



Assemblymember
Jo Anne Simon

52nd District



Announcements & Events

February 2022

A Message from Jo Anne...

The legislature is currently conducting state budget hearings. I have participated in the budget hearings on Workforce Development, Higher Education, and Elementary & Secondary Education and have observed several others, such as Environmental Conservation, Local Government & Health. Next up: Transportation.

On a subject near and dear to my heart, the topic of literacy received a refreshing amount of attention. We simply must improve literacy rates in NYS: 38% of our 4th graders are reading proficiently, while 62% are not. We should conduct earlier screening and identification of dyslexia and other disabilities, provide better interventions, provide training and professional development for teachers in the science of reading so that all students develop foundational skills, and improve funding for these initiatives. I brought up these issues with State Education Commissioner Rosa and will continue to advocate for these critical changes.

As a former teacher of deaf students, I know how important it is to teach our teachers how to teach reading -- and to understand the science of reading -- so that we can help all kids learn to read, and better address the needs of kids with dyslexia and other disabilities. I also discussed this with David Banks, the new Chancellor for the NYC Dept. of Education at the budget hearing and encouraged him to ensure that the "Five Pillars of Reading" identified by the National Reading Panel be part and parcel of the City's plan to improve the school system. I'm thrilled that the Chancellor and the Mayor are prioritizing literacy and I look forward to working closely with them because literacy is fundamentally a social justice issue.

I also support a New Deal for CUNY which would reverse decades of underfunding, make CUNY free, increase the ratio of full-time faculty-to-students and professionalize adjunct compensation. I have encouraged the higher education community - CUNY, SUNY and the independent colleges to work together to drive the market for accessible platforms for in-person and remote education; and advocated for additional funding to provide services and reasonable accommodations to our postsecondary education students with disabilities.

During the Workforce Development hearing, I highlighted the need for the state to improve our Unemployment Insurance (UI) system. I urged the DOL Commissioner to fix the persistent 2-year-old problem of people not being able to get through to DOL on the phone or waiting for long periods of time only to be disconnected. We need to improve the ID.me identification verification process, the roll out of which imposed barriers to protected groups of applicants including limited English proficiency (LEP) claimants, people with disabilities, older individuals, individuals who experience challenges with technology, and individuals who experience challenges with literacy. I also encouraged DOL to withdraw the UI ineligibility notices to educators and substitute teachers who received federal pandemic-related UI in the summer of 2020; the state is now trying to claw back their benefits. The state must also hold large employers like Uber accountable by ensuring they pay into UI so their employees can access UI like other NY businesses, and to overhaul non-compete contracts.

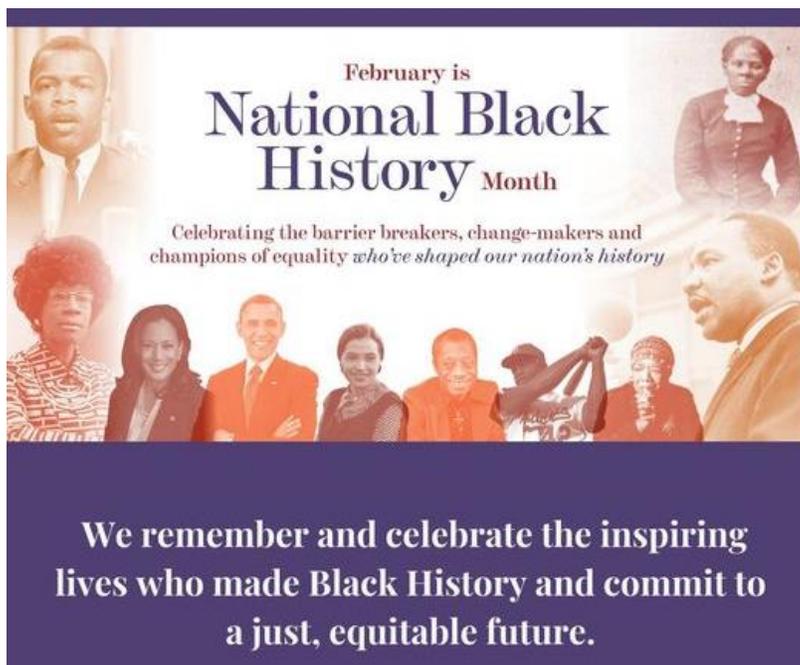
Budget hearing participation is limited to members of the various committees. If you're not on a committee, you are not permitted to question a witness. I am grateful to our Assembly Ways and Means Chair Helene Weinstein, who asked questions on my behalf to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner regarding the need for improved oversight and enforcement of the environmental clean-up of the brownfield sites and uplands that are part of the Gowanus Canal Superfund.

