



Assemblymember **Tony Simone**

Community Office

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Community and Budget Update

Dear Neighbor,

I am excited to send you my first newsletter, which focuses on community issues and the NYS budget. I decided to take the next step in my career in public service to help New York City become more livable, equitable, and healthy & safe for all New Yorkers. Dick Gottfried diligently served this community and our state for over 50 years. As your Assemblymember, I plan to continue the moral progressive leadership that he established.

Before I was elected, I called out a number of issues threatening our neighborhoods including the affordable housing crisis, crime, the lack of care for individuals with serious mental illness, threats to the LGBTQ+ community, and the destruction of our environment.

While I am proud of the progress we've made on these issues, these changes are not nearly enough and I plan to continue to fervently work towards solutions. We all need to work hard to beat back attempts to undo advances in human and civil rights including the attacks on LGBTQ+ people, and the attacks on reproductive rights by conservative legislators and judges around the country. New York will always remain a state where abortion and gender affirming care is accessible, but we must also build capacity for the people who travel here from states where they cannot get the healthcare they need.

Since my term began on January 1, I have introduced 28

bills, ranging from banning a heliport in the Hudson River Park, to protecting interns from discrimination based on their gender identity, to conserving our offshore shark populations, to increasing the standards of the food our pets eat, to regulating emerging biometric surveillance technology. Six of my bills passed the Assembly and Senate, and my first bill signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul (A.2890/S.823) addresses the unconscionable delays in processing the applications of people who apply for services from the NY State Office of People with Developmental Disabilities.

My Community Office at 214 West 29th Street, 212-807-7900, SimoneT@nyassembly.gov is here to help you in any way we can. Please contact us if you're having a problem with a government agency, your landlord, a utility, or if you have concerns about the neighborhood. We can help you.

Please also contact me if you would like me or my staff to come to a community meeting and to share your opinion about legislation.

Sincerely yours,

Tony Simone

My Inauguration

On March 4, we filled the Fulton Community Center with friends, neighbors and colleagues for my inauguration ceremony. It was such an honor to be sworn in by Attorney General Tish James and be introduced by leaders like Senator Chuck Schumer, Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, Speaker Carl Heastie, Congressman Jerry Nadler, Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, Councilmember Erik Bottcher and my predecessor, Dick Gottfried.

It was an exciting way to celebrate the work we have accomplished so far and set our sights on the great challenges we have ahead of us.



I affirmed my oath of office at Hudson Guild Fulton Senior Center with Attorney General Tish James while my husband, Jason Coughlin, holds the United States Constitution for me to place my hand on.

UPDATE ON COMMUNITY ISSUES

Public Safety and Working with the District Attorney



I joined District Attorney Alvin Bragg and my colleagues State Senators Brad Hoylman-Sigal & Robert Jackson, Councilmembers Gale Brewer & Eric Bottcher, CB4 member Joe Restuccia and others to announce a multi-million-dollar initiative to connect people in need with comprehensive support services, including housing assistance and treatment for mental illness and substance use disorders, to keep them and our fellow New Yorkers safe. This program will include preventative neighborhood-based interventions and intervention immediately after criminal court arraignment.

To many, our streets do not feel as safe as they did before the pandemic. I am meeting regularly with my fellow elected officials, Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office, our local police precincts, city agencies, and local residents to find solutions to public safety issues in our community. I joined my fellow elected officials to urge the city to form a special task force involving relevant agencies with the local community to address the public safety and quality-of-life issues on Eighth Avenue, which has seen especially difficult problems over the past couple of years.

Cracking Down on Illegal Cannabis Stores

Since the legalization of cannabis, over 1,400 illegal cannabis stores have opened and are not operating under any regulations. They don't consistently check IDs, they sell products that are not tested or regulated, and their products are marketed to kids. Their existence goes against the social justice goals of legalization that provided licenses to stores operated by those impacted from criminalization of marijuana.

If you see a store operating in an unsafe manner without a license, contact our office and we will request that it be shut down. Or, you can do this by visiting www.cannabis.ny.gov/report-an-incident. The Office of Cannabis Management can now impose fines of up to \$20,000 a day and can padlock the store.

Banned from Rangers Game for Opposing Facial Recognition Technology

Ensuring Access to Public Venues

After learning that Madison Square Garden and Radio City Music Hall had been using facial recognition technology to bar legal adversaries from entering, State Senator Hoylman-Sigal and I introduced legislation, A.3195/S.2424 to make it illegal to refuse entry to any public performances for ticketholders over the age of 21.

