



Assemblyman Steve Otis



Legislative Update

Fall 2026

Dear Friends,

I am writing to share some of the highlights of my advocacy during the 2026 Legislative Session.

My priority is always to view state issues from a community perspective and to make sure the concerns of our local governments and school districts receive the attention they deserve in a legislative process that does not always apply such focus.

Another priority has been the leadership role I have been able to play as Chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee. Again, this year, several cutting-edge technology issues were part of the work of the committee. I closely follow developments on fast-moving issues, such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data privacy, and digital equity. Several important bills came through the committee this year.

The session included budget wins in providing additional state aid to school districts and local governments, for childcare, lowering utility costs, clean water infrastructure, and affordable housing. One goal of many of these efforts is to reduce costs to New Yorkers by using state dollars instead of paying for services through the local property tax.

EMS reform continues to be a major priority. The statewide county by county planning process, initiated in legislation I sponsored in 2025 (A8086A), is now underway.

Hanging over the session was the impact of federal reductions in funding to hospitals and schools, actions to reduce protections for public health, the environment, workplace safety, and the impact of poorly trained ICE and other federal employees violating the rules of conduct expected of law enforcement officers in any state. We took action to push back against federal actions on several fronts.

Your emails, letters, and comments are valuable to me in representing Westchester. The problem you encounter or the idea you have may become the source for new legislation, fresh policy discussions with state agencies, or some other route to address the issue. Please continue to share your ideas and comments. Please call my District Office if I can be of any assistance.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis

State Assemblyman

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Changes in Technology Bring New Urgency to the Digital Equity Issue

This year I have continued to play a leadership role in support of digital equity and inclusion programs. These are the programs that provide broadband access, a device, and hands-on training to individuals in need of these tools. With the rapid growth of AI and new cybersecurity threats, the gap faced by individuals already left behind on digital access, device, and literacy skills has grown even larger. The elements needed to properly train individuals have grown.

With elimination of federal funding, it is more important than ever that states identify funding streams to support these programs. This year I successfully advocated that \$20 million in a Verizon settlement with the NYS Public Service Commission earmarked for these exact programs be assigned to the NYS ConnectALL office, the unit that worked with groups throughout the state to write NYS's Digital Equity Plan.

The ConnectALL office has previously administered grant programs for this type of work when funds have become available. The new \$20 million will provide a needed boost. To reach all the various types of individuals in need of these services, far more money is needed. The programs provide skills for education, work, employment search, health care access, economic development, financial literacy, and retraining programs provided by labor unions. On this funding issue, we had strong support from Governor Hochul's office. I have been advocating for funding for these programs for several years.

I work closely with the New York State Digital Equity Network (NYSDEN), the statewide organization of digital inclusion program providers. I will be participating in the Annual NYSDEN conference later in September. In Westchester I have been able to secure funding for digital inclusion programs in communities I represent including The STEM Alliance which often partners with local not-for-profits to provide computers, access and training to the individuals they serve.

For many years I have helped organize and been a panelist at the annual SOMOS conference in Albany. Our recurring topic has been on the unique needs of the Latino community outside of New York City. As part of the SOMOS 2026 Conference in Albany, I sponsored a new topic that overlaps with my Science and Technology and digital inclusion work. Our panel was titled: **AI, Cybersecurity, Broadband & Digital Equity; Protecting & Empowering Latino Communities in New York & the Caribbean.** Much of the discussion focused on the urgency of providing digital access and training to those individuals excluded from access and literacy, given fast moving developments in AI, cybersecurity threats, and the necessity of having digital access in the world we live in today. The speed of technological change means that the digital divide is growing.



I am pictured with fellow panelists Annmarie Lanesey, Founder & CEO, Can Code Communities; Gaby Marano, Capital Markets Technology Dir., Microsoft; and Jose Luis Rodriguez, President/CEO, Caribbean Preparedness and Response (CPR), Inc. Annmarie is also a key member of NYSDEN with whom I work with regularly. Jose Luis works on innovative programs in New York and Puerto Rico and is also a partner on these issues.

