



## January Newsletter Email

Dear Friend,

I hope this email finds you and your loved ones healthy and well. As we continue to battle COVID-19 and vaccines are distributed to eligible New Yorkers, I want you to know that I'm working hard to ensure our communities receive the support they need during these difficult times. The start of a new state legislative session brings a renewed sense of hope for the future, and we've already hit the ground running. I'd like to share the strides we've made in the last month to lift up our families and get us on the path toward a brighter tomorrow. Additionally, I'd like to invite you to my virtual town hall on **February 17th @ 12 p.m.** to hear your thoughts and concerns about the state budget. As your representative, I'd like to know what you believe we need to prioritize in the coming months.

If you're interested in attending or have questions you'd like addressed during the Town Hall, please email me [knoot@nyassembly.gov](mailto:knoot@nyassembly.gov) by February 15, 2021.

### VIRTUAL TOWN HALL ON BUDGET

- February 17; Wednesday
- 12pm

### Responding to the Governor's State of the State address

There's no question we have a lot of work ahead of us to help our communities rebuild and recover from the COVID-19 crisis. Thankfully, the Governor addressed many of the important issues facing the Mohawk Valley in his State of the State proposals, including passing the Medical Supplies Act, creating green energy jobs and bringing in much-needed revenue for our hospitals, schools and small businesses.

As a representative of a district which includes a number of arts and entertainment facilities, including Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, The Stanley Theatre, and the Rome Capitol Arts Complex, I'm excited to hear the Governor's plan to bringing the arts to the forefront and his plans to use public-private partnerships to create arts and music programming across the state. However, I have requested his proposal to include athletics and other tourism-related industries, as it's imperative that New York State make commitments to support our economic revitalization.

The Governor's plan to close the 'digital divide' by expanding broadband service to require monthly, low-cost internet service would help support our residents who need affordable internet for remote work and school and telemedicine.

### **Helping more Mohawk Valley residents get vaccinated**

Now that the vaccine is approved and available, the demand is growing. However, limited doses and distribution flaws have made getting the vaccine a difficult feat. As a representative of one of the most diverse districts in New York State, I was concerned over the numbers of COVID cases in our communities and about the difficulty our community members have had with getting vaccinations. Our community is diverse in terms of racial, ethnic, and cultural makeup, and a significant portion of our neighbors' struggle with their English language skills and/or digital fluency. I expressed this concern with the Governor and Health Commissioner and urged them to open a COVID-19 kit distribution sites in the Utica-Rome area. I also reached out to the state Department of Health (DOH) regarding the limited numbers of COVID-19 vaccines being distributed to New York State as I will continue to advocate for this area.

### **Honoring our veterans**

The brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our country deserve to be honored and remembered as heroes. After years of hard work and dedication on this issue, legislation I co-sponsored to facilitate the process of creating a state-run veterans cemetery was finally signed into law (Ch. 345 of 2020).

To further support local military veterans, I'm also hosting a virtual Valentines for Vets celebration. Students can digitally color in a virtual **Valentines for Vets** card, which can be found on my website. Completed cards must be emailed to [ButtenschonM@nyassembly.gov](mailto:ButtenschonM@nyassembly.gov) by Wednesday, Feb. 10.

### **Passed bill to extend public employee death benefit**

Throughout the pandemic, the comfort and safety of our communities has rested on the shoulders of our frontline employees – including government workers, such as health care professionals and the staff of long-term care facilities – who risked their own safety to provide

essential goods and services. Many of these brave heroes contracted COVID-19, and too many of them tragically lost their lives as a result, leaving their families both heartbroken and without a source of income.

In order to support grieving families, we passed a law in 2020 to ensure that the beneficiaries of public workers who died of COVID-19 after reporting to work on or after March 1, 2020 would receive a death benefit equal to 50% of the employee's monthly salary (Ch. 89 of 2020).

I also helped pass a bill to extend the eligibility period for this death benefit to December 31, 2022 (A.3988).

This legislation would guarantee that any public employee who contracted COVID-19 during the pandemic will be eligible for their accidental death benefits to be paid out yearly to their beneficiaries. To date, public employees who die of COVID-19 are eligible for ordinary death benefits they would receive if their deaths were not the result of an accident on the job. This legislation ensures that public servants who die of coronavirus throughout the height of this pandemic would receive the more substantial death benefits resulting from an in-service accident.

## **Budget Hearings**

New York State Budget hearings are scheduled throughout the month. As a member of the Assembly's Education, Agriculture, Higher Education, Banks, Veterans' Affairs and Economic Development committees, as well as the Chair of Economic Development Subcommittee on Exports, I've voiced my concern over issues that face individuals in the Mohawk Valley.

Our school districts have been under tremendous financial stress and our teachers have faced immense challenges as they successfully took on the unprecedented challenges before them throughout this pandemic. They shouldn't be forced to shoulder anymore costs or cutbacks. Therefore, I've advocated for the necessary funding to provide our children with a top-notch education that prepares them for future success during the Education hearing. Important items addressed included:

- to bring children back into the classroom safely
- the importance of looking into expense aid and maintain district expense aide categories
- securing additional funding for maintaining afterschool programs and transportation expenses incurred due to the pandemic.
- securing proper PPE funding

At the Environmental Conservation hearing, I voiced my support for the Mohawk Valley's agricultural economy and increased protections from environmental threats including:

- enhancing flood mitigation efforts and requesting an update on mitigation efforts along Sauquoit Creek;
- asking if more funds are needed for public education awareness programs, such as for health issues like tick-borne disease;

My time serving as an Academic Dean at Mohawk Valley Community College showed me firsthand how the knowledge, opportunities and skills that students gain through higher learning help set them up for success. During the Higher Education hearing I advocated for funding and protections for colleges in the Mohawk Valley and across the state. I also addressed many concerns facing our colleges in the wake of COVID-19 and voiced the need for community colleges and SUNY institutions to be a part of the state's recovery plan, emphasizing:

- the importance of funding community colleges, which have played a key role in offering students affordable and virtual learning options.
- Improvement of the slow process of approving academic certificate and degree programs
- funding to go toward green initiatives as well as the installation of antimicrobial high-touch surfaces for the safety and well-being of students and staff

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to my office at 315-732-1055 or [ButtenschonM@nyassembly.gov](mailto:ButtenschonM@nyassembly.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marianne Buttenschon". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marianne Buttenschon

Member of Assembly

119th Assembly District

Utica | Rome | Floyd | Frankfort | Marcy | Whitestown