of rats across the City. Many of you contact my office about rats, and I immediately ensure that exterminators from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene are dispatched to the area. I also work with other relevant agencies to address conditions that might be attracting the rodents, such as trash or construction. My office periodically hosts rat academies with the City of New York to help educate building superintendents, management and residents about how to prevent and manage rodent infestations. If your building or block would like to participate in a rat academy, please let me know.

Yet another successful trash program impacted by COVID-19 is the GrowNYC Compost Program, that diverts more than 23 tons of food waste,

which releases harmful methane, from landfills each week. The program was paused during the pandemic, and when it finally resumed, the Upper West Side was left out. Despite the fact that dozens of buildings in the neighborhood pre-registered to participate in the program, DSNY cited a "lack of demand" among West Siders as the reason for the delay. DSNY told others that budget cuts were the problem.

After I pointed out the inconsistency to DSNY, the program was quickly rolled out on the West Side.

I have joined Broadway Malls Association, Litter Legion in Hell's Kitchen and One Block UWS on neighborhood cleanups and worked to connect them with resources and other support. While I, and so many others, are grateful for their service, it should not be up to regular New Yorkers to perform essential municipal services.

As I continue to advocate for enhanced attention by DSNY on the West Side, I encourage you to continue reporting trash conditions, rodents and issues with composting to my office. The information you provide to me is vital in my advocacy on your behalf.



I joined the volunteers of Hell's Kitchen's Litter Legion to clean up our streets and sidewalks.

The March Toward Menstrual Equity Continues

New York has led the charge toward menstrual equity. Legislation I passed into law eliminated the sales tax on menstrual products; made menstrual products free in public schools and correctional facilities; required on-packaging menstrual product ingredient labeling; and required doctors, hospitals and schools to provide information to patients and students about common menstrual disorders.

Now, I am pleased that my legislation requiring menstrual products to be provided for free to people living in shelters statewide has also become law. Everyone has access to toilet paper in shelters and other public accommodations; the same should be true for menstrual products. I am also working to pass the TAMPACT (Total Access to Menstrual Products Act), to ensure that menstrual products are free of charge in every restroom statewide, public and private, as is toilet paper. Scotland and Ann Arbor, MI, have already made menstrual products free of charge to all who need them. New York should be next.



I was pleased to partner with PERIOD.org and Jeanne Rebillard of the Endometriosis Foundation of America to provide 25,000 tampons and pads to Connie Altamirano, a community organizer and activist, who distributed the menstrual products to people in need throughout New York City. (Connie and I stand with the products after we finished loading them on the truck for delivery.)



In response to overwhelming demand, I hosted a West Side Shred Day in November in front of my district office. Hundreds of West Siders brought boxes and bags of confidential papers to shred. I will host another Shred Day later this year and will be sure to share the details as soon as they become available.

Keeping our Children Safe

In a city as dense as New York, open green spaces are oases. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our parks and playgrounds became even more important than before, as many of us were confined for so many months within the four walls of our homes.

To ensure that my district has access to safe and modern playgrounds, I conducted an Upper West Side Playground Survey. My staff and I visited each playground in the district at several different times throughout the day and week. We observed the conditions at each playground, spoke with parents and caregivers and then sent a series of recommendations to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks).

While the conditions in the parks and playgrounds on the West Side are mostly good, there is certainly room for improvement.

Some playgrounds did not have an adequate number of trash cans, and as a result, the cans were overflowing with garbage. I requested additional trash cans be placed in the parks that needed them and additional trash pick ups to ensure that garbage does not pile up and attract rodents and other vermin.

My office found that some playgrounds on the West Side did not have working bathrooms. At Neufeld Playground in Riverside Park, guardians noted that the women's bathroom did not have running water. Running water is always a necessity, but even more so in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the City's guidance recommending hand washing as an important tool to reduce the spread.

At the time of inspection, the only water fountain in the Diana Ross Playground located at West 81st Street in Central Park was not working. Though Neufeld Playground has two water fountains, only one was working. Classic Playground does not have any fountains, and the only water fountain at DeWitt Clinton Playground is rusted.

Considering that caregivers bring young children to the playgrounds, changing tables are a must. I requested that changing tables be installed in all restrooms (regardless of gender). And continuing my efforts to achieve menstrual equity, I urged the City to make menstrual products accessible for free in all public restrooms.

Some playgrounds had uneven or cracked flooring, and I requested that these dangerous conditions be immediately repaired. At Neufeld Playground, the cement flooring is cracked throughout the playground and the soft padding underneath the play equipment is coming loose. At Classic Playground, there are large gaps between the plastic panels underneath the play equipment, and there are loose plastic mats underneath the play equipment at Little Engine Playground.

