



Assemblyman Steve Otis



Legislative Update

Winter 2023-2024

Dear Friends,

The end of the year provides an opportunity to highlight some of the work of 2023 that brought success on priority issues important to Sound Shore communities and the entire state.

Two of my most important bills were signed into law. This newsletter shares details of the Living Shorelines bill that provides one way to reduce flood impacts in coastal communities and my legislation to expand access to AED (automated external defibrillator) equipment that will save lives in youth sports programs.

The multi-year effort to bring full funding of state school aid through “Foundation Aid” was achieved in the adopted state budget. Efforts to enhance state funding to school districts will continue. We had another year of \$500 million in state funding for water quality projects, the most robust state clean water program in the nation. We had a win in assisting EMS workers in qualifying for the state health insurance program with more comprehensive EMS reforms high on the agenda for 2024.

This newsletter also highlights some of my work as chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee which include digital inclusion, cybersecurity and personal privacy.

I also continue to devote my energies on a variety of education, environmental and human service issues.

Printed and digital versions of this newsletter are available in Spanish online and by calling my office. Versiones impresas y digitales de este boletín están disponibles en español en línea y llamando a mi oficina. My office is available to help you with individual issues you may have with state agencies or other entities. Those issues may also offer ideas for changes in the law. Please feel free to call my district office at 914-939-7028 if I may be of assistance.

It is an honor and privilege to serve the Sound Shore on the many issues facing families, local governments, not-for-profits, and small businesses. These are challenging times for democracy and humanity. The holiday season is a time to treasure family, friends, and our community. Please accept my good wishes for you and your family and for health and happiness during the New Year.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman



Living Shorelines Legislation Signed into Law

There are many strategies and tools available to lessen the impact of extreme storms and flood damage. We received good news in September with Governor Hochul’s approval of the “Living Shorelines” bill I sponsored with State Senator Shelley Mayer. Our legislation establishes in law a preference for nature-based solutions for stabilizing tidal shorelines when the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation makes permitting decisions.

This is a win for more effective coastal resiliency and flood mitigation because nature-based solutions are generally more effective at reducing damage caused by extreme storms and sea level rise. In many locations, wetland vegetation or natural materials and soils buffer water impacts more effectively than a fixed sea wall. Living shoreline principles are vital to improving coastal resiliency, reducing flood impacts, preventing shoreline erosion and protecting natural habitats.

In the two-year effort to pass this legislation, Senator Mayer and I had great partners in the environmental community, including Save the Sound, Riverkeeper, and The Nature Conservancy as well as NYS DEC, which is a strong supporter of these principles. To announce signing of the legislation, we held a press conference at a coastal site in Mamaroneck that has already used these principles to improve the property’s shoreline. If a natural solution is not appropriate for a location, the bill preserves the agency’s ability to approve the correct treatment for the site (A.5221A /S.5186A; Chapter 487 of the Laws of 2023).

AED Youth Sports Bill Approved

I am very excited to report that legislation I sponsored with State Senator Shelley Mayer to expand the use and availability of AED (automated external defibrillator) equipment by youth sports programs and camps has been signed into law by Governor Hochul. AED equipment saves lives in cases of Sudden Cardiac Arrest and the equipment is already required at school buildings.

This issue was brought to my attention by Rye Brook residents, Alice Schoen and Dana Colasante, founders of the group “Saving Active Hearts,” which is dedicated to improving AED equipment availability, training, and accessibility in youth sports. Also supporting the legislation was Westchester Medical Center’s Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital, which is part of the national group Project Adam that advocates on AED access issues.

The importance of the issue gained wider attention nationally after Buffalo Bills player Damar Hamlin was saved by the immediate use of an AED after he suffered a Sudden Cardiac Arrest during a January game against the Cincinnati Bengals. The goal of our legislation is to have this equipment available at youth sports games and practices. The bill directs most youth sports programs and camps to draft an implementation plan for incorporating AED equipment into their first aid preparedness.

The bill allows sports groups to develop implementation plans without immediate deadlines, thereby providing time for programs to come up with a workable timetable to provide coverage.

Eighty percent of incidents of Sudden Cardiac Arrest in youth sports settings result in fatalities. Many of those deaths can be prevented through immediate application of AED and CPR emergency treatment. This legislation will save lives (A.366/S.7424; Chapter 681 of the Laws of 2023).

