



# Community Newsletter

## ASSEMBLY MEMBER DANIEL O'DONNELL

Manhattan Valley ■ Morningside Heights  
Upper West Side ■ West Harlem

WINTER 2014

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

Dear Neighbor,

Happy New Year! As we all gear up for 2014, I am looking back on the year behind us and brainstorming new ways to assist my constituents and further my legislative goals. I look forward to continuing the work I did in 2013, and to tackling new issues that affect our community and our state.

This year I began my work as Chair of the Assembly's Correction Committee, and have spent a lot of time visiting prisons and researching the issues that need reform most in New York. In this newsletter you can find more information on my visits and my reform efforts, especially with regard to the New York State parole system.

In addition to criminal justice reform, education, affordable housing, and equal treatment under law for all New Yorkers are among my top legislative priorities. You will find information about my community efforts in schools and on behalf of student privacy and tenants, as well as my annual health fair, further in this newsletter.

In the next few months I look forward to hosting an informational hearing about the Affordable Care Act. I was pleased to offer registration information at my annual Health Service Day in November, and I hope that those neighbors who were unable to make that event will be able to get their questions answered at this upcoming evening. Please watch for more information on that soon in my "Monthly Update" email blast. If you are interested in receiving those updates, please send me an email at [odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us) with the subject heading "subscribe."

I hope you will find this newsletter informative and useful. My staff and I are always available to assist you in my Community Office located at 245 W. 104th Street, just off Broadway, or by phone at (212) 866-3970. 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 available to help every day. I look forward to seeing you out in the community this winter!

Very truly yours,

*Daniel O'Donnell*



Assembly Member O'Donnell chats with constituents at a neighborhood greenmarket. Photo © Lisa Novitsky Photography.

## Assembly Member O'Donnell's 2013 Year in Review

2013 was a busy year for Assembly Member O'Donnell, who took on increased responsibility in the Assembly as the Chair of the Correction Committee, pursued his longstanding advocacy on behalf of New York's students and LGBT Americans, and expanded his office's constituent assistance work.

In the community this year, Assembly Member O'Donnell and his staff worked hard to solve the problems brought to the office by constituents and stakeholders. O'Donnell responded to thousands of emails, and his staff helped hundreds of constituents with problems ranging from eviction notices to complaints of late tax refunds. He hosted a successful book drive this winter, collecting over 2,000 books for under-resourced City public schools, as well as a cell phone drive for senior citizens and victims of domestic violence. His two popular health fairs drew crowds of constituents to get free flu shots; glucose, HIV, Hepatitis C, and other screenings; and important health information. This spring's Annual Community Reading Challenge was even more exciting than ever, with three popular children's authors and illustrators entertaining children who attended book festivals at local libraries. O'Donnell looks forward to hosting all of these events and more in 2014!

### In the Community

Constituents sometimes ask Assembly Member O'Donnell what issues he can best help them with. One of the best ways to answer this question is to give a snapshot of what O'Donnell successfully did this year:

- Worked with a same-sex couple to ensure both spouses would be covered by a Verizon Wireless retiree health plan, and convinced Verizon to change its national policy on this issue;
- Helped senior citizens who had been kicked off Medicaid and Social Security get reinstated, re-stabilizing their finances and enabling them to afford their living expenses;
- Helped an elderly constituent restore her AARP Prescription Coverage and obtain back pay for the time she was wrongly uncovered;
- Assisted constituents in navigating the Department of Labor system and qualifying for unemployment insurance;
- Linked constituents with help to sign up for the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare);
- Prevented evictions and effected necessary repairs for constituents by negotiating with landlords, advocating on tenants' behalf in housing court, and connecting them with further helpful resources;
- Helped constituents restore internet and telephone service after lengthy service interruptions and outages;
- Assisted elderly and disabled constituents in filling out SCRIE (Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption) and DRIE (Disability Rent Increase Exemption) forms to freeze their rent and stay in their homes;
- Got inspectors sent to apartment buildings lacking heat and hot water, ensured violations were issued, and monitored the situation until the problem was dealt with;

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## Assembly Member O'Donnell's 2013 Year in Review

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- Assisted constituents with applications for the STAR and Co-op/Condo Tax Abatements;
- Worked with DOT on a constituent's behalf to remove a dangerous concrete traffic bell.

