



Community Newsletter

ASSEMBLY MEMBER DANIEL O'DONNELL

Upper West Side ■ Morningside Heights ■ Manhattan Valley

SPRING 2014

■ SERVING NEW YORK'S 69TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT ■

Dear Neighbor,

Budget season for New York State is behind us once again, and I am excited to be able to spend more time in the community and to turn my attention to non-budgetary legislative issues in Albany. For the rest of the 2014 legislative session I plan to continue my advocacy on behalf of criminal justice reform and improved educational opportunity, among other priority issues. I also have some of my favorite community programs coming up – look for details later in this newsletter!

First, however, I want to highlight some very exciting affordable housing news – the budget increased the maximum income limit for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program from \$29,000 to \$50,000. New York City's government must officially accept the funding for this increase, but I am optimistic that they will do so soon. For more information, refer to the article on the right side of this page.

In the community, my 11th Annual Community Reading Challenge kicked off in mid-April, and I have begun to hear from eager readers preparing for my three book festivals in May. I encourage interested readers in pre-K through 8th grade to stop by my office for materials and more information, and to join me at any of the book festivals. Students who register will receive personalized invitations to the book festival of their choice, and I look forward to the chance to meet and congratulate some of the readers in my district on their great work. Read more about the Challenge on page 2. Also watch for information on my annual Cell Phone Drive and, as always, my free monthly legal clinics.

Finally, on just one day this January our community suffered the tragic loss of both a young man and an elderly man in vehicle-pedestrian accidents. These devastating losses were not the first, nor the last, suffered in our city this year. To help combat this terrible problem, I introduced A8478 to reduce New York City's default speed limit to 20 miles per hour, and empower New York City to make its own decisions about appropriate speed limits on specific streets (currently the state legislature must be involved). In March, I joined a press conference with the Families for Safe Streets calling for this important change, and I plan to continue fighting for my bill as the Assembly session continues.

I hope you will find this newsletter informative and useful. My staff and I are always available to assist you in my Community Office located at 245 W. 104th Street, just off Broadway, or by phone at (212) 866-3970. I encourage you to call, write, or visit us, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM. For those with specific housing problems, I have a dedicated housing specialist on staff available to help every day.

If you would like to receive monthly email updates from me, please send an email with the subject "subscribe" to odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us.

Very truly yours,

2014-2015 Budget Highlights

For nearly four months, the New York State Assembly, Senate, and Governor worked to negotiate the 2014-2015 State Budget. While it was an imperfect agreement, Assembly Member O'Donnell felt there were a number of notable successes.

First, O'Donnell was proud to vote for an **increase in the income limit for the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program**, and a **restoration in funds for the New York City Housing Authority Tenant Watch Program**. Under the current rules, individuals 62 years and older with yearly incomes below \$29,000 may be eligible for exemption from some or all increases in rent, dependent on the type of housing. The provision in the Budget will increase the SCRIE income eligibility cap to \$50,000 for the next two years, increasing the number of eligible seniors by 10,000. Assembly Member O'Donnell believes this is a tremendous step toward helping seniors remain in their homes and in our communities. Although the Community Office assists an average of one constituent on SCRIE per week, this program is grossly underutilized even under the current rules.

The Legislature also voted to increase the salaries of human service personnel. Human service personnel provide a vital service to our state, caring compassionately and gracefully for people with disabilities. This year the budget included a **2 percent cost of living increase** in salary for human service employees of non-profit providers licensed by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Mental Health, the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Health, the Office for Children and Family Services and the Office for the Aging.

Assembly Member O'Donnell and his colleagues voted to rejuvenate our health care system's infrastructure by creating a new \$1.2 billion capital program to complement \$8 billion in savings from New York's 2011 Medicaid reforms. The funding will support projects that reduce unnecessary hospital visits and improve home and long-term health care.

(continued on page 2)



Assembly Member O'Donnell attending the Public Protection Joint Committee Meeting on the budget in Albany in March.

The state budget also addresses New York's child care crisis. With the cost and scarcity of care options producing ludicrous situations such as waiting lists for daycare slots and yearly child care costs equivalent to a year of college tuition, some parents who want to return to the workforce or seek higher education are unable to do so. The Legislature allocated **\$34 million to create more than 4,500 additional subsidized child care slots**. Moreover, the budget requires child care providers to post their most recent inspection report in a prominent place.

The budget also **restores \$26.2 million to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program** that was excluded from the executive budget proposal. TANF delivers services to encourage the self-sufficiency of families, including aid to the Emergency Homelessness Program, Advanced Technology Training (ATTAIN), and services to prevent children from these families from being placed in foster care. While the amount of aid to TANF has decreased in many other states, New York State remains dedicated to providing the necessary public assistance to keep families afloat during difficult times.