Flood Mitigation Work on the Sound Shore

Flood mitigation issues and assisting local governments with mitigation challenges have been a priority of mine in every community on the Sound Shore. I have worked closely with municipal, state, and federal representatives to better advocate for flood mitigation responses and secure grant opportunities to complete flood mitigation work.

My goal is to help communities secure funding, help them navigate various state and federal agencies and promote intermunicipal cooperation as most flood areas exist in watersheds that encompass multiple communities.

State Funding for Mamaroneck US Army Corps of Engineers Flood Project

In the state budget adopted in April, Senator Shelley Mayer and I had New York State's \$17.5 million share of the long-planned US Army Corps of Engineers Mamaroneck Flood project included in a single appropriation in the final budget. This action removed the problem of state agencies having to identify and assign funds from various state programs to cover the state's share of the project.

Flood Buyout Program in Rye Brook

After Hurricane Ida, Senator Mayer and I brought a federal flood buyout program to Westchester. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program had previously been used successfully in Oneida County. The NRCS shared the details of the program with many Westchester communities that suffered flood loss with the assistance of NYS DEC. Successful participation requires potential buyout properties to be in close proximity to one another with the goal of removing structures from the floodplain in a contiguous area. Ideal properties are repetitive loss parcels grouped together.

Rye Brook had the most properties likely to qualify for the NRCS program, and the village government did a tremendous job of taking the time to work with residents and the federal officials on the many steps to get to the point where 22 properties are eligible for federal buyout. Appraisals will be completed by the end of the year. Homeowners will have the choice of accepting or rejecting buyout at the pre-Hurricane Ida price.

The staff of the NRCS, a unit of the USDA, have been exceptional to work with and I am very pleased that these homeowners will have the choice of leaving properties that have experienced severe flood damage in numerous storms.

State Grants Important to All Sound Shore Communities

In other flood mitigation news, I am supporting high quality applications by the City of New Rochelle for long-term sanitary sewer, stormwater flood mitigation, and drainage infrastructure improvements in the Lincoln Avenue/Memorial Highway area and another to address undersized stormwater infrastructure in the Pelham Road area.

The Town of Mamaroneck and the City of Rye have been awarded grants to help fund bridge replacements that will improve water flow in flood prone areas. The Village of Port Chester has been awarded state and federal funding towards their Downtown Sanitary Sewer Revitalization Project. Rye is receiving grant funding for stormwater projects.

I was also able to secure grant funding to assist with the rebuilding of Mamaroneck's Community Resource Center (CRC) that was flooded out of their campus by Hurricane Ida. Even as a displaced flood victim, CRC has continued to provide services to the community at St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Mamaroneck.

Every community on the Sound Shore has been awarded grant funding from the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) program I helped establish in 2015.

Stormwater Grant Program

We also look forward to the launch of the new statewide stormwater grant program I initiated that will help municipalities fund expensive stormwater projects included in the Environmental Bond Act approved by the voters last year. Stormwater grants will help municipalities fund needed, often required, projects and reduce the cost to local taxpayers while meeting the important goals of the environmental bond act.



In September, the Carver Center and the Port Chester/Rye NAACP hosted a NY Citizen Preparedness Training Program, which provided residents with the tools and resources to prepare and respond to natural disasters. The presentation was organized by the NYS Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES). If you would like a copy of the informative booklet, "Emergency Information Handbook", distributed at the session, please contact my District Office at 914-939-7028. I am pictured here with sponsors and presenters at the informative session.

Cybersecurity A Priority - Bill Signed Into Law

As Chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee, I focus on a number of fast moving issues where governments, whether nations or states, are challenged to keep laws ahead of the evolution of issues in the real world. Cybersecurity is one of those issues.

Legislation I sponsored to strengthen New York State's protection of critical infrastructure facilities was signed into law by Governor Hochul. The bill enhances state agency review of facilities related to energy generation and transmission, storage of hazardous substances, and pipeline and transmission facilities related to commercial aviation, petroleum, and natural gas fuel. The new law builds upon a 2022 statute aimed at critical infrastructure that I co-sponsored (A.7364/S.7414, Chapter 417 of the Laws of 2023).

I have also advocated for more state assistance to smaller local governments and school districts. Counties and some larger cities are already receiving technical assistance on cyber security issues. I would like to see NYS expand state support on cybercrime prevention and response.

New State Cyber Plan

I was very pleased to see this approach was included in the newly released NYS Cybersecurity Strategy Plan that provides a new unified blueprint for organizing state government's efforts. The plan builds upon the Hochul Administration's earlier initiatives, such as creating the Joint Security Operations Center (JSOC). This unit brings together federal, state, city, and county governments, critical businesses, utilities, and state agencies and authorities to share information and coordinate responses to cybersecurity issues. The plan provides a framework to unify New York efforts to combat cyber threats and expand services to smaller governmental entities.