In an act of retaliation I was disinvited from dropping the puck at a Rangers game - an event meant to highlight the team's efforts towards LGBTQ inclusion in sports.

As a sports arena meant to accommodate the public that receives public benefits and subsidies, it is outrageous that the owner would try to deny admission to his legal adversaries.

Biometric technology as a whole has been found to have high error rates when analyzing the faces of people of color. Racially biased

Protecting Our Streets, Preventing Violent Crime and Gun Violence

To prevent violent incidents in our neighborhoods, I fought to secure over \$110 million in anti-gun violence funding in the state budget. This includes funding to tackle illegal gun shipments and assist police with crime surges, and \$31 million for youth outreach and gang prevention programs.

E-Bike Safety

While e-bikes have been an important alternative to gasoline powered vehicles, we must ensure that they are safely operated. Many e-bike users, who are often making deliveries, have been illegally using the sidewalks. To combat this, I am introducing legislation to require commercial e-bikes to be registered and display a license plate. This bill will pass all fines for using the sidewalk on to the delivery worker's employer.

Protecting Retail Workers

The increase in larceny cases in New York City and around the state has hit independent supermarkets, bodegas, grocers, and mom & pop retail shops hard. That is why they formed Collective Action to Protect Our Stores (CAPS), which represents over 10,000 businesses. Organized theft and repeat offenders are pervasive and impact the safety of the worker and the community, besides hurting the livelihoods of the workers and store owners.

To protect retail workers, I co-sponsored three bills: the Retail Workers Protection Act (A.5260/S.5470), which would make it a class D felony to assault a retail worker; A.1504/S.1644, which makes the sale of stolen goods a felony; and A.4121/S.4448 which raises a repeat larceny offense within two years to grand larceny in the fourth degree.



I joined advocates, other elected officials and hundreds of CAPS members in the State Capitol Building to draw attention to the increase in retail larceny cases.

technology should not be used in spaces of public accommodation which is why I joined with Senator Hoylman-Sigal in introducing A.7625/S.7135 to ban the use of this technology.



We condemned the practice at a press conference with other elected officials in front of the Garden and in an act of retaliation the Garden disinvited me from dropping the puck at a Rangers game; an event meant to highlight the team's efforts towards LGBTQ inclusion in sports.

Update on Penn Station and Madison Square Garden

I have long opposed the plan that called for several huge office towers to fund the expansion and improvement of Penn Station. Thankfully, Governor Hochul has scrapped that plan.

My op-ed in the Daily News calls for a new strategy to pay for a new Penn Station. The state should continue the improvements happening now by maintaining the flow of state funds. We in the Legislature could then authorize bonds to pay for the work without relying on future property tax revenue from new development. By taking those steps, the state will position itself to tap into federal infrastructure dollars that could cover up to 80% of the total project costs.

Last century, our leaders failed us when they destroyed the great former Penn Station and left us with something far less grand and far less accommodating to New Yorkers. This is the time to fix that mistake, not repeat it.

We have seen a number of ideas for a new plan come from the private sector and Madison Square Garden is open to selling its theater on Eighth Avenue, which will help to improve the station, but not as much as if the Garden was to move. While there are more questions than answers, one thing is clear, we have moved the conversation away from the old Cuomo real estate plan and are heading towards a conversation focused on the actual station.

I am eager to work with the Governor, the community, I am eager to work with the Governor, the community, and my colleagues on a new plan that works for our community and delivers the transportation infrastructure upgrade we desperately need.



In the Legislative Office Building's hearing room for my first state budget hearing, sitting next to Senate Finance Chair, Liz Krueger. I took this opportunity to question Empire State Development on why the State was pursuing a plan that has no local support and which has increasingly unreliable funding plans.

Casinos in Manhattan

There are many proposals for a casino in Manhattan. While I am against a casino in Manhattan, I will look at all these proposals closely. No proposal should come to pass without clear support from the community and once the local advisory committee begins its work, that process will be informed by the community.

It's clear that any proposal has a massive hill to climb to win the local support that is required for approval and as details emerge on actual proposals, I look forward to hearing your thoughts as this process unfolds.

For a proposal to move forward, it will have to get majority support from the local Casino Community Advisory Committee, made up of the Governor, Mayor, Manhattan Borough President, State Senator, Assemblymember and Councilmember.