The Legislature has also voted to **provide \$1.6 million for the Displaced Homemaker Program** to provide counseling and job training to homemakers so they can secure employment and economic independence. Displaced Homemakers are individuals who have been outside the formal labor force for a number of years but, during that time, worked within their homes to care for family members. Many

of these individuals experience difficulty in returning to the labor force due to lack of training, experience, and/or self-confidence.

The state budget also distributes \$13.8 million for programs that help at-risk youth. These include the Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Youth (\$3 million), the Child Advocacy Centers (\$2.57 million), the Youth Development Program (\$1.29 million), Settlement Houses (\$450,000), and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (\$254,000).

Overall, the 2014-15 Budget provides needed funding for many important groups and programs, and O'Donnell was proud to vote in its favor. Assembly Member O'Donnell is optimistic about spending the next few months in Albany developing non-financial improvements to the correctional system and other portions of New York State government, and advocating on behalf of New York State's students and all members of his community.



Assembly Member O'Donnell with representatives from the Campaign for Summer Jobs in Albany in January.

Corrections Budget Prioritizes Funding for Training and Reentry Programs

As Chair of the Assembly Standing Committee on Correction, Assembly Member O'Donnell serves as the primary advocate for those in the correctional system during budget negotiations. This year he took this opportunity to ensure that state funds were allocated for progressive improvements to the entire correctional system, especially increased opportunities for meaningful rehabilitation. Assembly Member O'Donnell is proud to announce that this year's budget does include important funding for such reforms and programs.

With a declining inmate population, the state will close four prisons this year, freeing up millions of dollars of corrections funds. O'Donnell helped to designate those funds for important prison initiatives such as expanding crucial educational

opportunities and vocational training programs. The money will also help fund policy research, advocacy efforts, and reentry programs for recently released inmates. Many important non-profit allies in correctional reform received needed funding, including the Bailey House Project, Consortium of the Niagara Frontier, John Jay College, Friends of Island Academy, the Vera Institute/Common Justice, and The Fortune Society. Each of these groups is committed to correctional reform in various ways and will receive at least \$100,000 in state funding. Additionally, **over \$1 million was dedicated to Prisoners' Legal Services, which will be used to provide effective legal representation to indigent prisoners and help protect both their civil and human rights.**

Join the 11th Annual Community Reading Challenge!

This year's 11th Annual Community Reading Challenge kicked off on April 14th, and continues until May 14th! Visit Assembly Member O'Donnell's District Office, or the **Morningside Heights, Bloomingdale, or George Bruce Library** to register to participate in this exciting community event!

This year's theme is **Reading Saves the Day**, and all the books feature rich depictions of a variety of heroes or heroines. For the Challenge, students in grades pre-K through 8 will be provided with a book list, reading log, and a list of suggested activities and events that Assembly Member O'Donnell hopes will both entertain and encourage readers to see their own "hero" potential. These materials can be collected at the Assembly Member's Community Office, or at any of the following participating libraries: George Bruce, Morningside Heights, or Bloomingdale.

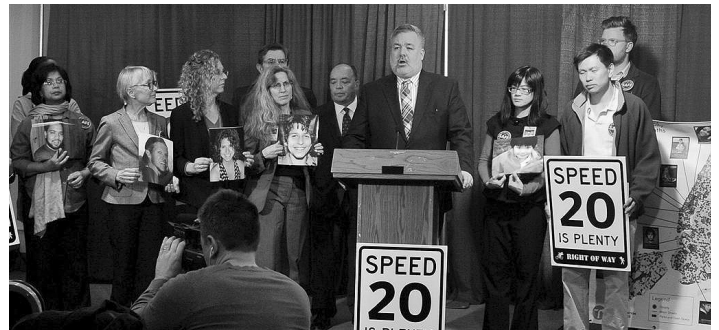
The Challenge will culminate in **three book festivals**. On **Thursday, May 8th at Morningside Heights Library, Saturday, May 10th at Bloomingdale Library, and Wednesday, May**

14th at Columbia Secondary School, join us for gatherings filled with special guest authors; food; prizes such as free books, tote bags, and bookstore gift cards; and lots of fun! Our **guest authors** include **Paulette Bogan, Matthew Cody, and Alex Simmons**. Paulette Bogan, the Morningside Heights Library Book Festival guest author, is a celebrated picture book illustrator and freelance artist, and author of *Lulu the Big Little Chick*. Matthew Cody, the Bloomingdale Library Book Festival guest, is the award-winning author of *Powerless* and *Super*. Alex Simmons, the Columbia Secondary School Book Festival guest, is a critically acclaimed freelance writer of comics and children's books, and the founder of the annual Kids' Comic Con. **Attendees at all three parties will receive a free copy of Matthew Cody's book, *Powerless*.** If you have any questions about this year's Reading Challenge, please don't hesitate to visit any of the participating libraries or call Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office at (212) 866-3970.

