



# COMMUNITY NEWS

Summer 2016

from Assemblyman

# J. GARY PRETLOW

89<sup>th</sup> Assembly District

## SUPPORTING OUR CHILDREN

The 2016-2017 New York State legislative session marks a monumental point in New York history. It's not just a spending plan, but rather a far-reaching, comprehensive plan to put families first and strongly invest in New York's future.

The final budget included a significant investment in our schools. Each of us knows that investing in education is the key to unlocking our children's full potential. Schools are the wellspring of knowledge for our whole society and adequate funding of our schools to ensure academic excellence has always been my top priority. As in the years past, I have fought for education aid increases and this year is no different. The Mount Vernon School System will see an increase of \$8,982,401, a growth of 10.26% from last year.

This year's education aid increase highlights the Assembly's commitment to helping every child in New York State achieve their full potential. We owe it to our students to provide them with a high-quality education that fosters innovation and prepares them for the ever-evolving 21st century economy so that each and every child in the Mount Vernon community has a fair shot at success.

I am also pleased to report that the Assembly passed legislation requiring the state health and education departments to create statewide guidelines for school districts to test drinking water for lead.

Recent test results have shown some schools in New York State have unsafe levels of lead in their drinking water. Currently, some school districts have voluntarily tested for lead, however it is not required. The legislation passed by the Assembly would direct the State Department of Health



*Reading to Leake and Watts Children*

and Department of Education to enact regulations for schools to periodically test for lead and help school district pay for the testing.

When parents send their children to school, they do so expecting they will learn in a safe, healthy environment. This legislation will create standards that ensure every school across the state has the resources to test its drinking water, so that we can be sure our kids here in Mount Vernon aren't exposed to harmful levels of lead.



*CUNY Students*

## HIGHER EDUCATION

I recognize the importance of a sound education and the impact it has on fostering the dreams of our children and young adults. We can't expect our students to get good jobs, achieve economic security and give back to this state and their community if they're forced deeper and deeper into student loan debt.

The Legislature understands that we do not need to create any more obstacles to an affordable college edu-

cation and a chance for a brighter future for New York students. And as a result, SUNY/CUNY tuition will not be raised for the coming academic year.

Higher education should never be a luxury. Every student in this state is entitled to it and it is imperative we do everything we can to make a college degree as accessible and affordable as possible.



*Mt. Vernon Boys & Girls Club*

## Community Improvement & Support

I am pleased to announce that I helped passed legislation that has been signed into law that will hold lenders accountable for maintaining vacant “zombie” residences and better protect homeowners’ rights.

The new law will force banks to be responsible for maintaining abandoned homes, even when a foreclosure action is pending, which will help reduce the number of dangerous and dilapidated properties. It also requires the banks to conduct periodic inspections to determine where vacant properties exist and creates a state-wide registry and toll-free hotline for reporting of these homes.

Under the law, courts will provide homeowners in foreclosure with a consumer bill of rights, ensuring homeowners are aware of their right to continue living in their homes until the foreclosure is finalized. The law also strengthens homeowners’ protections during court proceedings and imposes financial sanctions against lenders that do not make good faith efforts to resolve mortgage foreclosure actions.

Together, these safeguards will help stabilize our communities, prevent dilapidated homes from lowering neighboring property values and provide key protection

for homeowners facing foreclosure.

Although many organizations and agencies work tirelessly to better our communities, many operate on limited financial support. The effort put forth by these agencies should never be compromised due to lack of funding. As a result of my efforts in the New York State Assembly I am pleased to have assisted the following entities in obtaining financial assistance to continue operating adequately and successfully:

- Boys and Girls Club of Mount Vernon
- Summer Jobs for Youth –City of Mount Vernon Youth Bureau
- City of Mount Vernon Department of Recreation – Arts on Third Street
- Future Society
- Imani Cultural Academy, After-School Program
- Soup Kitchen/Food Pantry-Sacred Heart Church
- Mount Vernon Public Library
- St. Paul’s Church



## Keeping Our Streets Safe

Too many times we have watched as broken-hearted families plead in vain for Congress to do the right thing and pass stronger gun control laws to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the wrong hands. We have long recognized that military grade weapons have no place on the streets and in neighborhoods where our children play and where families deserve to live without fear.