While many of the playgrounds on the West Side are in good condition, children and their caregivers should not be exposed to trash, vermin, broken water fountains or uneven surfaces. It is critical that the City do a better job maintaining its playgrounds for the health and safety of those on the West Side and throughout the City. If you notice unsafe or unsanitary conditions at our neighborhood parks or playgrounds, please let me know.

Reducing Noise from Tourist Helicopters

Helicopter traffic is common in the City, but it has increased in intensity over the last several years as more and more companies provide tourist and commercial travel around and above our area. I have heard from many of you, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, about the disruptive whirring of helicopters at all hours of the day and night. In addition to the noise, the increase in helicopter travel is bad for our environment, particularly at a time when we need to reduce our carbon footprint and use greener modes of transportation.

I serve on a bi-state task force of city, state and federal elected officials from New York and New Jersey who are working to resolve the issue. Many of the helicopters in New York's air space originate on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, which is why New Jersey elected officials are part of these efforts.

Air travel between states is a federal issue that cannot be regulated by New York State or New York City. As such, task force member Congressman Jerry Nadler, who also represents the West Side, re-introduced the Improving Helicopter Safety Act of 2019, which prohibits non-essential helicopter travel over New York City.

I have urged the United States Department of Transportation to support Congressman Nadler's legislation.

While federal action is required to stop commercial helicopter traffic over New York City, the City of New York can limit local flights that originate at City-owned heliports; there is legislation in the New York City Council to do just that.

Along with members of the task force, I will continue to meet and work with community stakeholders to devise plans to pass these bills into law. There are many different issues at play here, and hopefully together, our continued advocacy will limit the noise that West Side residents and others throughout the City are experiencing.

In the meantime, I urge you to continue reporting helicopter noise to 311 and my office.

Fighting Fake News in the Digital Age

We live in an information age, and we are bombarded by words and images from a variety of sources nearly constantly. Young people are inundated by images of influencers and celebrities whose faces and bodies are heavily enhanced by filters.

Children and young people are particularly vulnerable to these new trends. Their minds and world views are still developing, and they do not have the experience necessary to beat back against the constant din of fake news and imagery. Fake news shared over and over again by friends on social media is the newest form of peer pressure, and it is critical that we equip young people with the tools to help them discern fact from fiction.

Young people in particular have an awesome ability to help shape their world, but only if they become involved. If we can harness the power of digital media to help encourage young people to become active in the political process, the changes could be monumental.

I am working on a package of bills that will help New York State ensure that all children in our public schools are educated in media literacy, civics and good digital citizenship.

Encouraging media literacy is important to help stop the spread and reinforcement of disinformation via digital media sources, and it is also crucial to help build a strong foundation in civic leadership in the next generation.

Ensuring the Social-Emotional Welfare of Our Kids

All of us struggled to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic, but few more than our young people. Like the rest of us, children and young adults were forced by COVID-19 to change nearly every aspect of their lives within an instant. Unlike adults, young people are not fully emotionally and intellectually developed, and as a result, some children continue to struggle to process the changes in a healthy manner.

After a year of social isolation, compounded by the fear of the out-of-control virus, many young people are experiencing the long-term consequences of that stress, even now that school has resumed. The situation has become so severe that the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and the Children's Hospital Association, which represents more than 77,000 physician members and more than 200 children's hospitals, declared a national state of emergency in child and adolescent mental health.

We must do all we can to connect young people with resources and support. I am the sponsor of legislation that will allow school psychologists to continue their treatment relationship with students outside the four walls of the school building.

Under current law, school psychologists are allowed to provide support to children during school hours, but are prohibited from providing that same support after school. With more and more young people in need of help, it is important that we have trained professionals on hand to meet the growing demand.

It is vital that we deploy all the tools at our disposal to ensure our children are healthy, physically and emotionally. My legislation is designed to do just that.



For years, I hosted an annual mobile breast cancer screening event in front of my district office. In 2020, the event was postponed as a result of COVID-19. Many women put off routine breast and other cancer screenings during the pandemic, which was one of the reasons I was so happy to be able to provide the free service again. This year, I partnered with the American-Italian Cancer Foundation, and I am grateful to their staff and nurses for a great job.



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Providing Grants for Local Schools

I was pleased to be able to provide funding to public elementary and middle schools in our district. The funding will be used to support after-school programming, and to enhance existing enrichment programs already offered, such as music and arts education. I am always looking for ways to help support students and their families in the 67th Assembly district. If your school community needs funding or other support, please reach out to my office.