Updates on the 2014-2015 Education Budget

The New York State Fiscal Year 2014-2015 Budget continues the Assembly's mission to more adequately and equitably invest in our children. Assembly Member O'Donnell firmly believes that the state must do all it can to fairly and adequately prepare New York State's children for the future. This year O'Donnell and his colleagues in the Assembly pursued this goal, most notably, by **increasing overall education funding by \$1.12 billion**, including a **\$435 million increase in the allocation for New York City schools**. Moreover, the state budget has provided an additional \$1.5 billion over five years to launch statewide full-day universal pre-kindergarten programs. New York City will receive \$300 million a year of this allotment.

This year, the Assembly also worked to address the yearly stress and anxiety brought on by New York State standardized testing, worsened recently by the accelerated rollout of new Common Core Standard-aligned curricula and tests. Assembly Member O'Donnell and his colleagues included several measures in the budget designed to slow the implementation of the Common Core, reduce emphasis on standardized assessments, and protect children from undue stress. These measures include **banning standardized tests for students in grades K-2, preventing the placement of test results on 3rd-8th graders' permanent records for four and a half years, and prohibiting state test results from solely or primarily determining grade promotion and admissions decisions**. Also, the budget instructed the



Assembly Member O'Donnell calling for a lower default speed limit in New York City at a press conference with members of the group "Families for Safe Streets." O'Donnell is the prime sponsor of a bill, A8478, which would lower the default speed limit to 20 miles per hour citywide. He plans to continue working with advocacy groups, including families that have been affected by traffic violence, as well as elected officials to get this essential change implemented.

State Education Department (SED) to provide teachers with materials and resources to assist in developing lessons that meet the new standards, and voted to limit the amount of classroom time used for assessments. O'Donnell hopes this will contribute to reduced testing anxiety and increased time for art, music, physical education, and other essential subjects sometimes neglected in favor of test preparation.

Assembly Member O'Donnell was also gravely concerned about the threat to student privacy created by the non-profit student data repository system, inBloom, and statewide efforts to collect and hold sensitive data "on the cloud." As a result, in 2013 he introduced Assembly Bill A6059 to protect student privacy by prohibiting the release of personally identifiable information about individual students to certain third parties without explicit parental consent. **This year's Education Budget incorporates similar measures by placing restrictions on the sharing of student data, allowing schools to opt out of sharing student data with vendors, and appointing a chief privacy officer, who will set guidelines for sharing student data and develop policies to deal with data breaches.** The budget also requires the termination of New York's contract with inBloom and mandates that all student information already provided to inBloom be deleted. New York was the last remaining state to collaborate with inBloom, and as a consequence of the contract termination, inBloom announced that it will cease operations.

Additionally, the Legislature increased funding for after-school programming in the state budget. This funding recognizes the importance of such programs to both children and parents, allowing children to continue learning in a safe and supervised environment, while relieving many parents of the often significant burden of finding adequate childcare that lasts until the end of their workday. That is why the legislature has initiated a five-year plan to **increase funds for after-school programs**, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. NYC will receive \$190 million per year of this funding.

In addition to K-12 education, Assembly Member O'Donnell believes that higher education is a right that every student, regardless of their economic status, should be afforded. He was very pleased that this year the Assembly provided **\$10.4 billion for SUNY and \$4.3 billion for CUNY**, in addition to voting to increase the Tuition Assistance Program budget by \$19.8 million, which will raise the maximum award for full-time students. The budget also provides \$102 million in funding for college opportunity programs, an increase of \$4.2 million over the executive proposal. This funding restores cuts and provides a 3 percent increase for the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP); the Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program; and the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP). These programs give economically and educationally disadvantaged students the ability to pursue higher education by providing academic support and financial aid. **Furthermore, Assembly Member O'Donnell and his colleagues have provided \$8 million in funding for a new Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) scholarship program.** This program would provide full tuition scholarships to the top 10 percent of high school graduates attending SUNY or CUNY schools if they pursue a STEM career and then work in New York for five years after graduation.

Assembly Member O'Donnell firmly believes that the state's fiscal woes should never be used as an excuse to deny students an adequate education. With the economic crisis waning, he will continue to advocate on behalf of New Yorkers' academic futures.

