



# COMMUNITY NEWS

Summer 2019

from Assemblyman

# J. GARY PRETLOW

89<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

Friends,

As your representative in the New York State Assembly, I am pleased to announce that with the passing of the state budget, we have delivered a \$175.5 billion 2019-20 budget that builds on the historic progress that's already been made this year and stays true to the Assembly Majority's commitment to putting families first. An unexpected budget deficit undoubtedly posed some challenges but that did not stand in the way of crafting a budget that truly delivers for New Yorkers. This budget cares for our most vulnerable and holds true on the Assembly Majority's promise to create a fairer, more just state for all, where opportunity and success are not reserved for only the lucky few. For the student who goes to school hungry, to the commuter who's tired of getting to work late because of unreliable service to the innocent New Yorker who unfairly sat in jail for far too long, we heard you and we're looking out for you.

## BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS



### INVESTING IN OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR CHILDREN

The 2019-20 state budget continues the Assembly's commitment to expanding opportunities for our youngest New Yorkers by increasing funding for public schools by \$1 billion over last year and putting a college degree within reach for more students. The state budget provides a total of \$27.8 billion in education funding, an increase of \$1 billion – or 3.7 percent – over last year. This includes a \$618 million increase in Foundation Aid for a total of \$18.4 billion.

Further, \$30 million of uncollected lottery winnings is earmarked for public schools and districts are authorized to create a reserve fund to finance contributions to the New York State Teachers' Retirement System. This will

help more kids get started on the right foot and the spending plan also includes a \$15 million increase in funding for grants for prekindergarten, for a total of \$822 million.

The future success of our children is dependent on how we prepare them for it today. Therefore, for our schools to have adequate funding to meet the needs of every student, I am pleased to inform you that the **City of Mount Vernon Public Schools will receive a total of \$108,428,803 in state aid, an increase of 7.98% from last year which equates to \$8,017,575.**

### HIGHER EDUCATION

The Assembly Majority has long recognized how invaluable college opportunity programs are to ensuring disadvantaged New Yorkers are given a fair chance to pursue higher education. This year's state budget restores \$23.8 million to these programs which include Higher

Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK), Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP) and Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (C-STEP).

The budget also allows SUNY and CUNY schools to reduce or waive tuition for high school students enrolled in college courses, supporting those who want to get a head start on the journey to a college degree.

The budget continues the Excelsior Scholarship, which was established in 2017 and makes SUNY and CUNY schools tuition-free for eligible New Yorkers. The income eligibility threshold increases this year to \$125,000. Students who attend a private college in New York and have a family income of less than \$125,000 this year would also be eligible for a scholarship award of \$6,000.

## **DECRIMINALIZING MARIJUANA**

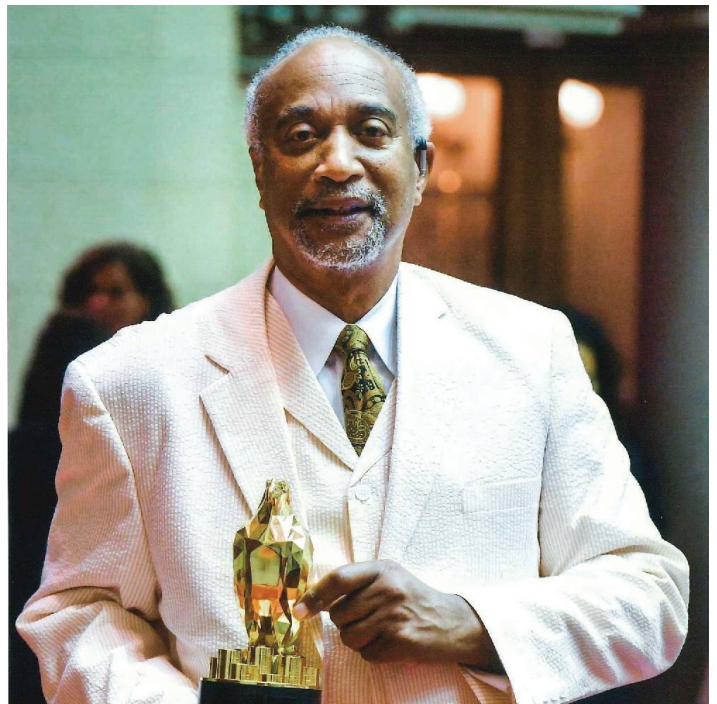
The Assembly has passed bill A.8420-A which decriminalizes possession of small amounts of marijuana and expunges the records of those with low-level convictions. This bill clarifies the previous law by defining unlawful possession in the first degree as possessing more than one ounce of marijuana which would result in a maximum of a \$200 fine. Unlawful possession of marijuana in the second degree would result in a maximum of a \$50 fine.

This bill eases the burden of New Yorkers, especially people of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the current drug laws and are living with a criminal record as a result of the possession of small amounts of marijuana. A criminal record makes the process of finding employment, housing and obtaining other basic services difficult. To rectify that injustice, the legislation would expunge the records of those with certain misdemeanor marijuana-related records and or charges.