I joined Councilmember Gale Brewer, Community Board 4 Chair Jeffrey LeFrancois, CB4 members Joe Restuccia and Leslie Murphy and State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal and other CB4 members in support of CB4's Affordable Housing Plan, which would generate over 30,000 units of new housing and bring wide bands of affordable housing to the community.



Assemblymember Grace Lee, community members and I came out to support programs that teach our children the value of inclusivity at an event hosted by Attorney General Tish James. Thank you everyone who joined us to celebrate love, joy, and fantastic storytelling.



On Earth Day, I joined residents of Penn South, the W400 Block Association and the Hell's Kitchen Litter Legion for cleanups, flower planting and lessons on how to keep our Earth clean.



Writers generate billions of dollars for the TV and film studios every year and create the art that connects us to each other. Our culture would not be the same without them, and they deserve a fair contract with a living wage! That's why I joined the picket line in Times Square with Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, State Senator Kristen Gonzalez and Councilmember Erik Bottcher.

NEW YORK STATE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

The recently enacted NYS budget made great strides toward improving local schools, combating climate change, safeguarding our environment, and supporting working families. That's exciting progress, but the work is far from finished, and I'll continue doing what I can to help our region thrive.

Ensuring High-quality Education and Expanding Access to Child Care

This budget invests heavily in expanding access to affordable, high-quality child care and after-school programs, ensuring that children are safely looked after while their parents are at work. We also successfully pushed to expand the Child Tax Credit to include families with children age 4 years old and younger. The final budget also provides:

- \$150 million in new funding for Universal Pre-K
- \$135 million to provide free school meals for 300,000 more students
- \$100 million for public libraries
- SUNY and CUNY will receive a combined \$5 billion in operating and capital support, and students will not have tuition increases.

Inflation Relief and Support for Working Families

The budget allocated \$391 million in much-needed funding toward affordable housing, covering COVID-era arrears through ERAP (the Emergency Rental Assistance Program) for NYCHA, Section 8 and other subsidized tenants. We also raised the minimum wage! In NYC, Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester the minimum wage will be \$16.00 starting January 1, 2024 and \$17.00 on January 1, 2026. Beginning 2027, these wages will be annually indexed to inflation. And we continued the phase-in of personal income tax cuts for working and middle-class families - taxes are now the lowest they have been in over 70 years.



Speaking at a pay parity press conference urging cost-of-living adjustments for human service workers with State Senator Jessica Ramos and advocates.

Protecting Our Environment and Combating Climate Change

To protect our environment, I helped deliver a sensible, forward-thinking plan for most new buildings to be powered by electricity instead of fossil fuels beginning 2026. The budget also funds a lead abatement program and lead service line replacements and includes \$400 million for the Environmental Protection Fund, \$500 million for clean water infrastructure, and \$200 million for energy-efficiency upgrades.

Improving Healthcare Accessibility and Quality

The budget provided a much-needed Medicaid rate increase to hospitals and nursing homes (and additional funding for distressed hospitals), increased access to home care services, cost of living and wage increase for health care workers, and funding to support subsidized health insurance.

Supporting the Arts

Our district is home to Broadway, Times Square, and countless theater, dance, and arts companies and organizations. The arts are a massive economic driver in New York, and are the beating heart of my district.

The budget also expanded the Film Tax Credit to incentivize filmmakers to bring their productions to New York.



I joined a rally in Albany against proposed budget cuts for the New York State Council on the Arts. Eventually we were able to secure \$110 million for NYSOA to support large and small artists and organizations.

Public Safety and the Wellbeing of our Communities

The budget provides over \$1 billion in mental health services, including increased inpatient and outpatient services, expansion of school-based mental health services and establishing Daniel's Law to improve response time for mental health and substance use crises.

The budget also clarifies standards by which judges make bail determinations, allocates \$1 billion to support asylum seekers, provides \$347 million for anti-gun violence programs, and provides \$30 million for Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) social service programs, crisis intervention and community-based programs to combat bias-related crimes.

Criminal Justice Reform was supported in the budget with more funding for defense services designed to expedite the processing of serious and violent felony cases through the courts; costs for law enforcement associated with enforcing and investigating extreme risk protection orders; community safety and restorative justice programs; criminal justice programs including reentry programs, community dispute resolution centers, transitional housing, civil and criminal legal services and crime prevention programs.



Shaking hands with Brian Cunningham, a fellow freshman Assemblymember, on the first day of our first legislative session.