Cathedral of St. John the Divine Threatened

This spring Assembly Member O'Donnell was alarmed to learn that a long-threatened development project on the northern end of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine's grounds is suddenly moving forward. The proposed pair of luxury apartment complexes would be erected feet from the Cathedral's north side, and add a huge new strain to the community's already overtaxed infrastructure, with over 400 units planned. Assembly Member O'Donnell has heard consistent and vehement opposition to the project from constituents, and has been working closely with one prominent community group – the Friends of St. John the Divine – to prevent this inappropriate development.

Unfortunately, the Cathedral itself is both pro-development and owns the land, and the construction can proceed "as of right." This means no Environmental Impact Study or any discretionary state or city review processes must be completed before the building can be built. This sad state of affairs is due to the fact that the Cathedral and its close are not landmarked, and the zoning laws for that area are inadequate. Perhaps even more concerning is the fact that a study of the new building's impact upon traffic in the area is not required to be completed until after the building is complete. This despite the fact that the proposed building will include a 193-space parking garage in its basement, and feature an entrance directly across 113th Street from the St. Luke's Hospital Emergency Room.

On Saturday, April 5th, Assembly Member O'Donnell joined members of the Friends of St. John the Divine and several of his elected colleagues at a press conference condemning the Cathedral's plan (pictured below). As O'Donnell noted, if the Cathedral wishes to become a for-profit real estate company, it should pay taxes like every other business. The Friends of St. John the Divine are exploring legal and procedural options to stop the construction.



Photo by Steve Friedman 2014.

Tenants' Corner

New York is largely a renter's city, and as such, a majority of New Yorkers are bound by a lease. These documents detail the renter's rights and responsibilities, often in the fine print of the first lease received. Few of them, however, specify what tenants should do when repairs are needed or services are not maintained. The staff at Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office can advise tenants on the steps they should take to successfully negotiate with their landlords to get their specific grievances addressed.

One simple action tenants can take to increase their success in dealing with their landlords is to **write letters which clearly describe the problems they are facing**. Often, tenants prefer to call their landlords on the telephone, or speak informally with the superintendent of their building to address problems they encounter. Although this is understandable, a conversation is no substitute for a written document.

In order to establish with certainty that a landlord was notified about the condition of an apartment, tenants should always mail letters that discuss the need for specific repairs, **and send them using a "return receipt requested" service. This gives the tenant evidence that the letter was received, and on which date.** All letters should be dated and tenants should remember to keep copies of the letters they write for their files. If you have further questions on this topic, or need help writing a letter to your landlord, please contact Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office at (212) 866-3970.

Assembly Member O'Donnell's Upcoming FREE Legal Clinics

For constituents who need help with legal issues but are unable to come to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office during the workday, Assembly Member O'Donnell hosts a monthly evening opportunity for constituents to consult with a volunteer attorney.

Call Joyce at (212) 866-3970 to make an appointment.

Upcoming clinic dates:

May 29th • June 26th • July 31st • August 28th

Internships Available

Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office is now accepting applications for the summer internship program from individuals who are high school age or older. Interns in his office get a taste of the workings of a local government office, and have the opportunity to research and advocate on behalf of important community and government issues. To apply, please fax or email a cover letter and resume to (212) 864-1095 or wilsonc@assembly.state.ny.us.

For more information, please call (212) 866-3970 and ask for Callie.

E-Newsletters

Do you want more frequent updates about interesting community events, important government information, and what Assembly Member O'Donnell has been working on? Sign up to receive his monthly electronic newsletters by sending an email to odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us.

Daniel O'Donnell's Community Newsletter

Assembly Member ■ 69th District

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COMMUNITY OFFICE INFORMATION:

Open Monday through Friday
9:00 AM - 5:30 PM
(212) 866-3970

odonnell@assembly.state.ny.us

Upcoming Cell Phone Drive!

A donated cell phone can become a lifeline for an isolated or otherwise vulnerable individual who needs to call 911, including seniors or victims of domestic violence. Secure the Call is a charity with a single mission: to collect and convert as many old cell phones as possible into 911 emergency access phones.

Please help us support this important cause by bringing your used cell phones to Assembly Member O'Donnell's Community Office, 245 W. 104th St. (between Broadway and West End) any time during the month of June. For more information, please visit www.securethecall.org.

June 1st – 30th, 2014

¡Atención!

La oficina de la comunidad del asambleísta O'Donnell tiene disponible empleados que hablan español para asistir al público tiempo completo, lunes a viernes de 9:00 AM a 5:30 PM. La oficina está localizada en el 245 West 104th Street, cerca de Broadway. También pueden llamar a la oficina en horas laborables al (212) 866-3970.

Recuerden que nuestro noticiero está disponible en español. Para obtener una copia favor de comunicarse con la oficina del asambleísta Daniel O'Donnell.