### In Albany

Five of Assembly Member O'Donnell's bills were successfully signed into law this year, on topics ranging from parole board reform to education to expanding the availability of the meningitis vaccine in response to a recent deadly outbreak. One more bill awaits the Governor's signature, and nine of O'Donnell's bills passed one house of the Legislature. Recently, thanks to a bill of his that allowed a volunteer parent advisory council—the Citywide Council on English Language Learners (CCELL)—to elect parents of former English Language Learners (ELLs) as well as parents of current ELLs to their body, the CCELL successfully convened a quorum at their December meeting for the first time in 2013. Also, O'Donnell's bill A6059, which passed the Assembly this year, was featured at a hearing held this November on student privacy (turn the page for more information).

As the new Corrections Committee Chair, Assembly Member O'Donnell has spent the year familiarizing himself with the state of the correctional system and beginning to take action on much-needed reforms. Since January, Assembly Member O'Donnell has visited twelve of New York State's correctional facilities, including Bedford, Coxsackie, Eastern, Fishkill, Great Meadow, Hudson, Shawangunk, Sing Sing, Sullivan, Taconic, Washington, and Woodbourne, as well as one New York City prison, Riker's Island. The Assembly Member spoke to inmates, correctional staff, nurses, psychiatrists, and many other stakeholders. In his visits, Assembly Member O'Donnell has also seen the educational and vocational programs available. He believes this type of programming is crucial to providing inmates with the tools they need to successfully rehabilitate and make a positive contribution to society, and will fight for increased funding and access to such inmate programs across the state.

He is a strong proponent of expanding our geriatric parole regulations, so that the very elderly and sick can spend their limited remaining time with their loved ones.

The Assembly Member looks forward to visiting more correctional facilities in 2014, and attending parole hearings. He expects to pursue various pieces of legislation based on his visits in the upcoming Assembly session.

Finally, with the 2014 Assembly session fast approaching, O'Donnell encourages constituents to reach out with their priorities for the coming session. He always welcomes suggestions!



*Assembly Member O'Donnell presides over an Assembly Corrections Committee Hearing on Parole Reform, December 4, 2013.*

## O'Donnell looks ahead to another year of prison reform efforts

As Chair of the Correction Committee, Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell is committed to advancing progressive legislation to improve notable deficiencies in our criminal justice system. His particular emphasis in 2014 will be on improving parole practices, banning solitary confinement for prisoners under the age of 21, increasing access to higher education for prisoners, and removing barriers to re-entry into society.

Since the adoption of more stringent prosecution policies in the 1970s, American prison populations have exploded. The U.S. now has the most citizens behind bars of any developed nation – New York State alone spends nearly \$3 billion a year to maintain our correctional system, and recidivism (the rate of return to prison) is nearly 40 percent. Yet studies show that the majority of parolees return for technical violations of parole, not new crimes, raising questions about the efficacy of the current system. Assembly Member O'Donnell is committed to reducing these numbers by improving our parole policies.

Assembly Member O'Donnell held a hearing on the New York State Parole Board on December 4, 2013, where he heard from the Commissioners of the Board of Parole and the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, as well as leaders in the field of correctional reform and law. He was joined by Assembly Members Aubry, Giglio, Ortiz, and Sepulveda at the hearing. As O'Donnell stated at the hearing, he finds that there are times when the current system is “just plain stupid.” He plans to introduce legislation that will increase parole release of deserving inmates, and he will advocate for better parole practices such as improved case management and transition planning.

Also on his agenda are plans to advance legislation banning solitary confinement for prisoners under the age of 21 in both jails and prisons. Despite research indicating that the brains of individuals this young have not yet fully matured and use different neurological pathways for decision-making than those of adults, teens are subject to the same prolonged disciplinary sanctions, including solitary confinement.

