



Assemblyman

Steve Otis



Legislative Update

Summer/Fall 2016

Dear Friends,

My goal as your State Assemblyman is to be productive and effective on issues of importance to the residents, local governments, school districts, businesses and institutions in the 91st Assembly District. I have worked hard to meet those goals and am pleased to report in this newsletter some highlights, especially with regard to budget issues.

Of special importance is the continued growth of the clean water grant program that I helped create in 2015. The program has spurred job creation, shifted costs away from property taxes and helped repair our aging infrastructure. I am also encouraged by our success in gaining additional state funding for education, ending the Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) to school aid that has limited state funding to our districts, increasing aid to higher education and targeting state resources to assist in the battle against opiate addiction.

As for legislation, I passed bills on a variety of issues this year that include providing help to property owners and tenants who are members of business improvement districts, changing the laws to aid in the identification of missing persons and enhancing consumer safety when purchasing prepared foods. I also passed legislation requested by local governments in Westchester.

Ideas for new legislation often come from the experiences we all have as consumers, residents, or in business. My office is available to help you with individual issues you may have with state agencies or other entities. Those problems may also become the impetus for changes in the law. Please call my District Office at 914-939-7028, if I may be of assistance.

It is an honor to serve you and to work on the issues of concern to Westchester residents and businesses.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman

Water Infrastructure Grant Program Doubles in Size

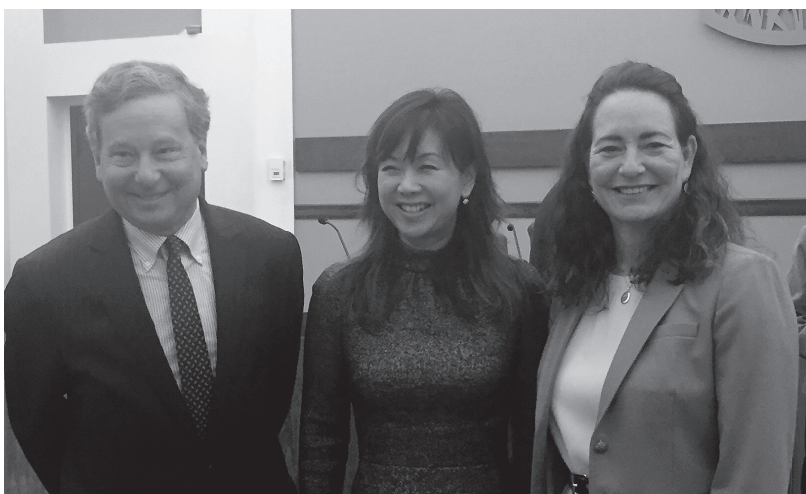
It started with the need to address a pressing problem. Local governments had expensive water quality projects that required attention, but the price tag made even borrowing for these projects too costly for local budgets and taxpayers. Low interest loans were available from New York State, but the financial burden of those loans kept many municipalities from applying.

The solution was a new state grant program, the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act, which provides direct grants to local governments to defray a portion of the costs of these projects, thereby making borrowing costs more manageable. Launched in the 2015-16 state budget, I spearheaded the proposal with Assemblyman John McDonald of Cohoes. As former mayors, we were keenly aware of the financial crisis facing municipalities that must invest in critical infrastructure improvements. The proposal won the enthusiastic support of our Assembly colleagues, Governor Cuomo and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie.

Initially funded for \$200 million over a three-year period, the new grant program has been a tremendous success. During the first round of funding in 2015, the NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation (EFC) awarded \$75 million to 45 different projects that, when combined with loans and other financing, leveraged more than \$400 million in water and wastewater infrastructure projects across the state.

This year's state budget builds upon the success of the water grant program, allocating an additional \$200 million in funding for water quality improvement projects. With an extra \$25 million in grant funds added by the Governor in round one, a program that did not exist a year ago is now poised to deliver \$425 million in direct assistance for local infrastructure projects.