Sincerely,

Jo Anne Simon

February is Black History Month, when we remember and celebrate the inspiring historical and political heroes, groundbreaking artists, musicians, authors and others--among them many Brooklyners--who left their mark here and on the rest of the world. Weeksville was the largest pre-Civil War community of free Black Americans in the United States.

Black History is being made every day, including by many members right here in our community. We acknowledge how much more work is necessary to dismantle racism and ensure the long-fought ideals of justice and equality are a reality for historically marginalized people. We will focus on a Black Future with a commitment to working towards a just, equitable future for everyone for generations to come.



I encourage New Yorkers to read the [People's Budget 2022](#) put out by the NYS Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus, which proposes a budget that centers on equity for BIPOC communities focusing on health and environmental justice, housing, education, justice, economic development and job creation, and sufficient revenue to accomplish these broad goals. Here are some local events to check out:

- On Saturdays in February from 1pm-7pm, the [New Women Space](#) in Brooklyn is hosting a pop-up event that features an incredible mix of Black, womxn, and queer-owned local and small businesses and live music.
- Harlem Chamber Players Concert at the Brooklyn Public Library's (BPL) Grand Army Plaza branch, Feb. 27, 4pm. It's free, but you must [RSVP](#). The BPL Business & Career Center, along with BOC Women's Business Center and Brooklyn Women's Business Center at the LDCENY, host [Power Forward: Black Business Conference](#) on Feb. 17th from 10am-2pm. See the full list of events [here](#).
- Join the [NYC Black History 50 Run](#) taking place on Feb. 12th: a 50-mile, 5 borough journey to key Black historical sites, some of which will hold special interactive programs. Join a guided group or run at your own pace and preferred distance following the route map.
- Weeksville Heritage Center hosts [Our Story](#), curated by the Fulton Art Fair, through Feb. 19. Featuring art celebrating the individuals who lived in and maintained Weeksville, a free Black community in Brooklyn in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. [Make a reservation](#) to tour the historic Hunterfly Houses at Weeksville; the Our Story exhibition can be viewed any time during business hours.

Still Time to Enroll in Health Care for 2022 - [Apply by Feb. 15, 2022](#) for coverage starting March 1, 2022. New York's Healthcare Marketplace, NY State of Health, is a way for individuals, families, and small businesses to find quality health insurance, including stand-alone dental plans (Note: the Marketplace is not for people who have Medicare).

- Need Financial Help? Financial aid to buy insurance is available for most consumers.
- Apply online at www.nystateofhealth.ny.gov, or call the Marketplace at 1-855-355-5777.
- Need Free Help Applying? Trained assistors, or navigators, are available to help you apply. To find a navigator near you, call the Marketplace or [click here for a list](#).
- Apply all year for Medicaid, Essential Plan, and Child Health Plus. You may also apply outside the open enrollment period if you have a [qualifying life event](#), like divorce or marriage, pregnancy, etc.



WORLD READ ALOUD DAY

World Read Aloud Day! It was my privilege to participate in [World Read Aloud Day with the students at St. Francis de Sales School for the Deaf in Brooklyn](#). And thank you to my good friend and neighbor, Ruthie, who loaned me her book for the day, *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats!

