

# Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz

*Reports to the People of the 81<sup>st</sup> Assembly District*

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*Serving the communities of Kingsbridge, Kingsbridge Heights, Marble Hill, Norwood, Riverdale, Van Cortlandt Village, Wakefield, and Woodlawn*

Dear Neighbor:

*As the weather turns colder, leaves change color and start to fall, state legislators try to pack as much activity in our districts as we can before we return to Albany in January. This is a season for spending time with people we love, our friends and family, giving thanks and reflecting on progress that we have made so far this year.*

*Working together, our community has made a number of tremendous strides forward, but we also have many challenges that continue to face us. We are faced with overdevelopment and regulations that don't adequately protect the integrity of our communities, government agencies that seem to disregard the needs and wants of people they are supposed to support, and fundamental disagreements about how our democracy should operate.*

*The strength of the 81st Assembly District has always been rooted in the people who consistently fight for their communities. I am always available to stand alongside you, to fight for our communities both at home in the Bronx and in Albany, and to speak up even when what we believe in means not taking the easy way out. I am proud to have you as part of our community and I look forward to our continued partnership improving lives in the Bronx.*

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Dinowitz  
Member of Assembly



**EXPRESS BUS RIDERS SPEAK OUT:** Over 500 people attended a town hall meeting that I sponsored along with my colleagues in government, and express bus riders are outraged at the proposed cuts to their service. Many riders expressed concern about the impact on their access to employment during non-traditional work hours, afternoon medical appointments, cultural institutions, and more. These cuts were not previously included in the widely discussed draft plan that the MTA published in the spring.

## Assemblyman Dinowitz Stands Up for Express Bus Riders

Most people who live in the 81st Assembly District rely on buses more than any other form of mass transit - whether to connect to the subway or Metro-North, to commute within the Bronx, or to get to hard-to-reach parts of Manhattan from harder-to-reach parts of the Bronx. As a longtime advocate for improving mass transit in our district, I was excited when the MTA announced that they would be producing a much-needed redesign of the bus network in the Bronx.

However, I was sorely disappointed by the "Final" Plan for The Bronx Bus Network Redesign that was released early this Fall. I do not believe this redesign accomplishes the stated goal of improving bus service. Not only are there no frequency improvements on local bus routes in our district, but there are also extensive cuts to express bus service. Express bus service is essential to people who live far from the subway, as many people do along the northern border of Bronx County, and also those for whom our subway system remains inaccessible.

I am in regular conversations with MTA leadership, including New York City Transit President Andy Byford, to share my concerns as well as those raised by riders in our district. Specifically, I am requesting that they rescind the severe reduction to express bus service (they are proposing to essentially reduce all lines to only operate southbound in the mornings and northbound in the evenings).

While I do understand that express bus ridership is relatively very low during the hours which were proposed for elimination, at a certain point the provision of mass transit is about more than which routes are fiscally solvent. Mass transit is functionally a public subsidy to encourage people to not drive their cars into a high-density area. Many people have reason to travel into Manhattan during odd hours - whether they work a job that isn't 9-5, have medical appointments in the afternoon, or just want to take in dinner and a show. They deserve mass transit service too.

To view the plan and provide feedback directly to the MTA, please visit their website: <https://new.mta.info/bronxbusredesign>



**LISTENING TO TRANSIT RIDERS:** For the third year, I was proud to join the Riders Respond Transit Tour (organized by NYC Council Transportation Chair Ydani Rodriguez). The goal of this tour is to gather feedback directly from riders about how their subway commutes are going. One of the main criticisms that we heard was the lack of accessibility in our subway system, something that I have been working very hard to correct. This year, we were joined by NYCT President Andy Byford - which represents a huge step forward in customer relations from the MTA. Bravo!

## FREE Notary Service

Our office provides free notary service during regular office hours, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Please bring two forms of identification, at least one with your photo and signature, if you would like your signature notarized.

