



Dear Friends,



The 2017-2018 Legislative Session is underway. Please join me, Senator David Carlucci, and Assemblymember Ken Zebrowski, for our annual **Joint Budget Hearing** on **Thursday February 23** from **9:30 11:30 a.m. at the Pearl River Library**. We will soon begin budget negotiations and your input is important. If you would like to speak briefly you must RSVP to Senator Carlucci's office: 845-623-3627.

[Joint Legislative Budget Hearings](#) on the [Executive Budget](#), taking place in Albany, are also intended to provide various state legislative committees with public input on the Executive Budget proposal. Testimony each day begins with appropriate state agencies and department heads followed by witnesses who sign up to testify on that area of the budget. You can view video of the hearings on the [Assembly](#) website.

I look forward to seeing you on February 23.

~Ellen~

Joint Budget Hearing on Mental Health

At the [Joint Budget Hearing on Mental Health](#) I questioned Ann Marie Sullivan, MD, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Mental Health, about the lack of psychologists, access to counseling, and social workers that provide mental health assistance and the serious impact this shortage has on the Rockland community and across the state. We need to provide incentives and partner with our colleges and universities to encourage our youth to pursue careers in mental health and to train more mental health professionals.



Funding to Increase Wages for Support Professionals

I met with [Jawonio](#), Bridges and other nonprofits to urge Governor Cuomo to provide adequate funding in the 2017-18 Budget for [wage increases for direct support professionals and teaching staff](#) in special education preschools around the state. The developmentally disabled, their families, and the nonprofits who serve them depend on these dedicated professionals. If we want to retain and attract the best staff to fill existing shortages, we must pay a living wage. New York State has an obligation to fund these wage increases before we face a crisis. For

more information [#BfairtoDirectCare](#).

Raise the Age Legislation

New York and North Carolina are the only two states to mandate that all youth aged 16 and 17, charged with any offense, be prosecuted and sentenced in adult criminal court. Research has consistently demonstrated that treating minors as adults in the criminal justice system is counter-productive if rehabilitating these youth, reducing future crime and recidivism is our goal. As a longtime advocate for [criminal justice reform](#) I co-sponsored 'Raise the Age' legislation. It's time NY State raises the age of adult criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 years of age, so that youth who are charged with a crime may be treated in an age-appropriate manner.

Foster Youth College Success Initiative

As [Chair of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families](#), I spoke about the need to continue providing funding for the [Foster Youth College Success Initiative](#) so that our young people who are swept into the foster care system know that they can go to college, build successful careers, happier lives, and brighter futures. New York State has a moral responsibility to provide these children with the resources they need to succeed, the resources we would want our own children to have.



Living Organ Donor Support Act

By reimbursing living organ donors' lost wages, medical and associated expenses and equalizing access to healthcare, the Living Donor Support Act, [\(A5475/S2498\)](#) that I co-sponsored, will raise awareness and encourage New Yorkers to take action, make a difference, sign the [New York State Donate Life Registry](#) and save a life. This landmark bill is expected to increase live donor transplantation in New York by 20%, which would save a hundred lives each year. We cannot ask the 10,000 New Yorkers - men, women and children - who are waiting for a life-saving transplant to keep waiting. We must do everything we can to increase organ donation rates in NY State through legislation, advocacy, and education.

Protecting Immigrant Rights

At a time when immigrant rights are under attack by President Trump and Congress, I am proud that the Assembly Majority passed new legislation, the [New York State Liberty Package](#), and once again, the [DREAM Act](#), to protect our vulnerable immigrant communities, safeguard their due process rights and ensure that they have access to the support services and resources they need. We must stand up to fear and never forget we are a nation of immigrants whose families, at one time or another, came to America in search of freedom and a better life.