SOMOS, Inc. is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization based in New York State dedicated to uniting the Latino community, advocating for public policy, and empowering youth.

Annual Clean Water Workshop Helps Bring State Funds to Westchester Projects

In June, I hosted my annual Clean Water Infrastructure Grant Workshop to bring local officials and not-for-profits together to receive the latest information on clean water infrastructure and other available grant funding. I have held these workshops since 2015 when I helped create the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) program. Since the program was established, NYS has provided \$3.4 billion in grants to over 1,200 local projects across New York. To date, Westchester communities have received over \$132 million in grants for 53 projects.

The purpose of the workshop is to maximize the opportunity for Westchester projects to win funding and to provide an opportunity to discuss the process with agency staff involved with the programs covered.

Officials from the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) and the Department of

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Environmental Conservation (DEC) as well as the Department of State and the Department of Health made presentations and answered questions on the many NYS funding opportunities available this year.

The annual workshop covered the current round of applications for the WIIA and the Intermunicipal Grant (IMG) programs. The current round offers \$425 million in grant funding from those programs. The workshop also covered several other clean water and environmental programs administered by NYS, including EFC’s Clean Water Revolving Loan Fund, DEC’s Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP), and local government efficiency grants offered by the NYS Department of State, and federal grant opportunities through the Sea Grant program.

I continue to be a leading advocate for clean water funding in the state budget. Since 2017 New York has allocated \$500 million a year for an array of clean water programs. This year we increased that total to \$525 million and the state also supports environmental grant funding through the NYS Environmental Protection Fund and the Environmental Bond Act. These funding sources make needed projects possible at the local level and shift part of the cost away from the property tax. New York State has the most robust clean water programs in the nation.

The workshop was sponsored by SeaGrant NY, Save The Sound, Federated Conservationists of Westchester, Westchester Municipal Officials Association, Riverkeeper, the Construction Industry Council and our host, the Jay Heritage Center. LMCMedia taped the presentations which are available on my Assembly website.

EMS Reform Process Moves Forward

Last year, EMS Planning Legislation I sponsored with Senator Shelley Mayer passed and was signed into law by Governor Hochul. The legislation requires EMS plans by each county to go through a locally driven process that involves counties, villages, towns, and cities as equal partners. (Ch 703 of the Laws of 2025, Ch 93 of the Laws of 2026)

Our approach is to acknowledge that throughout New York State, EMS is provided through a variety of organizational structures, including municipal, intermunicipal, not-for-profit or for-profit contract coverage, and special districts. Our belief is that the best way to grow EMS service is to have local officials choose the structure that they believe will best address their needs. The goal of the planning process is to bring all the participants together and decide what is the best way to deliver the service in each of their areas.

To assist in that process, this spring Senator Mayer and I participated in workshops on EMS reform at the annual conferences of the New York Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM), the NY Association of Towns (NYAOT), and the New York State Association of Counties, the three major groups representing New York State’s local governments. All the meetings brought in-depth discussions with local officials from around the state about their hopes for the planning process and the need for EMS reform.

As part of the legislation, the NYS Department of Health recently issued guidance documents to assist the local planning process. Our hope is that the plans will advance the EMS reform agenda by detailing the ways each



Assemblyman Otis at the Association of Towns conference with Senator Mayer and NYAOT Executive Director Chris Koetzle.

area wants to provide service, identifying where additional state statutory changes may be needed, and highlight ways we can fund the services where gaps exist.

We continue to work with Rye Brook Village Administrator Chris Bradbury, Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins, County Department of Emergency Services Commissioner Susan Spear, and other local officials on this reform effort. Our goal is to have feedback from the planning process for further action in the 2027 Legislative Session.

Science and Technology Issues Continue on the Cutting Edge

This session provided another year of focus by the Science and Technology Committee on quickly advancing technology issues of importance to our economy and how individuals are impacted by evolving products and services.

AI and Quantum Computing

New York has been a leader in promoting AI use for the public good through the Empire AI Consortium, which is a New York based partnership of public and private research institutions. The effort began in 2024 as an initiative of Governor Hochul and the legislature.



