



ASSEMBLYMAN

Michael Cusick

Update from Albany



SUMMER 2017

Dear Neighbor:

I hope this newsletter finds you well and you are enjoying your summer. As your representative in Albany, I work each day to advocate for policy and legislation that will positively benefit the people of our borough. During this session, I sought to tackle some of the most pressing issues facing Staten Islanders, including tax cuts for our senior citizens and veterans, continuing the ongoing battle against the heroin & opioid epidemic, and improving quality of life issues.

This newsletter contains information on what I and my colleagues accomplished on your behalf during the Legislative session. I hope that this is both helpful and informative and should you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me. My office is located at 1911 Richmond Avenue, our phone number is (718) 370-1384 and my email address is [cusickm@nyassembly.gov](mailto:cusickm@nyassembly.gov). I wish you a safe and relaxing summer and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick  
Member of Assembly  
District 63



## Progress & Accomplishments From the 2017 Legislative Session



### Securing Property Tax Relief for our Veterans and Seniors

#### Alternative Tax Exemption for Veterans

In 2013, I authored a law (A.565, CH.518) that expands upon the property tax exemption for eligible veterans. This law allows cities and municipalities around the state to opt into providing this additional tax break. The average exemption from school taxes is currently \$545 and will increase by an additional \$595 per veteran household. This would bring the total Alternative Veterans average exemption to \$1,140 for the 2018 fiscal year. The property tax break offered is a special way of recognizing the considerable sacrifices made by the brave men and women who have served their country during times of war. This law was recently adopted into the City budget this year and provides the funding for eligible veterans to receive this exemption. I would like to thank Council Members Steve Matteo, Debi Rose, and Joe Borelli for working to include this Initiative within the New York City budget.

#### Expanding the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption

The Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) and Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE) will be expanded to raise the income cap to \$50,000 for a full 50% property tax exemption and to \$58,400 for a partial exemption, increasing eligibility for senior citizens and providing much-needed relief for those who are living on a fixed income.

If you qualify under the new income limit, the benefit will apply retroactively to the full tax year that started on July 1, 2017.





## Addressing Physical Fitness and Health

In order to address the continuous issue of obesity, the Assembly passed my legislation which establishes a statewide physical fitness education campaign (A.4426) to increase awareness regarding the problems associated with obesity and to promote recreational and physical fitness activities within the State of New York. In addition, my legislation (A.6538) which provides education and outreach programs to address the danger of sudden cardiac arrest among student athletes was also passed. The support would come in the form of educational materials explaining the threat of cardiac arrest, early warning signs, and an overview of options for screening.

## Protecting Our Seniors

In both the Assembly and the Senate we passed an important bill that would create guidelines to help health care providers and employees identify abuse and maltreatment of senior citizens (A.8258-A). Additionally, in the Assembly we passed legislation to develop training materials to help bank employees recognize and report signs of financial exploitation (A.6395), require banks to notify customers seeking to open a joint account if the bank also offers convenience accounts (A.8217-A), and a measure that would streamline the estate planning process by simplifying the power of attorney form to a single document with more straightforward, transparent language (A.8120-B).

## No Expansion of Speed Cameras

Recently, there has been a call by city officials to increase the number of school zones from 140 to 750 in order to expand the number of speed cameras. The legislation that was proposed did not pass both houses of the Legislature, which means the expansion has been curbed for at least a year.

## Assemblyman Cusick Chairs the Assembly Committee on Election Law

As the Chair of the Assembly Election Law Committee, I oversee all legislation that pertains to and affects elections on a local, state, and federal level. This year, the committee passed my legislation that would give overseas military personnel and New Yorkers living abroad an opportunity to vote and save \$25 million in election administration costs (A. 3052). We also passed measures that would allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 years of age by the time of a presidential election (A. 3549), increase the number of registrants an election district may contain, thereby consolidating districts and reducing costs (A.5576), establish early voting (A.2064), and allow for electronic voter registration (A.5382). It is my sincere belief that by simplifying the process and improving voter accessibility, this legislation will give citizens a better opportunity to participate in the democratic process and increase voter turnout for elections.



## New York Buy American Act

This year, the “New York Buy American Act” (A.8427-A) was passed in both the Assembly and the Senate which automatically requires American-made iron, steel, and concrete to be used on certain State-issued construction contracts. I had proposed similar legislation in early 2015 which utilized a rating system to mandate the use of American-made products. These new measures put in place will bring more jobs into New York by reinvesting into local businesses.



# Delivering for Staten Island

## Preserving the Staten Island Resident Discount on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge

In this year's budget, I fought to ensure the continuance of the essential toll relief on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge for Staten Island residents and commercial drivers with New York State E-ZPass tags. The final 2017-18 budget agreement included \$10.3 million in funding, as well as an additional \$3.5 million to completely offset what would have been an additional rate hike. The Staten Island resident rate is \$5.50 per crossing with E-ZPass and the commercial discount will remain intact. Senator Andrew Lanza and I have successfully negotiated this deal with the Governor's Office and respective leaders in each house and were assisted this year with funding from Senator Diane Savino.



