



Community Newsletter

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DANIEL O'DONNELL

Manhattan Valley ■ Morningside Heights
Upper West Side ■ West Harlem

SPRING 2012

■ SERVING NEW YORK'S 69TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT ■

Dear Neighbor,

I hope the return of warm weather finds you well! The Legislature has been in session now for four months and I have been spending much of my time in Albany, fighting for legislative reform in many areas. Some of my top priorities include criminal justice system reforms, protection of our children through anti-bullying measures, equal treatment under law for all our citizens, and the fight against hydro-fracking in New York.

For the second year in a row, both the Assembly and Senate passed the state budget early, successfully closing this year's \$3.5 billion budget deficit. While the 2012-2013 budget still left much to be desired in a number of areas, it was a step in the right direction after the draconian budget cuts forced into last year's budget.

I'm happy to report there were a number of bright spots and restorations for which the Assembly successfully advocated, including in crucial areas like school funding for both K-12 schools and schools of higher education, and healthcare funding for economically disadvantaged families and seniors.

More detailed information about specific portions of the 2012-2013 state budget is available in articles in this newsletter. If you have questions or comments about what was signed into law, please feel free to contact me by email at odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us or by phone at 212-866-3970.

In our community, I have a number of exciting events coming up soon, including my annual Cell Phone Drive and my free Legal Clinics. Also, watch for information about my upcoming summer Community Health Fairs.

My community office is located at 245 W. 104th Street, just off Broadway. My staff and I are always available to assist you. I encourage you to call, write, or visit us, Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM. For those with specific housing problems, I have a dedicated housing specialist on staff available to help every day.

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,

¡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 laborables 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.

Final Budget Restores \$30.6 Million to Drug Co-Pay Assistance Program for Seniors

This year, the Assembly worked diligently and successfully to ensure the majority of its budget priorities were intact prior to the April 1st final budget deadline. A pressing component of these negotiations was the restoration of funding for the Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) Program, a previously underfunded program that assists moderate- to low-income senior citizens with their prescription drug co-payments. Assembly Member O'Donnell and his colleagues recognized that the partially restored funding in last year's budget was simply insufficient, and that failure to secure significant restorations this year would put many seniors under considerable, long-term financial strain.

The Assembly urged the governor to restore funding for the EPIC Program in the 2012-2013 Budget, which resulted in the restoration of \$30.6 million in EPIC funding to the Governor's original budget. These restorations will fund co-payment assistance, which will again allow EPIC enrollees to pay no more than \$20 for their co-payments when filling their prescription.

This will considerably alleviate the burden of prescription drug costs for senior citizens, who have paid up to a quarter of the cost of their medications since the co-payment assistance plan was eliminated on January 1, 2012.



Assembly Member O'Donnell explaining the impacts of recent budget restorations to seniors at Goddard Riverside Community Center.

Education Funding Increased in 2012-2013 Budget

As the only Manhattan member of the Assembly Education Committee, Assembly Member O'Donnell is dedicated to his role as an advocate for local and state-wide education. This year, he and his Assembly colleagues worked hard to protect increased education funding in the budget. Their efforts were successful, and the final budget includes a 4% increase in school aid—an \$805 million addition.

Included in this number are multiple restorations to projects that had been cut in past years, as well as much-needed additional funding for some of the most important programs. For the first time in five years, the budget increased the base aid for SUNY and CUNY schools. With an additional \$150 per full-time student, CUNY received \$9.1 million and SUNY \$22.1 million. To accommodate the diverse student body that both SUNY and CUNY attract, legislators also restored funding to child care programs at both institutions, amounting to over a million dollars in increased funds to support student-parents.

On the K-12 level, \$10.2 million was restored to teacher resource and training centers to help New York teachers stay engaged in their own professional educations and improve their teaching. In addition to continued funding at full 2011-2012 levels, schools are eligible for a portion of the \$125 million made available through the competitive grant process. Aid to the state's vital public library system has been increased to facilitate its increased role as a community resource center for New Yorkers seeking tax assistance, computer training, and other services, in addition to its outstanding collection of books.