I was joined on the panel by (l to r) Travis Scholten, IBM Technical Lead, Public Sector; Deepesh Chandra, Chief Information Officer at Montefiore Einstein; Gaurav Jayaswal, Senior Solution Architect, New York Power Authority and Dr. Scott Crowder, IBM Vice President, Quantum Adoption.

Two years ago, my committee visited the initial base of the program at SUNY Buffalo. The program continues to grow with heavy involvement of the SUNY system and private institutions.

In this year’s budget, New York advanced our focus on quantum computing with the establishment of the SUNY Stony Brook Quantum Research and Innovation Hub based on Long Island. This ensures a competitive process to create Quantum Technology Commercialization Hubs on a regional basis throughout the state to facilitate the sharing of the power of Quantum computing more broadly as the technology continues to expand. Westchester’s IBM is playing a big role in growing this technology that can solve problems of a more complex nature more effectively than advanced super computers.

Quantum computing was the topic of the annual CONVERGE conference sponsored by the Westchester County Association, the STEM Alliance, and Westchester County. I was a speaker on a panel which focused on the evolution of the scientific breakthrough of quantum computing to strategic business growth, challenges, and uses that will follow.

Data Center Issue Focused on Utility Costs and Environmental Impact

The rapid growth in data centers, accelerated by the growth in artificial intelligence services, has impacted utility rates, energy use, air quality, and water usage in many states across the country. Most dramatically, data centers use massive quantities of energy and have directly escalated the cost of electricity for residential and business customers¹.

During this session, we passed legislation to establish a temporary moratorium to study and address these issues before new commercial data centers are built in New York (A11560). Governor Hochul, while still reviewing that legislation, signed a narrower executive order to provide a time-out to allow policies to be put in place to protect consumers and establish procedures that will allow for expansion of data centers to be planned, energized, and built in a careful manner.

The executive order establishes a framework to protect ratepayers, communities, and the environment. The one-year moratorium will protect New Yorkers from paying for energy transmission roll-out of data centers and create a structure for communities that want data centers that provides an ability to receive benefits from developers as part of the process. The order provides a process for review of data center expansion impacts, environmental, water, and air quality issues, and hopefully provide for a structure that will avoid the errors of other states where unplanned expansion has hurt communities.

My view is that we need a time-out to evaluate these issues. I also believe that there is a burden on the technology industry to develop less energy-intensive ways of doing this work. Many are taking on that challenge. It is also noteworthy that quantum computing appears to be more energy efficient than traditional super-computers. With all that we have experienced in increased utility costs, we can ill-afford a new disruption that will make those increases even more onerous.

¹ www.nytimes.com/2026/02/19/climate/data-centers-power-bills.html

Key Legislation

The Assembly Science and Technology Committee continued our practice of developing, reviewing, and advancing legislation on changing technology issues.

Chatbot Toys. We passed legislation that places a temporary ban on the commercial sale of chatbot toys, which are toys that use an AI companion including emotional recognition algorithms designed to simulate a sustained human or human-like relationship with the child. The risks to children posed by this new technology raise several mental health, privacy, and safety concerns. During the prohibition, a multi-agency study will be evaluating the issues related to these new products. (A11144)

Health Data Privacy. We passed the New York Health Information Privacy Act to establish rules to prohibit the sale of New Yorkers’ sensitive health data to third parties without consumer consent. HIPA and other laws do not adequately protect patient privacy. (A10357)

Protecting Minors from Addictive Feeds. Prohibits artificial intelligence companions from using features that are considered unsafe for minors. This legislation was strongly supported by Attorney General Tish James whose office will be involved in the implementation of changes that will protect minors from unsafe intrusions by AI companions. (A10379)

Connected Device Legislation. Working with the great team at Consumer Reports, I passed legislation in the Assembly to provide consumers with notice of how long a manufacturer will update software connecting the device to the internet that is required for the product to safely function. Consumers increasingly rely on internet-connected devices, ranging from smart appliances and fitness trackers to home security systems and medical devices that require ongoing software and security support. When manufacturers discontinue support, these devices can become unsafe, insecure, or unusable, often without consumer knowledge. Our legislation requires notice of the length of the commitment at the time of purchase, so the consumer can compare products, including commitment for product support. I am hopeful we will win Senate passage when session reconvenes. (A10132)

Legislation to Protect News Media Work Product. For several years, I have been working with the NYS News Publishers Assn. and the NYS Broadcasters Assn. to find a legislative approach to protect their material from AI scanning without their consent.

