



Dear Friends,

First of all, Happy Holidays! Whether you are celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa (perhaps Festivus?)... from my family to yours, I wish you a very happy and healthy holiday season.



I would like to thank everyone who participated in our holiday food and toy drive efforts. Whether you supported the *Lifting Up Westchester* or LVAC/SSFD *Toys for Tots* toy drives – or donated directly to our effort by dropping food at our office for the *Community Center of Northern Westchester* or toys for the children of mothers incarcerated at the Bedford Hills & Taconic Correctional Facilities (distributed by *Hour Children*) – I am so grateful for everyone's generosity. Below are photos of the food and toys we delivered on Tuesday!



Thursday, I was honored to join NYS Senator James Skoufis in his office in Newburgh to announce that Governor Kathy Hochul had signed into law [our legislation](#) to expand the definition of sexual conduct against a child in the third degree. Last year, a constituent bravely came to me to recount the horrible sexual assault on his daughter years ago, who was eight years old at the time. The crime was undiscovered for many years, and the statute of limitations had run out. Furthermore, the crime in question was not explicitly defined in the crime of sexual conduct against a child in the third degree.

While this bill will not change what occurred, it hopefully will provide some closure and peace for the victim of that assault and her parents, as well as justice for future victims. My thanks to Senator Skoufis for his leadership in getting this bill passed in the Senate and to Governor Hochul for signing it into law.



Following the press conference, I was up in Albany (*my second time this past week - please see below regarding the Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing*) to address a proposed raise in pay for the legislature, which passed both chambers. **Pay raises are never popular for elected officials, but under the New York State Constitution, legislators must set their own salaries.** Moreover, legislators may not raise their pay in the middle of a term – any increase would take effect in the next legislative term, which runs for two years. It is for this reason that we were called back to Albany at this time; if we were to wait until the 2023 term, any increase would not go into effect until January 2025, and many colleagues – particularly those who are living in high-cost areas and are the breadwinners for their families – are struggling with the current salary, especially in light of the inflation that affects us all.

Like myself, most of my colleagues are in this position full-time. When we are not in Albany, we are working in the district offices or are out in our communities (often including nights and weekends). **Especially because of this, I am very pleased the increase comes with the requirement that any outside income be sharply limited** (this restriction codifies ethical guidelines set down in 2011 by the Legislative Ethics Commission to address conflicts of interest and potential self-dealing). With the increase, and by limiting outside income, legislators who have been forced to take on additional work to make ends meet will now be able to focus more fully on serving their constituents.

Veterans' Affairs Committee Hearing

As I mentioned, yesterday's trip to Albany was my second this past week. **On Tuesday, the Veterans' Affairs Committee held a hearing on the progress of the New York State Division of Veterans' Services' restructuring.** As I have discussed previously, including in my [last newsletter](#), the legislature in last year's budget elevated the NYS Division of Veterans' Services to a full department, beginning in April 2023. The goal of the hearing was to review the actions taken thus far by the Division to implement the new law, to ensure that the state's estimated 800,000 veterans have the best possible access to the benefits, programs, and services to which they are entitled.

Tuesday's hearing made clear that more work is needed to meet the expectations of the veterans' community and to provide a more cohesive and user-friendly process. The hearing testimony did reinforce the observations and experiences shared with the committee at a previous hearing, which is that benefits, programs, and services for veterans are scattered over several state agencies and departments, making it difficult and frustrating for veterans in need of services, especially those dealing with homelessness and mental illness. The intention of elevating the division to a full department is to provide "one-stop" access - although some testimony did point out that certain existing programs and services should remain in the agencies that currently deliver them, particularly the very successful and impactful Dwyer Veterans Peer Support Project, which is currently overseen by the Office of Mental Health.

As we move closer to April, I will continue to provide updates on the restructuring's implementation.

Funding for Harrison Flood Mitigation

I am pleased to share that the Town of Harrison has been awarded a \$2.6 million grant through the Governor's Green Innovation Grant Program. The funds will be used for the town's Brentwood Brook Floodplain Restoration Project.

As many of you may remember, in September 2021 the remnants of Hurricane Ida swept through the Hudson Valley causing severe flooding that wreaked havoc in the Town of Harrison, as well as causing millions of dollars in property damage. Significant flood mitigation efforts are required to prevent similar damage from recurring. **The \$2.6 million in funding will enable Harrison to carry out crucial flood mitigation work that will not only help areas affected by the previous flooding just north and south of I-95, but also provide added flood protection for the Village of Mamaroneck and City of Rye.**



Photos of damage caused by Hurricane Ida in September 2021

This funding was the result of many hours of hard work and collaboration between multiple officials, including Harrison Mayor Rich Dionisio, Harrison Central School District Superintendent Lou Wool, NYS Senator Shelley Mayer, Westchester County Legislators Nancy Barr and Catherine Parker, and myself, all of whom worked closely with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation on the grant application. My colleague Assemblyman Steve Otis, whose district abuts Harrison and will also benefit from these flood mitigation efforts, likewise lent his support.

For those who are unfamiliar with it, the [Green Innovation Grant Program](#) supports projects across New York State that utilize unique EPA-designated green stormwater infrastructure design and create cutting-edge green technologies. Competitive grants are awarded annually to projects that improve water quality and mitigate the effects of climate change. \$15.8 Million was awarded to 8 different projects across the state, and Harrison's grant is one of two awarded to the Mid-Hudson region.

Congratulations to the Croton Falls Fire Department!

The Croton Falls Fire Department, through its 130-year history, has protected the community with courage, empathy, quick thinking, and skill. These selfless volunteers risk their safety and lives to protect their neighbors.

To help retain and recruit members, the department approached me to sponsor legislation to create a Benevolent Association. My colleague, Senator Pete Harckham, carried the bill in the NYS Senate and I am delighted that Governor Kathy Hochul recently signed it into law.



Wednesday, joined by Senator Harckham, I had the honor of presenting the department with a citation in recognition of their heroic efforts on behalf of the community and of the creation of the Benevolent Association.

Touring Mount Kisco's Immigrant-Owned Businesses

My thanks to Mount Kisco Village Trustee Karine Patiño, who recently took me on a tour of downtown Mount Kisco to introduce me to a number of small businesses operated by enterprising immigrants. We visited [Bagel & Bean Cafe](#), [Lorena's Juice & Snack Bar](#), [Tijuana Mexican Grill](#), [Mimi's Coffee House](#) and [El Tesoro Deli](#), and made a stop at the British store, [The Hamlet](#).



It is evident that all of these business owners have put a great amount of time, effort, and love into these businesses to make them thrive. The atmospheres were welcoming and the aromas (and food) were delicious!

We have a thriving immigrant population in Mount Kisco and it is wonderful to see how they are shaping the downtown shopping district.

[Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\) Applications Open](#)

For those who qualify and are in need of assistance, HEAP applications are now open! Eligibility and benefit amount are determined by income, household size and composition, and heating source. To learn more, please go to www.otda.ny.gov/programs/heap. And don't hesitate to reach out to my office if there is any assistance we can provide.



Free COVID-19 Tests
Now Available Through the USPS

The Biden administration and United States Post Office are partnering once again to offer free at-home COVID-19 tests. **Every U.S. household is eligible to order 4 free tests.**

To learn more or request your free tests, please visit COVIDTests.gov.



As always, **please do not hesitate to reach out to my office with any questions or if there is any assistance we can provide.** You can always reach me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov or by calling (914) 244-4450. My staff and I are always ready to help. Please also follow me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) for continued up-to-date information.

Miss any of our previous newsletters? You can [find them here](#).

Sincerely yours,

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