As Assembly Member O'Donnell mentioned when discussing the budget overall, there is never as much money as would be ideal. This is especially true for education, which is vitally important to the wellbeing of New York State. While Assembly Member O'Donnell always advocates for very generous funding for every level of education in the state, the restorations and additions the budget includes this year are a strong start, and he will continue to fight for increased support at every opportunity.



Assembly Member O'Donnell questioning NYS Education Department Commissioner John King, Jr. at the Assembly Education Committee hearing on April 11th in Manhattan.

O'Donnell Continues to Fight Against Hydrofracking in New York

The passage of the 2012-2013 state budget brought a few changes to the hydrofracking situation in New York State. Assembly Member O'Donnell is also happy to announce that the final 2012-2013 budget provides no funding to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) that would be necessary for hydrofracking permit issuance and regulation to proceed.

Currently, the DEC continues to review the over 60,000 submissions they received from concerned New Yorkers regarding the revised draft Supplemental Generic Impact Statement (rdS-GEIS). The agency cannot even begin to issue permits until each comment is reviewed and changes to the existing regulations have been implemented. Fortunately, neither Governor Cuomo nor the DEC has placed a timetable on the review, allowing for a more thorough review of the comments.

Elsewhere in New York State, local municipalities are seeing their rights to

local control upheld as a February ruling by the New York State Supreme Court held that towns could use their local zoning laws to ban hydrofracking as they see fit. As a lawyer, Assembly Member O'Donnell believes in the constitutional rights of municipalities to govern themselves and applauds the court for recognizing this right. While the ruling will be appealed, for the moment it is a victory for New Yorkers against land-hungry gas drilling corporations.

In recent weeks, reports of an unstudied, propane-based form of hydrofracking have surfaced, along with many fresh concerns. This new method uses a liquefied version of petroleum gas (instead of water) to blast open shale rock in the hydrofracking process. Some New York State landowners have signed drilling rights over to companies known to use this process. In response to this information, Assembly Member O'Donnell wrote a letter to both Governor Cuomo and DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens

calling for the new, potentially devastating practice to be subject to an environmental review separate from the one currently in place for water-based hydraulic fracturing.

As Assembly Session continues, Assembly Member O'Donnell will continue to work to pass legislation protecting our health and environment. As a member of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee and the Assembly Parks Committee, he advocates for a common-sense approach to protection from the dangers of all types of hydrofracking. One example is his bill **A6913**. This legislation would prohibit the use of hydrofracking flow-back water as a de-icing agent on our roads, a practice that has led to the contamination of water supplies and natural habitats in neighboring Pennsylvania. As the DEC review process proceeds and we learn more about the perils of hydrofracking, Assembly Member O'Donnell will continue to fight against the dangerous, untested drilling practice.

New O'Donnell Anti-Bullying Legislation Builds on the Dignity for All Students Act

This year Assembly Member O'Donnell introduced two new bills that will expand and strengthen his anti-bullying bill, the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA), which he successfully passed in 2010. The two new bills, **A9535** and **A9536**, grew out of legislative participation in the DASA Implementation Task Force and are intended to make DASA more effective without impeding ongoing implementation. Both bills address continuing concerns about bullying and the phenomenon popularly known as "cyber-bullying."

The first bill, **A9535**, does so by clarifying that DASA applies to bullying through electronic communication. It also specifies that the training and education required by DASA must deal with all forms of bullying whether face-to-face or through electronic media, as well as expanding and strengthening the training requirements in a manner consistent with the Task Force's discussions about how the existing training requirements should be implemented. Finally, the bill directs the Commissioner of the State Education Department (SED) to provide guidance and educational materials to local school districts that will help schools and their communities,

including students and their families, address cyber-bullying. The second bill, **A9536**, would add pre-service training requirements for teachers and other education professionals. The pre-service training must be based on educational research and is to address the educational needs of students in marginalized identity categories in ways that will prevent bullying and other forms of harassment and discrimination.