As recent events across the country have made clear, ignoring or delaying investment in clean water projects can have potentially tragic consequences. I am grateful to EFC and the Cuomo administration for their leadership in helping local governments move forward with these vital public health and environmental projects.



Mamaroneck Town Supervisor Nancy Seligson joins Assemblyman Otis in welcoming EFC President Sabrina Ty to the Town Center in Mamaroneck. The Assemblyman hosted an EFC workshop for local officials in April 2016, which highlighted various state initiatives, including the Water Infrastructure Improvement grant program, that provide financial assistance for local infrastructure projects.

Otis Sponsors Workshop to Aid Local Governments in Financing Environmental Infrastructure Projects

Earlier this year, I hosted an informative workshop about programs and services offered by the Environmental Facilities Corporation to help municipalities fund critical water quality and stormwater infrastructure projects. The event was well attended by local officials, city managers and other municipal representatives from throughout Westchester County.

EFC is the key state environmental agency providing financial assistance to local governments for a variety of clean and drinking water projects. New York leads the nation with the largest annual investment in water quality infrastructure, providing more than \$9 billion in subsidized loans, grants and loan re-financing to local governments since 2011. An important new program administered by EFC is the Water Infrastructure Improvement grant program de-

scribed earlier in this newsletter. EFC also offers assistance through its award-winning Green Innovation Grant Program.

I am grateful to Sabrina Ty, EFC's President and CEO, and her senior staff for taking the time to meet with our Westchester local officials and explain project eligibility, application deadlines and other requirements of the many programs that EFC administers. I have worked closely with the EFC in recent years and have seen firsthand how willing the agency is to assist localities with any technical or financial questions that arise during all phases of a water quality project. The agency is a tremendous resource for any local community seeking to move forward with water projects that will protect our health and that of the environment.

2016-17 Budget Increases State Aid to Sound Shore School Districts

I am pleased to report that for the fourth consecutive year, every school district in the 91st Assembly District received increased funding in the state budget. Statewide education funding was \$24.7 billion for 2016-17, an increase of \$1.4 billion over the previous budget year, with Westchester schools receiving an additional \$58 million.

Of particular interest to many Westchester school districts, the enacted budget fully eliminated the Gap Elimination Adjustment, the name given to the state aid budget cut that was put in place during the lean budget years following the recession of 2008-09. While aid to Sound Shore districts increased over the last three years,

districts received less aid than they were due under the state aid formula because of the GEA calculation. Elimination of the GEA will end this practice.

The state budget also increased funding for 4201 schools, serving New York's deaf and blind students, and added \$1 million, for a total of \$15.5 million for much-needed bilingual education services.

Ensuring that suburban school districts receive a fair share of the state's education dollars has been a top priority for me and our entire Westchester delegation. There is perhaps no greater responsibility in state government than to ensure that all our children have access to the highest quality education possible.

2016-17 Budget Increases Aid to Libraries

The enacted state budget includes a \$4 million increase in funding for public libraries, for a total appropriation in 2016-17 of \$95.6 million. This is the largest appropriation for library funding since the recession of 2008-09. The budget also includes a \$5 million increase in state library construction aid (for a total of \$19 million) and represents the first increase for the library construction aid program in nearly a decade. The Assembly was a major advocate for these increases in the budget this year. I serve on the Assembly Committee on Libraries and Education

Technology, and we made the case that library funding was vital to local budgets and taxpayers.

Libraries are central to the civic and cultural life of the communities I represent. They offer critical access to information for all residents and help to bridge the digital divide for economically disadvantaged students, job seekers and seniors. I am thrilled that we were able to secure additional funds for our libraries in this year's budget negotiations.



Assemblyman Otis is presented with the 2016 William Hoyt Environmental Excellence Award by Virginia Stowe, Board Chair of Audubon New York, Erin Crotty, Executive Director of Audubon New York and Marcy Boyle, Chair of Audubon Council of New York State.