Assembly Member O'Donnell is also determined to increase the availability of higher education in prison. The majority of New York's prison population has little education beyond high school, and little opportunity for educational advancement while incarcerated. But research shows higher education helps reduce recidivism and gives the formerly incarcerated the tools they need to become fully-functioning members of society and leaders in their communities. O'Donnell is working with existing programs, like that of Bard College, to expand their availability.

Lastly, Assembly Member O'Donnell is dedicated to reducing the stigma of incarceration that cripples many offenders upon their release. Despite paying their debts to society, criminal records can prevent past offenders from accessing housing, continuing education and training, and finding jobs. Assembly Member O'Donnell hopes to streamline the processes ex-offenders must go through to obtain Certificates of Relief, and expand the Correction Law in order to prevent discrimination.



*Assembly Member O'Donnell reads to children at the Stephen Gaynor School, a school for children with learning disabilities. O'Donnell loves going to schools and hearing directly from students about their experiences, and never turns down an invitation to visit.*

## O'Donnell's Annual Health Service Day at the Children's Aid Society a great success!

Assembly Member O'Donnell recently hosted his annual Community Health Service Day at Children's Aid Society – Frederick Douglass, bringing healthcare information and services to about 100 people in our neighborhood. He partnered with numerous community organizations to offer free flu shots; HIV and Hepatitis C testing; eye and dental screenings; blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose testing; and much more to the residents of the Douglass Houses and the surrounding area.

Assembly Member O'Donnell thanks everyone who came out to the event and all the community organizations that donated their personnel, supplies, time, and effort to this wonderful and worthwhile occasion.



*Frederick Douglass Houses Tenants Association President Jane Wisdom (left) and Community Activist Carmen Quiñones (right) at Assembly Member O'Donnell's Annual Health Service Day at Children's Aid Society – Frederick Douglass.*

## O'Donnell continues fighting to protect students' privacy

As the only Manhattan member of the Assembly Education Committee, Assembly Member O'Donnell pays particular attention to how policies affect New York students, especially those in Manhattan and our community. He is continuing his work to prevent the online disclosure of personally identifiable student information by schools, school districts and the New York State Education Department (SED) to private corporations.

Recently, SED has entered into a contract with a non-profit data collection corporation, inBloom, Inc., to collect and store highly valuable and sensitive data on New York State students. This information would be stored online indefinitely, and inBloom does not guarantee its safety on "the cloud." Even more appallingly, inBloom's operating system was built by Wireless Generation, a division of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp, which was found to have violated privacy laws in Great Britain and the United States.

There is little guarantee that this new system will create effective, personalized learning environments, and serious doubts among advocates as to how the information currently being collected can be meaningfully used in instruction. Assembly Member O'Donnell and many of his colleagues believe that this plan is a direct violation of student privacy rights, and must be stopped.

To this end, Assembly Member O'Donnell has introduced Assembly Bill A6059A, which would block disclosures of student data

without affirmative parental consent and require full indemnification for any breaches. The bill is supported by the New York City Council via a resolution, dozens of fellow Assembly Members, and several State Senators. Assembly Education Committee Chair Catherine Nolan has also introduced Assembly Bill A7872A, which would allow parents the right to opt out of the state or district sharing their child's data with third parties. Both O'Donnell's and Nolan's bills passed the Assembly in the spring of 2013, and await the Senate's action.

At a November 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly Education Committee Hearing hosted by Chair Nolan, parents voiced their concerns that they will not have the ability to opt out of this system, which puts their children's most sensitive data – including name, address, test scores, disability status, attendance and suspension records, and more – in the "cloud" database. Commissioner John King claims that allowing parents to opt out would make the day-to-day running of the school system nearly impossible, despite the fact that other states contracting with inBloom were willing to allow parents this simple input. A great majority of speakers at the hearing, including representatives from organizations such as the New York Civil Liberties Union, Class Size Matters, and the Croton-Harmon School Board expressed overwhelming opposition to the use of inBloom.

As the debate continues, Assembly Member O'Donnell will fight to protect and support our students and schools in any way he can.

## NYCHA residents: Know your rights!

### Adding Family Members to Leases

Assembly Member O'Donnell's office is often contacted by residents of public housing (NYCHA) who want assistance adding a family member to their lease. While this is possible to do, there are a few important considerations to keep in mind.