## Sign Up for Goethals, Bayonne, and Outerbridge Crossing Toll Relief

Currently, the cash toll on these crossings is \$15. Senator Lanza and I have crafted a plan which gives E-ZPass holders a reduced toll on their third round trip over New Jersey spans in a calendar month. Once the third trip is taken, the

first two trips will be rolled back to \$6.25. Staten Islanders who want to participate in the three-trip plan should go to [panynj.gov](http://panynj.gov), visit the NY E-ZPass Customer Service Center in Travis, or call E-ZPass at (800) 333-8655.

## Combating the Opioid Epidemic

In 2012, my bill, A.10623 (Ch. 447), which established a real-time database for prescription monitoring by tracking the dispensing of prescription drugs that is used by practitioners and pharmacists, became a standard tool to curb drug abuse. In 2016, the Governor expanded upon the I-STOP law by establishing a comprehensive plan adopting further measures to address the heroin and opioid epidemic in New York State. The 2017-18 budget agreement provides \$213 million in funding to support prevention and treatment programs targeted toward chemical dependency, residential service opportunities, and public awareness and education activities.

## West Shore Light Rail

Last year during budget negotiations, Senator Lanza and I obtained a commitment from the MTA for a study of a West Shore Light Rail as another means of transportation for Staten Islanders. This year, the MTA followed through on their commitment with the inclusion of \$4 million in their proposed Capital Plan. This is an important step forward in determining the feasibility of this project.

## Protecting Against Brush Fires

Many areas on Staten Island are prone to brush fires because they are thick with an invasive weed – phragmites. Phragmites are combustible plants that are a threat to surrounding properties of homeowners. Since 2011, I have passed laws that authorize owners of residential properties in high risk brush fire areas the ability to apply for a no-cost permit to cut and remove these reeds. To obtain a permit, call or stop by the Staten Island borough president's office.

## Education Aid

In the 2017-2018 budget enacted in April, we increased Educational Aid by \$1.1 billion, which includes a \$700 million increase in Foundation Aid. With this increase, the total Education Aid is \$25.8 billion, an increase of 4.4 percent.

## Nonpublic School Aid

This year, I passed legislation (A.7833) that clarifies the language regarding the basis by which the State Education Department uses to distribute aid to schools, which has formally been based on the instructional time standard. The disparity addresses the use of "instructional hours," but not "instructional days," which resulted in reductions in aid to nonpublic schools. The legislation was necessary to avoid a reduction in reimbursement to nonpublic schools.

## Free College Tuition

The 2017-18 Budget we enacted in April adds \$163 billion to make college tuition free at SUNY and CUNY for middle-class families making up to \$110,000 per year and increasing to \$125,000 in 2019. It also provides for an additional \$8 million for access to e-books. In addition, we included \$19 million for the Enhanced Tuition Award which enables students attending private not-for-profit colleges to receive financial assistance with a maximum award of \$3,000, which also requires private colleges to provide a match. For more information visit <https://www.hesc.ny.gov/eta/>.

# Stopping the New York City Plastic Bag Tax



In early February, I authored a bill (A. 4883) that established a moratorium, thereby halting adoption of the City of New York's "Plastic Bag Tax," which would have required the charging of a fee for single-use plastic carryout bags. In response, Governor Cuomo signed the bill into law and formed a task force to develop an equitable statewide plan to address the issue and come up with an alternative solution that won't unfairly burden Staten Island taxpayers.

## Total Fitness Challenge

To encourage children to exercise both their mind and body during the summer months, I established the Total Fitness Challenge in 2008. The 2017 Total Fitness Challenge has begun and is open to all students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Each child must read at least 30 minutes every day and perform as many physical activities as they want. The different physical activities are assigned various point values which count toward each student's total score. A Total Fitness medal will be awarded to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place top scorers from each grade among the island-wide entries. A trophy will be given to the school having the most points and participants in the challenge.



For more information, visit: [www.totalfitnesschallenge.org](http://www.totalfitnesschallenge.org) or call my District Office at (718) 370-1384

## Discount Program for Veterans

A number of years ago, I 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, you can sign up at Assemblyman Cusick's office at 1911 Richmond Avenue. Please bring your discharge papers (DD-214) to receive your Staten Island VETS discount card. You will be given a listing of participating businesses that offer discounts at their establishments. For more information, contact our district office at (718) 370-1384.



New York State Assembly • Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman

**Michael  
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**UPDATE  
FROM ALBANY**

SUMMER 2017

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## UNCLAIMED MONEY

The New York State Office of the Comptroller may have money that belongs to you! There is over \$15 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 ([www.osc.state.ny.us](http://www.osc.state.ny.us)) and click on "Unclaimed Funds."