



Assemblyman
Michael Cusick
Information Concerning
Benefits Available To You



Winter 2013

Dear Neighbor:

I am pleased to present you with this newsletter containing important information for Staten Islanders. With the ongoing challenges many of us face due to the economy, I hope that you will be able to take advantage of some of these programs that you may not be aware of. It's always nice to be able to save money, especially during the holiday season.

As your representative in Albany, I continue to work hard to solve the many problems facing our community. Each day my staff and I connect folks in need of services with local and state programs and work to solve other problems that challenge the people I represent. I will continue to fight hard for the quality of life issues that are important to Staten Islanders. I hope the information in this newsletter is helpful.

Should you have any questions about this information or any other topic, please feel free to contact my office at 718-370-1384 or by email at cusickm@assembly.state.ny.us. We are always available to help.

During this joyful season, I wish you and yours . . .

**Happy Holidays and a
 Happy and Healthy New Year**

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick
 Member of Assembly
 District 63



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

TRANSPORTATION



Toll Relief: Goethals, Bayonne and Outerbridge Crossings

A toll relief plan I negotiated last year gives E-ZPass holders a reduced toll on their third trip over New Jersey spans in a 30-day period. Once the third trip is taken, the first two trips paid at a peak rate of \$10.25 are rolled back to \$5.25. To sign up for the three-trip plan call the Port Authority at 1-800-333-8655 or visit www.panynj.gov. You can also go to the New York E-ZPass Customer Service Center at 1150 South Avenue, Staten Island, NY 10314. Those enrolled in the 10-trip plan will be automatically absorbed into the three-trip plan.

Verrazano-Narrows Bridge

Staten Island residents receive an \$8.64 discount (\$6.36 round trip versus the \$15.00 cash rate) on the bridge. If a resident takes more than two round trips in a calendar month, the discount will be \$9.00 (\$6.00 round trip versus the \$15.00 toll rate). Vehicles must be registered to a valid resident address in Staten Island. Please note that vehicles used for commercial purposes are not eligible for residency plans. Plan Code: (SIR) EZ-Pass/MTA Discount: Call 800-333-8655 or visit <http://web.mta.info/bandt/html/dscintro.html>

MTA MetroCard Discount

For customers who are 65 years of age or older or have a qualifying disability. The base subway or local bus fare is \$2.50. Reduced fare is half the base fare, \$1.25 or less with Reduced-Fare MetroCard discounts. Call 718-330-1234 or 311 or visit <http://web.mta.info/bandt/html/dscintro.html> or visit any MetroCard Customer Service Center.

Application for Staten Island Resident MTA Discount Sticker: <http://web.mta.info/bandt/html/siresidt.html>

Access-A-Ride (AAR)

Access-A-Ride provides transportation for people with disabilities who are unable to use public bus or subway service for some or all of their trips. It offers shared ride, door-to-door paratransit service. MTA New York City Transit administers AAR; private carriers under contract to NYC Transit provide service. Call NYC Transit at 718-330-1234 or 1(877)337-2017.

EDUCATION AND TUITION AID

State scholarships, grants and awards

NYS Higher Education Services Corporation; 888-NYS-HESC www.hesc.com.

NYHELPS state loan program offers students (if they have a co-signer), parents, and legal guardians or sponsors a loan equaling the cost of their attendance minus all other federal and state financial aid. Visit www.hesc.com/nyhelps.

The Aid for Part-Time Study (APTS) program provides grant assistance for eligible part-time students enrolled in approved undergraduate studies. Awards provide up to \$2,000 per year for part-time undergraduate study at participating institutions in New York State. Visit www.hesc.com/content.nsf/SFC/Aid_for_PartTime_Study.

College Tuition Tax Credit

If you, your spouse, or a dependent attended an institution of



higher education as an undergraduate and paid qualified tuition expenses you may be eligible for the college tuition tax credit.

Visit www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/college_tuition_credit.htm.

Veterans Tuition Awards

These awards apply to full-time study and part-time study for eligible veterans enrolled in either an undergraduate degree, graduate degree or diploma and certificate programs at degree-granting institutions or noncredit vocational training programs of at least 320 clock hours specifically approved by the New York State Education Department.

The Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant is for undergraduate students who are not eligible for a Pell Grant, but whose parent or guardian was a member of the U.S. Armed Forces and died as a result of service performed in Iraq or Afghanistan after September 11, 2001.

Visit www.hesc.ny.gov/content.nsf/SFC/Veterans_Tuition_Awards to learn more.

For more information contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center at 800-433-3243 or visit www.studentaid.ed.gov.