First, when a family member moves in with you, they should be added to your lease as soon as possible. This can protect you from being threatened with eviction for having an unauthorized person in your apartment. Adding family members also ensures that those who are added will have the right to continue to live in the apartment if you leave. However, it is important to note that **adding a family member to your lease may cause your rent to rise**. This is unfortunately unavoidable, due to NYCHA rents being based on household income. However, to protect yourself from eviction, it is important to add all residents to the lease.

To add a family member to your lease, the head of household should visit your Management Office and ask for a "Permanent Permission Request Form." When you complete the Permanent Permission Request Form, make two copies of the form and any documents you attach to the form. Remember to have the copy you keep for yourself stamped "received" by your Housing Assistant.

The following is a list of family members who can be added to the lease:

- **Husband/wife;**
- **Son/daughter (including those who are adopted);**
- **Stepson/stepdaughter;**
- **Brother/sister (including half-brother/sister);**
- **Grandfather/grandmother;**
- **Grandson/granddaughter;**
- **Son-in-law/daughter-in-law;**
- **Father-in-law/mother-in-law;**
- **A person registered as the domestic partner of the head of household; and**
- **A person who is the legal ward (legal guardianship) of the head of household.**

In addition to this list, anyone who was part of the household and whose name was on the lease when the family first moved into the NYCHA apartment (but who subsequently moved out and had their name removed from the lease) can also be added to the lease again.

NYCHA has the right to deny your application if the family member on your application does not pass the criminal background check or, if in adding a family member, your apartment would become overcrowded.

If your application to add a family member to your lease is denied, or if you have questions about this process, please contact Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office for assistance.

## Free 2014 NYC Parking Calendar

Assembly Member O'Donnell's office has copies of his annual parking calendar. It helps make sense of NYC's complicated alternate-side parking regulations!

If you would like a free copy, you can come pick one up in the Community Office at 245 West 104th Street or call the office at 212-866-3970 to request that one be mailed to you. It is also available on Assembly Member O'Donnell's website at <http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Daniel-J-O'Donnell/postings/>.

## Assembly Member O'Donnell's Upcoming FREE Legal Clinics

For constituents who need help with legal 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.

Call Joyce at 212-866-3970 to make an appointment.

Upcoming clinic dates:

Jan. 30<sup>th</sup> • Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> • Mar. 27<sup>th</sup> • April 24<sup>th</sup>

## ¡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.

## Internships Available

Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office is accepting applications for the spring 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 [wilsonc@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:wilsonc@assembly.state.ny.us).

For more information, please call (212) 866-3970 and ask for Callie.

## E-Newsletters

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 [odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us).

### Daniel O'Donnell's Community Newsletter

Assembly Member ■ 69<sup>th</sup> District  
Manhattan Valley • Morningside Heights  
Upper West Side • West Harlem



#### COMMUNITY OFFICE INFORMATION:

Open Monday through Friday  
9:00 AM - 5:30 PM  
(212) 866-3970  
[odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us)

## 2014 Children's Book Drive Is Around the Corner

Assembly Member Daniel O'Donnell is starting his annual Children's Book Drive to benefit Project Cicero, on Thursday, January 2nd, running through the end of February. Last year, the drive collected over 2,000 books—help him beat that record!

Project Cicero distributes books to under-resourced New York City public schools, homeless shelters, community centers, juvenile detention facilities, and preschool and after-school programs. On their behalf, O'Donnell's office will be accepting new and gently

used books in excellent condition at early-reader to high school reading levels. Project Cicero does NOT accept textbooks, books for adults, or discarded books from school libraries, so the Community Office is also unable to accept them. For more information on Project Cicero, please visit [www.projectcicero.org](http://www.projectcicero.org).

Please bring book donations to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office at 245 West 104th Street (between Broadway and West End), Monday through Friday, between 9:30 A.M. and 5:30 P.M.

# Welcome!

Assembly Member O'Donnell welcomes a new staff member, **Elana Shneyer**, to his Community Office. Elana is serving as Policy Director.