Dyslexia Bill to Screen People Who are Incarcerated Passed! The Assembly passed my bill A2062, which provides dyslexia screening and intervention to people who are incarcerated and who do not have a high school diploma or equivalency. The prevalence of dyslexia in the general population is about 20%; the prevalence of dyslexia among people who are incarcerated is much higher. Identifying people who are at risk for dyslexia and initiating interventions that are evidence-based, effective, and consistent with research tailored to address dyslexia will help prepare people for their future. Onto the Senate!

Redistricting. The legislature approved new district lines for the State Assembly and Senate, and Congress. The [Independent Redistricting Commission \(IRC\)](#) could not agree on one set of maps, and therefore sent two sets of maps proposed along party lines, neither of which were accepted by the Legislature. You can view the new 2023 Assembly District (AD) 52 and other districts [here](#). Due to a population increase in the district over the last decade, AD 52 had to lose a significant number of constituents, and therefore lost southern parts of Park Slope (AD 52 will retain North Park Slope). AD 52 gained the Brooklyn Navy Yard and some new constituents immediately bordering the Navy Yard. Please note that the new lines do not go into effect until 2023.

Legislative Updates: The Assembly and the Senate passed legislation allowing New Yorkers to vote by absentee ballot in the 2022 elections! As COVID continues to be a health threat, no one should risk their health to make their voice heard. Once again, the Assembly passed the 'rape is rape' bill (A6319A). It expands New York's rape statutes and helps survivors in their fight for justice. This is the 10th time that the Assembly has passed this Rape Is Rape legislation. It's past time to make this state law. I'll always do everything I can to ensure that victims are heard, believed and supported on their journey to healing. [Read the press release.](#)

Voter Registration Deadline for Party Enrollment: 2/14/22 – Change of party enrollment for 2022 primary elections must be received by the Board of Elections (BOE) by Monday, Feb. 14, 2021 (online, by mail or in person). This includes a change of your current party affiliation or enrollment into a party by registered voters who are not currently affiliated with any party.

- [Check your voter status here](#) or call 1-866-868-3692.
- [Register here online via the DMV.](#)
- Visit the local [BOE offices in person.](#)
- Mail the [BOE a voter registration form](#) so it is received by 2/14.
- For all other voter registration deadlines for this year's elections, [click here.](#)

Help for Homeowners: Apply by Feb. 18. The NY State Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) is providing assistance so struggling families can stay in their homes. This is a federally-funded program for homeowners who are at risk of default, foreclosure or displacement as result of a financial hardship caused by COVID-19. This program is first come, first served and HAF will not accept applications after Feb. 18th (on Feb. 19th, applicants will be added to a waiting list). For more details, visit <https://www.nyhomeownerfund.org/> or direct questions to 1-844-77-NYHAF (1-844-776-9423).

Free Tax Prep Assistance: It's that time of year again! You can get free help using NYC Free Tax Prep at most sites if your family earned \$72,000 or less or you are a single filer who earned \$50,000 or less in 2021. IRS certified VITA/TCE volunteer preparers can prepare returns for you or assist you in preparing your own returns online. Find a location or set up a virtual appointment by calling 311 or go to: nyc.gov/taxprep. **NOTE: If your family received advance Child Tax Credit payments in 2021, you must file a return in 2022 to claim the remaining 50% of your total credit.**

NEED HELP FILING YOUR TAXES?



The **VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE (VITA)** and **TAX COUNSELING FOR THE ELDERLY (TCE)** programs offer free basic tax return preparation for qualified individuals at a number of different sites across New York.