## More Gifted and Talented Opportunities Needed

There is an ongoing conversation in New York City about how to accommodate students of all different learning styles and backgrounds – including gifted and talented programs. The issue of gifted and talented classes is a serious and important one, especially for so many families in our community. On one side, there are parents who believe that it is important to offer challenging curricula to students who learn more quickly than their peers. On the other, some advocates are concerned that separating students into different learning categories at a young age is detrimental to overall development – particularly to those born into lower income backgrounds.

Every child deserves an opportunity for academic success. This means that we must increase the availability of gifted and talented programs in every neighborhood. In the 81st Assembly District, there are only two schools that offer full-time gifted and talented classes: P.S. 7 and P.S. 24. That is insufficient.

We should also reform how we determine who is eligible for those classes. Currently, there is one test – taken between Pre-K and Second Grade – that determines whether a student is allowed to take advanced classes in primary school. There should be an opportunity every year for students to take the placement test for gifted and talented classes. This would allow more gifted and talented students to qualify for these important academic options.

This is not to say we should ignore the concerns of parents who worry about over-testing or that testing doesn't accurately capture a student's academic potential. Nor is this to say that students don't benefit from being around peers that learn differently than they do. However, we must acknowledge that different students learn in different ways. Just as we would support a child who needs extra support for a learning disability, we should also support a child who needs the appropriate support of an advanced academic curriculum.



**AMALGAMATED NURSERY FALL FESTIVAL:** So many incredible costumes! I was happy to join Amalgamated Nursery School along with Council Member Cohen to celebrate the start of the Fall season.

## Erin's Law will Protect Children from Childhood Sexual Abuse

Since 2012, I have been fighting to pass Erin's Law, which is a much-needed modernization of 1994 legislation which first introduced the concept of "stranger danger." Over the years, as more survivors of childhood sexual abuse have come forward, the data has shown that trusted acquaintances are the most frequent abusers, followed by family members, and then strangers. I am very excited that this battle has finally come to a close with the Governor's signature enacting my legislation into law, making New York the 38th state nationwide to adopt a version of Erin's Law.

The new law will take effect next school year and requires public schools to teach children how to recognize and react to inappropriate behavior from adults. It also trains parents and school personnel how to recognize and respond to signs that a child is being abused.

The proactive preventative approach taken by Erin's Law is an integral complement to the Child Victims Act, which is primarily focused on seeking justice after abuse has already occurred. New York must do everything in its power to protect children, and this new requirement accomplishes just that.



**HEALTHY BUILDINGS AT FORT INDEPENDENCE:** I am excited about the launch of a Healthy Buildings program at Fort Independence Houses from Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition. This is a fantastic initiative that has been implemented successfully in other NYCHA complexes throughout the Bronx and offers potential to address underlying chronic problems in many apartments. The Healthy Buildings program is focused on two aspects: integrated pest management and weatherization.

## Next Steps on Vaccination Effort

Following up on our successful fight to increase immunization rates in New York State, I have introduced a new bill with State Senator Brad Hoylman (who also partnered with me on the non-medical exemption repeal bill) to require that all schools report aggregated immunization data to the state. One of the main questions that kept arising during our efforts this past year was regarding how many students are actually immunized.

By improving access to data, this will help ensure compliance at every school with the school vaccine requirements. It will also help parents make informed decisions about where to send their children to school, especially if their children have compromised immune systems.



**PROTECT YOURSELF FROM THE FLU:** Getting a flu shot is about more than just protecting yourself. It's about protecting those around you, particularly those who are at higher risk from the flu – children, seniors, and people with compromised immune systems. I am proud to have continued my annual tradition of offering free flu shots for our community this year. We were at three locations: St. Gabriel's School, the Riverdale Y, and Vladeck Hall in the Amalgamated. If you haven't gotten your shot yet, there is still time to get one at your local pharmacy or doctor's office!

## Accessibility on Metro-North, Too

Building on our fight for accessibility throughout our mass transit system, I have reiterated my request to bring accessibility improvements to Metro-North stations in the 81st Assembly District that don't already have them: Woodlawn and Spuyten Duyvil.