While some of these issues are covered by federal copyright law and are not under state jurisdiction, notice to access a site by these AI scanning tools is an important step to providing some accountability to this process. Legislation I sponsored to require disclosure when a news site is being scanned passed both houses. (A.11292)

New Grant Awards for Sound Shore Projects

We were honored to have NYS DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton in Westchester for the press conference announcing the statewide grants and highlighting the selection of 12 Westchester projects, including six projects benefiting Sound Shore watershed and communities I represent.

In her statewide announcement, Governor Hochul said, “Every New Yorker deserves clean water, which has been a top priority of mine since taking office. These grants continue our critical investments to update aging water infrastructure across the state. They will also help our local governments enhance resiliency against flooding caused by severe weather, again demonstrating our commitment to a safe, affordable, and sustainable future for all New Yorkers.”

Assisting communities in identifying grants and supporting them in the application process is an important part of my work. Every community I represent has received state grant awards through a variety of programs in recent years. The recent announcement includes the following projects:

Village of Mamaroneck - \$9,976,250 to support:

- Mamaroneck River Bridge Removal and Streambank Stabilization
- Confluence with Sheldrake River Channel Realignment
- Sheldrake River Pedestrian Bridge Removal and Floodplain Expansion

Village of Port Chester - \$10 million for the Sanitary Sewer Overflow Reduction.

The village will replace an undersized 18- inch sewer pipe on Boston Post Road that causes sewage discharges during storm events with a new 36-inch pipe. The new pipe will increase flow capacity, reduce sanitary sewer overflows, and improve water quality of the Byram River.

City of Rye - \$723,631 for the Rye Nature Center Blind Brook Marine Habitat Restoration Project. The Friends of Rye Nature Center will stabilize streambanks and restore wetlands along 1,660 feet of Blind Brook and an adjoining eight-acre wetland. The project will reduce streambank erosion and improve wetland habitat within the Long Island Sound watershed.

Town/Village of Harrison - \$7,385,494 for the Brentwood Brook Culvert Replacements and Channel Widening.

At the announcement Commissioner Lefton was able to talk to some of the Westchester grant recipients. We have great support in Westchester from Governor Hochul, Commissioner Lefton, and NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation President Maureen Coleman.

Local Governments and School Districts Receive Increased Aid and Support



Left to right: Village of Port Chester Manager Stuart Rabin, Port Chester Deputy Mayor Phil Dorazio, Senator Shelley Mayer, County Executive Ken Jenkins, Assemblyman Otis, NYS DEC Regional Director Kelly Turturro, NYS DEC Commissioner Amanda Lefton.

Each year a top priority is to address needs of these community entities during session and the budget process. State funding to localities reduces the cost shouldered on the local property tax.

The adopted budget included an increase in state aid to school districts above the funding in the Governor’s initial proposal. The budget includes \$39 billion in school aid, a \$1.7 billion increase from the previous school year and \$27.4 billion for Foundation Aid (the major formula aid program), a \$1 billion increase over last year. Every Westchester district will receive an increase in Foundation Aid.

Aid to municipalities also increased by \$100 million by tripling one category of aid to local governments from \$50 million to \$150 million. Every village, town, and city received an increase.

During the budget process, one of the non-budget policy issues was a proposal that Governor Hochul included in her budget to create exemptions in the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) process for approval of certain housing projects. The SEQRA law provides the process by which local governments receive information about the impacts of a project on local project applications from applicants.

Although many projects will now be exempt from the SEQRA review, I was successful in adding language to the final changes that make it clear that a municipality can still require reports on specific issues of local concern relating to a specific application such as traffic impacts, contamination issues, or other issues of local importance. I have been in contact with local governments and their state associations regarding the changes with the goal of making sure that project-specific issues of concern can be addressed as part of the approval process outside of SEQRA.