Get FREE help if your family earned \$72,000 or less or you are a single filer who earned \$50,000 or less in 2021.
Find a location or set up a virtual appointment by calling 311 or go to: nyc.gov/taxprep

Atlantic Yards Community Meetings. The Atlantic Yards (Pacific Park) developers promised affordable housing, open space and jobs - in 2003. Many of those have disappeared, while traffic and construction deteriorates quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods. Rising housing costs continue to displace community members. We are at a Crossroad. I was pleased to join the [Brooklyn Speaks](#) coalition and participate in a series of community discussions about the future of the Atlantic Yards. If you missed the meetings, you can watch them online and you can still give feedback on topics through these portals: [Urban Design](#), [Transportation and Streets](#), [Housing](#), and [Accountability](#).

Con Ed Bill Spikes: I'm alarmed to hear from constituents about unexpected massive spikes in their Con Ed energy bills. I have registered my complaints with Con Ed and have requested that the NY State Public Service Commission (PSC) investigate the hikes, along with many other local elected officials. This [article in The City provides helpful background](#) on understanding your bill and the spike. You can call the PSC at 800-342-3377 to file your complaint about an increase in your ConEd bill, or [file a complaint online](#).

This is one of the reasons why I am a strong supporter of the NY Build Public Renewables Act (Carroll A1466A) to transition from private to public ownership of our energy generation, transmission and distribution—and to transition to renewable energy sources. Improving energy efficiency in our buildings (A08431 Gallagher) would also help NY achieve the goals of the landmark NYS Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

If you need help paying your bills, the [Home Energy Assistance Program may help](#). Eligibility and benefit amounts are based on household size and income, primary heating source, and if a household member is younger than 6 or older than 60, or permanently disabled. You may also be eligible if you receive certain public benefits like SNAP, TA or SSI. Emergency HEAP can also assist in a heat-related emergency. There are also resources for gas and electric arrears, and heating equipment repair and replacement. To find out if you're eligible and to apply for these benefits, contact HEAP at 1-800-342-3009 or [click here](#). Click here for details on help [paying your bill from Con Ed](#).

Housing Lottery Opportunity in Prospect Heights, due March 14, 2022. There are affordable units available at 18 Sixth Ave, Brooklyn, 11217. Studios and one, two, and three bedroom units available. Qualified applicants will need to meet income requirements. Preference given to residents of Brooklyn CBs 2, 3, 6, and 8. For more information, visit [Housing Connect](#). To request an online application, email 18sixthavenue@mutualhousingny.org. To request a paper application, send a letter to: Brooklyn Crossing, c/o MHANY Management Inc, 470 Vanderbilt Ave, 9th Fl. Brooklyn, NY, 11238

Housing Lottery Opportunity in Ft. Greene due March 21, 2022. Applications for affordable units are now being accepted at 196 Willoughby St, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Studios, one bedroom, and two bedroom apartments available. To find out if you meet the income requirements and to apply online, visit [Housing Connect](#). To request a paper application, email 196willoughbystreet@mutualhousingny.org or write a letter to: MHANY Management Inc., 470 Vanderbilt Ave, 9th Fl., Brooklyn, NY 11238

Bail Reform: Important Information: This week, Mayor Eric Adams testified in a joint budget hearing on local Governments. During that hearing he raised the issue of public safety and his plans for reducing gun violence. Several aspects of his plan enjoy much support. One area of concern is the issue of bail and his request that courts be permitted to include consideration of future “dangerousness” in setting bail. That proposal is highly problematic for a variety of reasons.

Let’s not forget that our previous bail laws were deeply flawed, perpetuating racial bias and income bias, leaving individuals who can’t afford bail behind bars for months or even years pretrial, and even where the charges were eventually dropped. The purpose of bail is to ensure that a defendant returns to court; it is not supposed to infringe on one’s due process rights or substitute for a fair trial. **New York’s bail laws have never allowed judges to set bail based on a defendant’s perceived risk of dangerousness to the community.**

Here are the facts: Data recently released by the state’s Division of Criminal Justice Services shows that 98% of people awaiting trial between July 2020 and June 2021 were not re-arrested for serious crimes.