I am happy to report that Woodlawn has been included on their list for accessibility upgrades in the upcoming (yet-to-be-approved) Capital Plan for 2020-2024. However, Spuyten Duyvil is not currently included in the MTA's plans. I am working hard to convince the MTA and Metro-North to include both stations. Metro-North is an essential transit option for commuters in our neighborhoods, particularly those for whom the subway and bus are not convenient (for example, if you work on the east side of Manhattan).



**EXPAND BRUST PARK:** One of the best parts about living in the Bronx is all of the green space we have throughout our neighborhoods. Brust Park is a wonderful example of these urban oases, full of old growth forest and even a stream cutting through the middle. You may not realize that on the western edge of Brust Park there is an undeveloped fifteen-foot strip of land that is technically owned by NYC DOT and has been set aside for a step street since at least the late 1920's. I have been working with a broad coalition of community members and colleagues in government to transfer the jurisdiction of this land to the Parks Department so that we can expand Brust Park and better protect the trees and wildlife that live there.

## 5040 Independence Avenue

In the latest edition of "What's Wrong With Our System of Governing Development in the Bronx" we arrive at 5040 Independence Avenue, more commonly referred to as the Kennedy House. Recently, a property developer has begun to file paperwork with the Department of Buildings to make some changes to the house, which was occupied by the Kennedy family for a brief period in the 1920's.

Last year, a plan was raised to convert the house into a community facility of sorts. Apparently, if you just make small and incremental changes, there is no extra review necessary. But if you do all of those changes at the same time, then there would be. I don't think this makes sense. As an analogy, if I eat one slice of pizza at a time in eight separate stages – I just ate an entire pizza, with the same calories and same result. The Department of Buildings should wise up and force the developer to go through a public review of their overall plans for this site.

## Save the Jerome Park Reservoir

For the better part of a generation, our community has fought with New York City about our beloved Jerome Park Reservoir. A couple decades ago, the Department of Environmental Preservation (which oversees our water supply) proposed building a massive water filtration plant in Jerome Park Reservoir – taking away a historic icon of the Northwest Bronx.

We did manage to stave off this horrible plan (although we instead ended up with the multi-billion dollar boondoggle at Croton Filtration Plant in Van Cortlandt Park instead), and DEP agreed instead to preserve the visual aesthetic and ecological role of the Reservoir by keeping it full of water.

Now, it appears that DEP is hoping we have forgotten the promise they made to our community in the past. They are currently reconstructing some of the walls and gate houses within Jerome Park Reservoir; rumors have been swirling that DEP intends to keep the North Basin of our beloved Reservoir empty – just in case there is an overflow at their "state-of-the-art" \$3.2 billion Croton Filtration Plant. These rumors have all been confirmed by DEP, who discussed their plans openly at a Community Board 8 meeting and have since filed environmental quality review documents reflecting an empty North Basin.

This is unacceptable. The DEP should be working with our community to improve access to the Reservoir and helping to preserve this amazing asset for generations to come. I will keep fighting to save Jerome Park Reservoir.

### LOESER'S DELI:

For decades, Loeser's Deli has been a neighborhood staple in the Northwest Bronx. With its no-frills decor, Loeser's Deli has called West 231st Street and Godwin Terrace its home for nearly sixty years. I was delighted to join longtime-owner Fredy Loeser and his family at Council Member Andrew Cohen's honorary street renaming for this intersection. Mazel tov!



## Housing Tips

There are a lot of changes coming for tenants in New York City because we have passed the strongest tenant protections ever, and have removed many of the motivations for landlords to displace tenants – including a repeal of the notorious vacancy bonus, an end to deregulation, and much more.

Here are some tips on how you can make sure you are best able to utilize your new tenant protections:

1. For rent regulated tenants: Request your rent history from the state by calling the HCR Rent Infoline at 718-739-6400 or emailing [ORAreCORDS@nyshcr.org](mailto:ORAreCORDS@nyshcr.org) (you can also make this request in person, by mail, or online). You may want to ask for all the iterations of your apartment just in case (ex: both 1A and A1).
2. Organize your old leases (especially the vacancy lease – which is the first lease you signed for your apartment) and look over them to make sure all of the increases make sense. This includes saving all documents related to your apartment – including lease riders, correspondences from your landlord, and notices from HCR or other government agencies. It is especially important if you have

a preferential rent to make sure that preferential rent is maintained in all future lease renewals (plus appropriate increases as approved by the Rent Guidelines Board).