As the nation once again finds itself in mourning over another deadly attack that has stolen more innocent lives, it is absolutely critical that we do all we can to ensure that we have the strongest and smartest laws possible to address the issue of gun violence. We must continue to stand on our promise and duty to protect the citizens we serve.



*Association of Proprietary College with Assemblyman Gary Pretlow*

## HEALTH CARE

I am sure we all know and understand that healthcare is a fundamental right — not a luxury and access to quality health insurance can literally be the difference between life and death. In order to ensure that every New Yorker has the coverage they need, the New York State Assembly passed legislation that I supported that would create a universal plan to cover every New York State resident, known as the New York Health Act (A5062-/A).

The New York Health Act would establish a universal health care system, known as New York Health, and would

expand coverage eligibility to include all residents, regardless of wealth, income, age or health status. In addition, every enrollee would have access to the full range of doctors and service providers offered.

Too many people are faced with rising costs and crushing medical bills, and in some cases, it's causing them to go without critical care. Universal health care will help get the focus back on prevention and wellness, which will ultimately rein in health care costs and save taxpayer dollars.



*ArtsWestchester's  
Ribbon Cutting  
for the Public Art  
Installation of Seeing  
the Wind.*

## END OF LIFE WISHES

Whether to accept or reject medical care in an end of life situation is a very personal decision governed by one's own beliefs. Should a serious accident or illness leave you unable to communicate those wishes, it is necessary to take steps to ensure that they are honored. In New York State, that means having a living will or health care proxy. The emotional case of Terri Schiavo shows what can happen when an individual's wishes are not spelled out.

A health care proxy and living will are similar in that they both clarify what to do only when you lack the capacity to make your own medical decisions. A health care proxy empowers a loved one to make medical decisions for you whereas a living will is specific written instructions describing your medical wishes in detail—usually crafted by and left with your attorney. You can use these documents in tandem so your health care agent has greater guidance for what you would want in specific medical situations.

If you prefer a loved one to make decisions for you, the New York State Health Care Proxy Law allows you to appoint a competent adult as your health care agent. It is important to note that you must specifically document your wishes about life-sustaining artificial nutrition and hydration or your health care agent will not be able to make these decisions for you. A health care proxy can be filled out easily without a lawyer, and becomes legally binding after you and two witnesses' sign it.

Once you complete a health care proxy, hospitals, doctors and other health care providers must follow your agent's decisions as if they were your own. The health care proxy will not only help ensure your wishes will be carried out, but also eliminates any conflict or confusion among your loved ones.

If at any time you change your mind about your end of life wishes, it is important to amend your health care proxy or living will.

If you would like more information about a health care proxy or would like to obtain one, please contact my office at (914) 667-0127.

**CLIP AND RETURN**



*Your questions or comments are important to me. If you have any concerns or issues you would like to discuss with me, please indicate and return to:*

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow, 89<sup>th</sup> District**  
6 Gramatan Avenue, Suite 201, Mt. Vernon, New York 10550

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Name:**

**Address:**

---



**COMMUNITY  
NEWS**

*from Assemblyman*

**J. Gary  
PRETLOW**

**SUMMER 2016**

**Assemblyman J. Gary Pretlow**



DISTRICT OFFICE: 6 Gramatan Avenue, Suite 201 • Mt. Vernon, New York 10550 • 914-667-0127  
ALBANY OFFICE: Room 845 Legislative Office Building • Albany, New York 12248 • 518-455-5291  
Email: [pretlowj@assembly.state.ny.us](mailto:pretlowj@assembly.state.ny.us)