To address issues raised by school districts, we also delayed requirements for school districts to purchase all-electric school buses when buying new vehicles. Currently there is not an adequate supply of all-electric buses or charging and transmission infrastructure for districts to fulfill that goal. In addition, my view is that these costs should be borne through state funding assistance rather than out of the local school budget whose dollars should be devoted to the classroom. Several years ago, voters adopted a Smart Schools Bond Act to support school district technology purchases. A similar approach makes sense for electric school bus purchases, combined with technical assistance from state agencies, once supply chain issues are resolved.

State Budget Highlights Programs to Reduce Costs to New Yorkers



The state budget review, negotiation, and adoption are always a major part of the legislative session. As a member of the Assembly Ways and Means Committee I work as an active participant in the weeks of Senate Assembly Joint Budget Hearings as part of the annual budget process. I also help organize our annual Assembly Westchester Delegation Budget Forum to make sure the concerns and needs of our local organizations become part of our advocacy in the budget negotiations.

In addition to the funding covered in other articles, this budget placed a priority on reducing costs to families through a variety of new or expanded initiatives.

A new program will provide \$1 billion in energy rebate checks to 8.2 million eligible New Yorkers based on incomes below \$300,000 to provide some relief for recent increases in utility costs. The Protecting Our Wallets Energy Rebate (POWER) program will provide payments this fall based on 2024 tax year filings.

Changes were also made in how the Public Service Commission reviews utility rate increase requests to give the PSC the ability to block the passing on to consumers some of the costs that should be borne by the utilities. Some of these changes come from legislation I have co-sponsored to reform the utility rate-setting process. (A.2281 of 2017 and A.3360-A of 2021)

The budget provides an additional \$65 million in tax relief for families by enhancing the Child and Dependent Care Credit

by decoupling it from the federal credit and replacing it with a standalone credit in 2026.

It expands Universal Pre-K (UPK) to support full-day instruction for 4-year old children by Fall 2028, as well as consolidating UPK and Statewide Universal Full Day Pre-K into a single program.

The budget includes \$116 million for after-school programs.

The adopted budget also provides \$3 billion in childcare subsidies to help New York families.

The budget includes \$50 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) and additional funding for municipal housing authorities outside of New York City.

The budget includes additional statewide funding for a number of programs I advocate for in the budget process. These include alternative courts such as the Opportunity Youth Part in New Rochelle City Court led by Judge Jared Rice, 4201 schools such as Westchester’s New York School for the Deaf, additional funding for higher education including SUNY and CUNY, and additional funding for higher education opportunity programs that allow students to afford going to college.

In addition, I work with local governments and local not-for-profits to identify and secure funding for important programs throughout the Sound Shore. Many of those funding sources were included in the adopted state budget.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman
**Steve
Otis**

Legislative Update

Fall 2026

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Be on the Alert for Alpha-Gal Syndrome and other tick-borne diseases.

Since last fall I have been advocating with the NYS Department of Health on Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS), a new tick-borne disease on the rise in New York and throughout the Northeast. Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS) is an emerging tick-bite-associated allergy to meat that may cause a serious, sometimes fatal, reaction to mammal-based foods or products.

As was the case with Lyme Disease decades ago, new tick-borne diseases arrive in a region before there is awareness by the public or health care professionals. Suffolk County has more reported cases than any other county in the nation.

My advocacy has been on two fronts: Asking the DOH to expand their public education efforts on the illness and requiring mandatory reporting by labs and health care professionals so that we can better track the spread of the illness in New York and notify the public when

cases rise in different regions of the state.

In April DOH launched their first Alpha-Gal Syndrome (AGS) webpage at https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/alpha-gal_syndrome/ which provides a great first step towards making New Yorkers aware of the illness. DOH has also begun the rulemaking process to adopt a mandatory reporting requirement this fall.

You can visit the DOH tick-borne disease information page at <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/lyme/> or their April press release announcing the AGS webpage at https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2026/2026-04-30_precautions_against_tick-borne_illnesses.htm

Please visit these links and take precautions to protect yourself against tick-borne disease.