3. For all tenants: Report any necessary repairs in your apartment or building to the landlord in writing (letter or email). If they still don't get fixed, then report them to the city by calling 311. The last resort option, which is the only way to actually force your landlord to make repairs, is to commence an HP Action which can be done at New York City Housing Court.
4. If your apartment is always cold or you never have hot water, make sure you are logging the temperatures along with dates and times to create a record of the problem. You can also file reports with 311 for lack of heat and hot water, and can contact the Bronx Office for Code Enforcement at 212-863-7050.

If you have any questions or concerns, my office is always available to assist you. Whether it is walking you through your rights as a tenant or placing a call to your landlord, we are here to help.



**WORK LOCAL, HIRE LOCAL:** We had a tremendous turnout at our job fair with KRVC! As an example, New York Public Libraries alone met with 35 job seekers and received 27 resumes. Big thank you to KRVC Jobs Program Director Holly Makin and KRVC Executive Director Tracy Shelton (pictured in top photo) for their help putting this wonderful event together to help people in our community find work!

If you missed the job fair but are still interested in finding work (or hiring locally), please reach out to Holly Makin at the KRVC Jobs Program. She can be reached at hollykrvc@gmail.com or 718-543-7100.



**MONEY FOR COLD AIR AT THE RIVERDALE Y:** As someone who prefers my air a little cooler than most, I am very excited to have secured \$125,000 for a new HVAC system at the Riverdale Y for their auditorium. This facility is a wonderful resource for our community, whether they are hosting summer camp or children's theater (or one of our very exciting town hall meetings).

## Assemblyman Dinowitz Supports Small Donor Matching Funds for Public Campaign Financing

Our political system tends to operate more easily for the wealthy and well-connected than for working people who want to run for public office. I have long advocated for public financing in elections, and I am excited that this is about to happen. During our historic legislative year, we passed legislation to approve small donor matching funds as part of a public campaign financing system. By the time you read this newsletter we may already know the details of the proposed plan. While I was unhappy that the details were delegated to a commission, I am hopeful it will produce a new system that will vastly improve the way campaigns are financed.

I have made my opinions very clear on this subject: in a written letter to the Public Campaign Financing Commission, in an op-ed with my colleagues published in the New York Daily News, and in regular correspondences

with constituents, colleagues, and advocates. We should lower contribution limits and offer a significant match on in-district contributions. We should ban contributions from corporations and dramatically lower (or ban entirely) contributions from people doing business with the state. I have also made clear that this commission should focus solely on public campaign financing and not on tangential issues such as fusion voting.

I am excited that we are on the precipice of an electoral system that encourages and empowers candidates to leverage small dollar donations from the people they seek to represent – not spend their time soliciting money from affluent donors throughout the city and state. That is what democracy is truly about.

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz  
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Assemblyman  
**Jeffrey  
Dinowitz**

**Fall 2019**



**A VETERANS DAY TRADITION:** An annual event at Memorial Grove in Van Cortlandt Park, it was gratifying to join so many members of our community to say thank you to all those who have served our country in our military. Special thank you to Herb Barret who organizes this tradition every year! (Pictured above, l-r: Community Leader Eric Dinowitz, Veteran Herb Barret, Council Member Andrew Cohen, Congressman Eliot Engel, and myself)



**SUPPORTING WORKING PEOPLE:** The organized labor movement has brought significant improvements to the lives of working people over the years, and many unions represent thousands of our friends, family members, and neighbors. It was wonderful to meet the new President of 32BJ, Kyle Bragg, at their annual legislative breakfast this year and I look forward to a strong partnership on behalf of working New Yorkers.