Ransomware Event Simulation

I recently participated in a simulated ransomware attack training hosted by Cohesity, a data security and management company. Governments and businesses will be better positioned by protecting themselves in advance through adoption of good cybersecurity practices rather than weighing the choice of paying ransom, having data released, or dealing with expensive insurance costs and issues. I will continue to advocate for more state resources to assist local governments and other entities in cybersecurity protection and response.

Support for Digital Equity Programs

I have continued to lead in advocating for the expansion of digital inclusion programs across the state that provide broadband access, devices, and training to individuals excluded from the digital literacy most of us take for granted. The digital inclusion model empowers those who have been deprived of access, usually because of economic inability, age, or race from the essential tools digital literacy provides.

As part of this effort, I have supported funding for local programs throughout the Sound Shore by working with the STEM Alliance, which provides programs in partnership with local not-for-profits. I have also participated in the statewide effort to develop a state digital equity plan to be submitted to the federal government for future funding. The draft plan has been written by the NYS ConnectALL office following meetings and outreach through the state. Comments on the draft plan are being accepted by ConnectAll into December. I work closely with the NYS Digital Equity Network (NYSDEN), a statewide group of digital inclusion providers that have been offering these programs for many years.

This Fall I spoke on a panel on digital inclusion at a conference in Syracuse and spoke at a Westchester County press conference to support the county's partnership with the STEM Alliance, The Westchester County Association and the Westchester Library System to help all members of our community make a significant step towards achieving digital equity.

Digital inclusion programs are an effective tool for undoing structural inequities that deprive individuals opportunities in employment, education and health care.



This fall I spoke at a conference in Syracuse on a panel to discuss digital inclusion programs. I am pictured here with fellow panelists Meg Kaufer, President of the STEM Alliance; Lynn Thurston, President, Finger Lakes Digital Inclusion Coalition; and Don Matteson of the Western NY Digital Inclusion & Equity Coalition.



In November I was very excited to attend the ribbon-cutting of the Hudson Park Children's Greenhouse to congratulate Millie Radonjic-Ilich on what can only be described as an outstanding project. Millie is president of the HPCG not-for-profit committee and has provided the vision for the new greenhouse and other improvements to New Rochelle's Hudson Park. The committee and the City of New Rochelle have worked for years to make this project a reality. Assemblywoman Amy Paulin and I combined efforts to secure an early state grant towards the project that will provide horticultural programs for New Rochelle elementary school students and a variety of other programs serving the community.

New Rochelle's HOPE Community Services Moving to a New Home

HOPE Community Services in New Rochelle is an indispensable provider of essential services to individuals in need of food, housing, and human services since the 1980s. Last month I attended the launch of their capital campaign to revitalize their future home at 81 Union Avenue in New Rochelle. Their new home was donated by another longstanding New Rochelle not-for-profit, the Casa Calabria Society. The future location is one block away from HOPE's current home at 50 Washington Avenue, and it will help maintain services for area families already served by their important programs. The Casa Calabria Society deserves special recognition for their foresight and commitment as exemplified by their donation.

The goal of the fundraising campaign is to convert 81 Union Avenue, a great building, to a facility that can provide the wide range of community services HOPE provides. Together with my State Legislative colleagues representing New Rochelle, Senator Shelley Mayer, Senator Nathalia Fernandez, and Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, we have combined to provide \$1 million in state grant funding for the project. Please visit the HOPE Community Services website for more information about HOPE and their important work: www.hopecommunityservices.org.

Albany Hearing on School Partnerships

I participated in an important hearing on partnerships between school districts and colleges to offer high school students unique academic and career opportunities, including college credit, through programs such as Early College High School and Pathways in Technology (P-TECH). These programs provide a pathway for students to succeed in college and future careers by reducing the cost of attending college, ensuring that students have ongoing academic support, and offering workplace learning opportunities in emerging, high-demand fields. The goal of the hearing was to learn how the programs have been established and to seek ways to expand these opportunities throughout the state.

These programs are especially important in the technology field where I have a special interest and where we are seeing job growth in New York driven by the fact that we have workers trained to work for growing technology companies. The hearing was held by the Assembly Education Committee, of which I am a member, and the Higher Education Committee.