As the Dignity For All Students Act nears its July 1, 2012 effective date, Assembly Member O'Donnell continues to monitor SED's implementation efforts. He recently urged Commissioner King to re-visit SED's decision to exempt charter schools from the curriculum regulation that was adopted by the Board of Regents on March 19, 2012. SED added an exemption from DASA for charter schools without any opportunity for the Task Force to suggest an alternative. Assembly Member O'Donnell believes charter school students should have the same protections as students attending traditional public schools. In his letter, O'Donnell called on SED to act quickly and avoid implementing a two-tiered system of protections against bullying.



Assembly Member O'Donnell answering questions from students visiting the Capitol about his work on the Education Committee.

TENANT'S CORNER:

A Great Success in Fight to End "Tenant Blacklist"

At the urging of a coalition of legislators, including Assembly Member O'Donnell, as well as tenant advocates, New York's Chief Administrative Judge A. Gail Prudenti issued a statement on April 10, 2012, indicating that the New York State Unified Court System would end the practice of selling the names of individuals sued in Housing Court to tenant screening companies.

The practice of selling an electronic database of individuals named in New York City Housing Court proceedings created what is known as the "tenant blacklist." Tenants appeared in this database simply for being sued in Housing Court for non-payment of rent. Once their names appear on the list, these tenants often have severe difficulty finding landlords willing to rent to them.

The list's harmful effects extend to innocent individuals

involved in quickly dismissed, frivolous cases. Even tenants whose landlords just file claims to harass them end up on the list, as do tenants involved in honest rent disputes. Regardless of their cases' outcome, tenants are added to the list, simply because they appeared in court.

The resulting fear of being blacklisted has kept countless numbers of tenants from exercising their legal rights, such as withholding their rent in cases where essential services such as heat and hot water have not been provided by landlords for long periods of time.

With the issuance of Chief Administrative Judge Prudenti's statement, the sale of the electronic database of names ends on June 1, 2012. The "tenant blacklist" has not ended, but a great step toward justice for all residents of New York City has been made.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Upcoming Cell Phone Drive

A donated cell phone can become a lifeline for an isolated or otherwise vulnerable individual who needs to call 911, including seniors or victims of domestic violence. **SECURE THE CALL** is a charity with a single mission; to collect and convert as many old cell phones as possible into 911 emergency access phones.

Please help us support this important cause by bringing your used cell phone to **Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office, 245 W. 104th Street (bet. Broadway and West End)** any time during the month of June. For more information, please visit www.securethecall.org.

June 1-30, 2012

Assembly Member O'Donnell's 2012 Children's Book Drive a Great Success!

Assembly Member O'Donnell sends his sincere thanks to community members who donated children's books at his Community Office earlier this year. His office collected over 750 books to be donated to the nonprofit organization Project Cicero!

The collected books will be distributed by Project Cicero to public school teachers and classroom libraries across New York City.

For more information on Project Cicero, please visit www.projectcicero.org

Free Legal Clinic for Tenants

For constituents who need help with housing issues, but are unable to come to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office during the workday, Assembly Member O'Donnell hosts a monthly evening opportunity for constituents 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:
May 31st / June 28th / July 26th /
August 30th**

2012 Summer Internship Opportunity

Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office is now accepting applications for the summer internship program from individuals who are high school age or older.

To apply, please fax or email a cover letter and resume to (212) 864-1095 or eliasm@assembly.state.ny.us. For more information, please call (212) 866-3970.



Assembly Member O'Donnell meeting with constituents in his Community Office.

E-Newsletters

Sign-up for monthly e-newsletters with the latest event and community calendar information by e-mailing: odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us.

245 West 104th Street, New York, New York 10025

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COMMUNITY OFFICE INFORMATION:

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