Audubon New York William Hoyt Environmental Excellence Award

On March 19, 2016, I was honored to receive the William Hoyt Environmental Excellence Award from Audubon New York and the Audubon Council. The award, which is named for an outstanding environmental advocate who passed away in 1992, is presented annually to a state or federal official in recognition of work above and beyond the normal call of duty to advance critical solutions on the state's most pressing environmental issues.

In presenting the award, Erin Crotty, Executive Director of Audubon New York generously cited my efforts on the Water Infrastructure

Improvement Act and other initiatives I have worked on over the years.

As a member of the Assembly Environmental Conservation Committee, the Climate Change Group and Chair of the Commission on Solid Waste Management, I have long been committed to protecting the natural resources and habitat of this beautiful state. We are fortunate to have the leadership and advocacy of Audubon New York and the Audubon Council on so many environmental issues affecting New York, and I am deeply grateful to have earned their recognition.

Legislature Takes Strong Steps to Combat Crisis of Heroin and Opioid Addiction

With heroin and opioid abuse reaching epidemic levels, every community across the state has been touched by this growing crisis. Through the budget process and subsequent legislation, Governor Cuomo and the Legislature have taken important steps this year to address this epidemic through expanded prevention strategies and increased access to treatment for those already struggling with addiction. More focus is needed at the community, state and national level to deal effectively with this difficult problem.

The 2016-17 state budget adopted a multi-faceted approach, allocating \$189 million for education, enforcement, treatment and recovery efforts -- an 82 percent increase in state spending since 2011. It includes \$25 million for the Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services to implement a Heroin and Opiate Treatment Prevention Package.

The misuse of prescription medication is a serious problem and is often seen as the gateway point for heroin and other illegal drug use. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 15,000 Americans die each year from overdoses of prescription painkillers. Studies have shown that the vast majority of prescription drug abusers will go on to try heroin and other dangerous and addictive drugs.

To combat prescription drug abuse, the approved budget includes \$1 million for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation to conduct drug collection programs. These programs, which include the purchase and distribution of tamper proof drug collection boxes, will not only reduce the risk of addiction through the safe and responsible disposal of opioid pharmaceuticals, but also help to protect the environment from these harmful substances.

Building upon these budget initiatives, the Legislature passed a series of bills, which I co-sponsored, aimed at improving the treatment and prevention of heroin and opioid addiction. These

measures were signed into law by the Governor on June 21st.

The legislation includes provisions to:

- Limit the over-prescription of opioid medication and improve physician education on pain management and palliative care;
- Expand access to addiction treatment at detoxification facilities and require those facilities to provide discharge planning services to connect patients to nearby treatment options for continued care;
- Require insurance companies to provide five days of coverage for withdrawal treatment and eliminate the need for prior authorization by managed care companies for drugs, such as buprenorphine and Vivitrol, used to treat opioid dependence; and
- Permit social workers and certain other licensed professionals to administer Narcan – a potentially life-saving drug for counteracting the effects of an opioid overdose -- in emergency situations.

Together, these measures will help in the fight against heroin and opioid addiction. It is clear, however, that addiction and the tragic fatalities that too often result are signs of a broad overuse of opioid prescription drugs in our society. The path to addiction is too easy. In every community there has been increased discussion in schools and with adult audiences about the scope and significance of this problem. More resources and new approaches will be needed as we continue to work towards solutions.

I will continue to work with local drug and alcohol prevention coalitions, schools, not-for-profits, local governments and my colleagues in state government as we address an epidemic that is gripping the nation, as well as our state.



Assemblyman Otis questions MTA executives about safety and service quality issues on Metro North's New Haven line during a Transportation budget hearing earlier this year.

Otis Appointed to the Assembly Education Committee

I have been active on education issues for many years. When I joined the Assembly in 2013, I continued that advocacy, opposing an over-reliance on standardized testing, working to improve the process by which members of the State Board of Regents are selected, supporting increased state aid to suburban school districts and protecting the needs of Westchester school districts, students and parents as new issues arise.