TAXES AND EXEMPTIONS

STAR School Property Tax Reduction Program

All property owners receiving the Basic STAR exemption for school property taxes must follow new registration requirements in order to continue receiving the Basic STAR property tax exemption. The registration ends December 31, 2013. If you do not register you will not continue to receive this exemption. Senior citizens who receive Enhanced STAR are not impacted by the new registration requirements. However, senior citizens must continue to file each year as they have in the past. Call 518-457-2036 or visit www.tax.ny.gov.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Veterans Property Tax Exemption Program

Qualified veterans living in a private house, condominium, or cooperative apartment who served during specific periods of conflict in the armed forces during one of the following: Persian Gulf Conflict (beginning Aug. 2, 1990), Vietnam War (Feb. 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975), Korean War (June 27, 1950 to Jan. 31, 1955), World War II (Dec. 7, 1941 to Dec. 31, 1946) are eligible for a property tax exemption. Other owners who are eligible: wife or husband of a qualified veteran, surviving spouse of a qualified veteran (who has not remarried), and Gold Star parents. Call 518-457-2036 or visit <http://www.tax.ny.gov>.



Tax Preparation

Earn \$57,000 or less last year? You may be able to file your taxes for free or at low cost by using the city's tax preparation services. Find out if you are able to claim tax credits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the NYC Child Care Tax Credit. Visit http://www.nyc.gov/html/ofe/html/policy_and_programs/taxprep.shtml or http://www.tax.ny.gov/pit/credits/new_york_city_credits.htm



HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

HEAP helps pay heating costs. Eligibility is determined by annual income and household size. Call 718-557-1399 or the NYS HEAP Hotline at 800-342-3009 or the New York State Office for the Aging Senior Citizens Helpline at 800-342-9871 or visit www.mybenefits.ny.gov.

TELEPHONE LIFELINE

Verizon offers Lifeline reduced rate services, if income eligible. Contact Verizon at 1-800-VERIZON.

RENT RELIEF

The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption program (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program give assistance to eligible residents age 62 and older and the disabled. Call NYC Department of Finance at 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/finance.

HELP AT HOME

Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP) helps residents age 60 and older who want to live at home but need help with activities, such as dressing, bathing, shopping and cooking. Call the NYC Department for the Aging at 212-442-1000 or visit www.nyc.gov.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS



BigAppleRx is the City of New York's official prescription discount card developed to help NYC consumers save on their medication costs. It provides discounts averaging 47%; 15% average on brand-name drugs and 53% on generic drugs. The card is free and available to everyone, regardless of age, income, citizenship or health insurance status. Call (800) 697-6974 or visit www.bigapplerox.com.

EPIC: Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage cuts prescription drug costs for residents age 65 and older. Call the EPIC Helpline at 1-800-332-3742 or visit www.health.ny.gov/health_care/epic/.

STATEN ISLAND VETERANS DISCOUNT PROGRAM

Assemblyman Cusick partnered with the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce to initiate a discount program for veterans of the United States military who live in Staten Island. To join this program and receive reductions on goods and services at participating businesses sign up at Assemblyman Cusick's office (1911 Richmond Ave., 718-370-1384). Bring your discharge papers (DD-214) to receive the Staten Island VETS card.

ACCESS NYC

ACCESS NYC is a free service that helps you find out if you may qualify for over 30 City, State and Federal benefit programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or help with utility bills. To apply for benefits visit <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycha/html/residents/residents.shtml>

CHILD CARE

Child Care and Head Start: http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/html/child_care/child_care_information.shtml

Child Care Eligibility Centers on Staten Island: http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/chidcare_eligibility/childcare_directory_statenisland.pdf.

NON-EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE DIAL 311

Find a Police Precinct
Illegal Parking
Find a Towed Vehicle
Vehicle Blocking Driveway
Pay a Parking Ticket
Street Lights/Traffic Signals
Potholes/Street Repairs
Sidewalk Repair
Landlord Maintenance
Heat/Hot Water
Water/Sewage
Stray or Sick Animals
Noise from Neighbor

WHERE CAN I GET A FLU VACCINE?

- Family doctor or primary care provider
- Most pharmacies provide flu vaccines for adults
- Many employers offer flu vaccines
- Health Department immunization clinics or New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation facilities
- How to find a location:
 - Call 311
 - Text flu to 877877
 - Visit: www.nyc.gov/flu

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UPDATE FROM ALBANY

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UNCLAIMED MONEY

The New York State Office of the Comptroller may have money that belongs to you! There is over \$12 billion dollars of unclaimed money from bank accounts, stocks and bonds, utility deposits, income tax refunds, and inheritances to name a few. To see if New York State has money that belongs to you go to the Comptroller's website and click on Unclaimed Funds. All you have to do is enter your name and your city. Visit www.osc.state.ny.us.

**Smoke Detectors save lives!
Remember to test your battery**