The recent rise in gun violence is not connected to New York’s bail reform. This is a nationwide increase, most likely exacerbated by the stress and disruptions of the pandemic and lax gun laws in other states. No data points to a connection to bail reform. In fact, in New York, fewer than 0.5% of people released pre-trial were rearrested for a gun-related charge.

Contrary to the misinformation circling around, New York judges can set bail for people charged with violent felonies, or who persistently miss court dates, or violate orders of protection, or are rearrested on a second felony, or are charged twice (or more) with any offense involving harm to a person or property, or are on parole or probation when charged with felonies. Because judges can set bail doesn’t mean they will in each instance.

Considering “dangerousness” would likely lead to greater racial disparities. This is because the factors a court can consider to attempt to predict “dangerousness” include taking into account past factors such as arrest records, or someone’s neighborhood of residence or employment status. However, releasing someone into a pretrial program, such as mental health and substance use counseling services, is a bigger contributor to public safety than pretrial jail. This is because imprisonment is destabilizing and thus often leads to more criminal activity and risks to the health of individuals and communities.

Risk assessment algorithms based on such factors have been shown in other states to lead to discriminatory outcomes. For example, five years ago, New Jersey reformed bail and adopted a dangerousness provision. Re-arrest data since then is virtually identical in New York and New Jersey with New York’s being slightly lower. However, New Jersey now incarcerates over 20% more people pretrial than New York. Overwhelmingly, they are low income people of color. Read more about the [danger of dangerousness](#) and how the current debate [distracts](#) from reality and the real work ahead of us.

Heart Health: This month, we take a stand against heart disease in women with [#WearRedDay](#). Too many women are affected by cardiovascular disease. Get your heart health checked; please encourage those you know & love to do the same.

COVID Updates: Governor Hochul announced New York's new [Winter Toolkit](#) as the pandemic enters a new phase, aiming to keep New York safe, open and moving forward. The Winter Toolkit focuses on five core areas: protecting the most vulnerable New Yorkers, increasing vaccinations and boosters, strengthening our health care system, empowering local leaders, and supporting individuals facing the long-term effects of COVID.

Starting February 10, the statewide indoor business mask-or-vaccine requirement will be lifted and will remain optional for businesses, local governments and counties to enforce. Governor Hochul plans to assess the mask requirement in schools in early March. The assessment will be based on public health data, including key metrics like cases per 100,000 residents, hospital admission rates, vaccination rates, global trends and pediatric hospitalizations.



Mask requirements will remain in place in certain high-density settings. Health care settings regulated by the NYS Dept. of Health and other related state agencies will continue to require masks, as will nursing homes, adult care facilities, correctional facilities, detention centers, homeless shelters, and domestic violence shelters, public transit and transportation hubs, as well as trains, planes and airports in accordance with federal regulations. Resources:

- [Click here to make a COVID test appointment](#). You can also text "COVID TEST" to 855-48 to find a location. Find a vaccination site near you: <https://vaccinefinder.nyc.gov/>.
- **NYC's isolation and quarantine guidelines** have been updated. [This guide](#) shares information on what to do if you've been exposed to Covid-19 or have tested positive.
- [Child care guide on updated quarantine, isolation, and testing](#) for staff & children in daycare.
- **At-home testing for COVID-19** is available to all immunocompromised NYers and those ages 65 and older. To schedule an in-home appointment, call 929-298-9400, 9am-7pm (7 days a week).
- **Free At-Home COVID Tests:** the federal government is sending each household 4 free at home COVID rapid antigen test kits. To receive your test kits, sign up [here](#) or call 1-800-232-0233.
- **Coverage for COVID tests:** Your health insurance company will pay you back for the cost of up to 8 at home rapid COVID test kits per person on the plan. Reimbursement procedures varies by provider. Some insurance providers will ask you to keep your receipts and apply for a reimbursement while others might set up a network of pharmacies for you to order from. It is recommended to find out the rules directly from your provider. More information can be found [here](#).

Sign up for my Email Alerts. Email simonj@nyassembly.gov to stay informed of community events & policy issues!

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