I joined the Larchmont-Mamaroneck non-profit Fields for Kids, school leaders and local elected officials for the ribbon cutting and grand opening of the new outdoor athletic space at Hommocks Middle School in Larchmont. Fields for Kids has a long history of working with the school district, and town and village local governments to expand and enhance the athletic facilities in Mamaroneck and Larchmont. Their volunteer efforts and fundraising have helped develop many projects. The play area at Hommocks will benefit over 1,200 middle school students. I have worked with Fields for Kids in the past and have supported youth sports and park projects in every community in the Sound Shore Assembly District I serve.

Two Environmental Conservation Hearings Focus on Waste Reduction

The Assembly and Senate Environmental Conservation Committees hosted two days of hearings on two topics that relate to waste reduction, diversion, recycling, and sound environmental practices. We heard testimony from a variety of perspectives on the two major topics:

- Should we expand or modify the bottle bill?
- Should we adopt Extended Producer Responsibility legislation that would promote cleaner, more recyclable packaging and assign more responsibility on manufacturers for disposal of their products rather than all waste being accepted by municipal recycling programs?

The testimony was thoughtful and both proposals require additional analysis based on comments we heard. The new legislative session begins in January, and both topics will continue to receive attention. One takeaway regarding the bottle bill is that the cost of recycling through beverage centers or upstate redemption centers needs to be revisited.

Waste reduction needs to be a goal we all embrace. In Westchester, our garbage is incinerated in a plant in Peekskill. Upstate most garbage that is not recycled ends up in landfills. Earlier this fall, I attended two fascinating not-for-profit site visits that provided great examples of community efforts to reduce waste going to landfills or incinerators. The Ithaca area has one of the most active Reuse programs in the state to reduce waste going to upstate landfills, and their programs may provide ideas for new reuse activities in Westchester. Their websites are Finger Lakes Reuse www.ithacareuse.org and Significant Elements www.significantelements.org.

Bills Approved to Support High School Student Government Programs and Access to AP Courses

I joined Governor Hochul for a bill-signing ceremony at Tech Valley High School in Albany, where she approved legislation I sponsored with Senator Shelley Mayer requiring that every High School offer a student government program and another bill I co-sponsored making sure parents are made aware of the availability of high school AP courses.

With support for democracy threatened in our country and around the world, it is more important than ever that we find ways to bolster the understanding of how democracy functions. High school is one place to help share the idea that democracy is not just a form of government but that it also requires the learned skills of deliberation, cooperation, compromise, and the ability to listen carefully and respect the views of others (A.6091/S.1732; Chapter 357 of the Laws of 2023).

As an advocate for science and technology education, I was able to talk to several of the students and administrators about the exciting teaching methods at the school.

New Rochelle Court Opportunity Youth Part Program

Congratulations to New Rochelle Judge Jared Rice and the staff of the New Rochelle City Court on the Third Anniversary of the innovative Opportunity Youth Part program which links young offenders to local social service providers to offer jobs, workforce training, academic assistance, mentoring, and mental health services.

This program, conducted in cooperation with the District Attorney's office, provides a vital diversion opportunity to give youth offenders a second chance. Since 2020 the program has worked with over 250 individuals to provide a positive alternative to a path that would include continued involvement with the criminal justice system. To supply mentoring and support services to participants, the program relies upon a variety of local social service agencies to work with each youthful offender. I have been able to secure some state grant funding to support these efforts.

I attended the Third Anniversary ceremony, which highlighted successful program participants. The stories of lives changed are moving. Congratulations to Judge Rice, everyone involved with the court, and the outside agencies that make this program possible.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman
**Steve
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Legislative Update

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The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on the Workforce

In October I co-chaired a legislative hearing on the impact of artificial intelligence on the current workforce and related issues for workers and the workplace. The meeting was a joint hearing of the Science and Technology Committee and the Assembly Labor Committee, chaired my colleague from the Bronx, Latoya Joyner.

We heard testimony on advantages and challenges posed by expanded use of AI in the workplace, including greater cost effectiveness, efficiency, and productivity. We also heard about areas of concern such as productivity monitoring, worker privacy, and algorithmic bias. At the hearing, we heard from union members and privacy advocates who shared their concerns about the impacts of AI on the workforce.

The White House and Congress have also begun to frame discussions on how the evolution of AI can proceed in a positive way while making sure that automated decision-making is not used to take actions that would otherwise be a violation of existing laws. AI should not be used to allow retaliation and discrimination against workers in hiring, promotion, or dismissal in ways that would be illegal under employment law.