Earlier this year, I was appointed to the Assembly Education Committee, which will provide me with additional opportunities to advocate on a broad range of education issues affecting the quality of education in New York. I am very excited about this new opportunity.

UPCOMING SMALL BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM

TAP THE INTERNET:
E-Commerce Tools to Expand Your Business

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2016

8:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

LARCHMONT VILLAGE CENTER
119 LARCHMONT AVE.

Please contact my office for additional information

My Brother's Keeper Initiative

This year's budget includes \$20 million for the My Brother's Keeper Initiative, a program that will implement the Board of Regents recommendations to improve educational outcomes for boys and young men of color. Despite modest gains, generations of inequality have created a lingering achievement gap for minority children, particularly boys.

In keeping with the State's obligation to promote the achievement of all students, the My Brother's Keeper Initiative builds upon a framework established by the Obama administration to provide additional support, programming and mentoring services that are tailored to the unique educational challenges facing boys

and young men of color.

The City of New Rochelle was one of the first cities in New York to accept the President's call to action and adopt its own My Brother's Keeper program. The \$20 million in this year's budget will help to expand the initiative statewide and provide grants to communities, including New Rochelle, to implement programs that will help ensure that every child enters school ready to learn, is encouraged and supported to stay in school, and graduates with the requisite skills for college or careers. As a society, we are better off when all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Enacted State Budget Supports College Affordability and Accessibility

Making the dream of a college education both accessible and affordable is one of the most important investments a state can make. Higher education can help young people achieve economic stability and prepare them for the challenges of today's job market. I firmly believe that every New Yorker who wants to pursue a college degree should have that opportunity. Unfortunately, the high cost of tuition too often means incurring enormous debt in the process.

This year's enacted state budget helps to preserve college affordability by freezing tuition at SUNY and CUNY schools during the coming academic year. We also added \$13.3 million in support for SUNY community colleges, including Westchester Community College, by providing additional support from the state for each fulltime student.

I was also pleased to support state funding for a variety of college opportunity programs, which increased by 20% over last year, for a total of \$23.8 million. These programs, such as the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) and the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), provide additional academic and/or financial support for economically disadvantaged students who might otherwise be unable to attend college. For the second year in a row, the state has made a major commitment to increasing support for these programs.

I will continue to advocate for state efforts that support our students, colleges and universities so that higher education can become more affordable and student debt less of a burden.



Each summer, the Assemblyman welcomes college interns from throughout the 91st Assembly district who are interested in a "hands-on" experience in the legislative process. Joining him for a district office lunch are his 2016 summer interns: Jack Westerink, Theo Alexander, Ellie Seid, Karen Seid, and Lilah Schaeffer, along with former intern and current staff member, Andrew Frolich. Not pictured is Evi Alexopoulos.

College Internships

Legislative internships are available to college students in my District and Albany offices. Internships focus on legislative research, analysis of state issues and assisting constituents with problems they may be having with governmental agencies. If you are interested in applying for an internship position for the fall/winter academic term, please send a cover letter and resume to otiss@nyassembly.gov. For more information, contact my district office at (914) 939-7028.



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**Steve
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On Memorial Day, I was on hand to celebrate the successful partnership to rebuild the ball field at Lorenzen Park. Jim Hanley of Fields for Kids, Bill Nachtigal of the Larchmont Mamaroneck Little League and I presented Larchmont Mayor Lorraine Walsh with a ceremonial check for construction of the new baseball complex, which will feature two natural grass ball fields equipped with electronic scoreboards, a concession stand and improved restroom and parking facilities.

The combined efforts of the Village, Fields for Kids, and the Little League, coupled with a NYS grant that I helped secure, will bring increased field space, improved drainage and more playing time for the popular program. Having worked with the community on this project for the past three years, it is gratifying to see it coming to fruition.

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