## **BANNING PLASTIC BAGS**

The widespread use of single-use plastic bags is wasteful, unnecessary and puts our marine life and our environment at risk. They also take decades to decompose. New York State has been a strong leader in fighting the very real and present threat of climate change and tackling the scourge of plastic bags is another step the Assembly is taking in protecting our environment.

To clean up our neighborhoods and waterways, the 2019-20 state budget implements a statewide ban on single-use plastic bags given out by grocery stores and



other retailers. The proposal also authorizes counties and cities to impose a 5-cent fee on paper carryout bags, with 40 percent of the fee going back to the municipalities to help distribute reusable bags and 60 percent going toward the Environmental Protection Fund. Low-income New Yorkers who qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) services will be exempt from the paper bag surcharge.

If you would like to see if you're eligible for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) please contact [mybenefits.ny.gov](http://mybenefits.ny.gov) or you can contact our office for more information.

It's up to us to undo years of damage from pollution so that our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have clean water to drink, healthy air to breathe and fertile land to use. This legislation is a strong step in the right direction. I'll always work to implement a policy that protects our natural resources and wildlife now and for generations to come.

## **RAISING THE TOBACCO PURCHASING AGE**

New York becomes the eighth state to raise the tobacco purchasing age to 21. The new law states that the key to reducing the number of smokers in New York is to stop them before they start. Under the new law, retailers who sell tobacco products to anyone under 21 could be faced with a fine as high as \$2,500 and face the revocation of their license to sell the items.



Each year 53,000 kids under 18 become regular smokers, many taking their first puff before starting high school. The legislation passed will help curb dependence on cigarettes, chewing tobacco and other highly addictive products that cause horrible diseases and premature death.

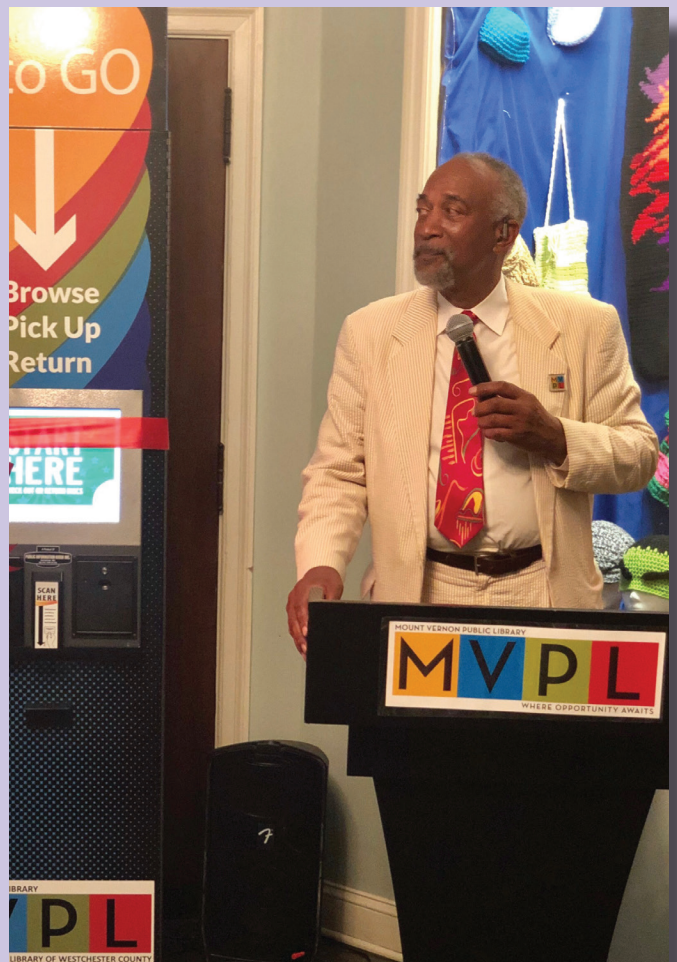
Tobacco use remains the most preventable cause of death and disease in the United States. Approximately 480,000 people die from smoking-related deaths each year. Also, 41,000 people die from secondhand smoke annually. One cigarette can be all it takes to become addicted for life. Raising the age will curb tobacco and electronic cigarette use among youth by making them less available and will help to create healthier communities.

## SMOKE DETECTOR LAW

A Smoke Detector Law was originally passed on January 1, 2017, but was amended to go into effect on April 1, 2019. The bill went into effect this year and requires newly installed smoke detectors to be powered by a non-removable battery that lasts for 10 years or it must be hardwired to the home's electricity.

These upgraded smoke detectors cost more than the ones you may still have but you will no longer have to continually buy new batteries, which saves consumers money in the long run. Note that the law doesn't require smoke detectors that are already in use to be in compliance but when you install or replace one it has to be the detectors with a non-removal battery.

## 89<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS



**CLIP AND RETURN**



*Your questions or comments are important to me. If you have any concerns or issues you would like to discuss with me, please indicate and return to:*

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow, 89<sup>th</sup> District**  
6 Gramatan Avenue, Suite 201, Mt. Vernon, New York 10550

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*from Assemblyman*  
**J. Gary  
PRETLOW**

**SUMMER 2019**

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow**



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