



Assemblyman Steve Otis



Legislative Update

Winter 2021

Dear Friends,

This newsletter provides another update of some of my work and activities over the last year.

One of my priorities has been to fund state programs that assist businesses, create jobs and bolster our economy as we transition to recovery from Covid-19. One way we can all help local businesses is to support the merchants when shopping during the holidays and into the new year. Local retailers are an important part of our Westchester economy. They provide jobs and are part of the fabric of each of our Sound Shore communities. Your patronage will help in many ways.

My goal is always to be effective, deliver results and make a real difference on the issues we face in Westchester. The challenges of Covid-19 to families, businesses, schools and our economy has made this work even more urgent.

In the last year, I have been able to play a leadership role on issues affecting schools, local governments, small businesses, not-for-profits, consumers, the environment and taxpayers.

My new role as Chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee has provided the opportunity to work on emerging technology policy issues that affect all of us. One initiative for 2022, will be to speed-up our state's rollout of electric vehicle charging stations that will be essential to meeting the growth of EV in the upcoming years.

I hope that you will contact me with your ideas for legislation or on issues where I can be of assistance.

In this holiday season, I wish you and your family happiness and health in the New Year.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman



It was great to be at the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce Annual Tree Lighting. I am pictured with County Executive George Latimer, Rob Hayes, President of the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce and local business owner; Catherine White, Executive Director of the New Rochelle Chamber of Commerce; and New Rochelle City Mayor Noam Bramson.



Otis Delivers Opening Keynote for Statewide Environmental Conference

In the 1990s I served as Chair of the City of Rye Conservation Commission and have supported grassroots environmental efforts throughout Westchester for many years. In late October, I gave the opening keynote for the annual conference of the NYS Association of Conservation Commissions (NYSACC), which brought together local conservation, sustainability and environmental committee members from around the state.

The conference theme was "Climate Resilience through Community Action," and there was strong participation from Westchester organizations and experts. The purpose of the conference was to share projects and expertise with committee members from around the state to give groups ideas about programs that they could take back to their communities.

My theme was to stress the importance of local environmental committees in bringing ideas and know-how on good environmental practices back to their communities.

I left my local Conservation Commission many years ago but remained on the Board of NYSACC to assist in these educational efforts. NYSACC's major activities are the annual conference and an annual update program from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.



I joined statewide environmental groups at an Albany press conference on the environmental issues linked to one form of cryptocurrency authentication called "proof-of-work" mining. The high energy use and emissions of this one method of authentication has raised concerns in the ability to meet climate change greenhouse gas reduction goals.

National Digital Inclusion Week Celebrated in Westchester

To mark national digital inclusion week, I participated in two Westchester events to promote the importance of digital literacy programs in changing the lives of program participants.

In Yonkers, I joined the inaugural graduating class of the Digital Literacy Program for 914United's Westchester Incarcerated & Justice Involved clients. 914United's program was possible through a partnership with AT&T and The STEM Alliance to support this innovative technology and digital literacy education program. The program is part of The STEM Alliance's Digital Equity Now initiative and AT&T's commitment to working with organizations across the country to address the digital divide impacting underserved

communities that have faced long-standing social inequities and higher unemployment.

I was also a panelist in a webinar hosted by The STEM Alliance on the importance of local digital equity programs. The webinar was moderated by STEM Alliance Executive Director Meg Kaufer and I joined participants Jordan Cormier from Youth Shelter of Westchester, Grace Battaglia of Open Door Family Medical Center and Dr. Fenix Arias of Yonkers Public Schools.

My program to create a new \$15M statewide digital inclusion grant program was included in the 2021-2022 state budget.

One Form of Cryptocurrency Authentication Places Climate Change Targets at Risk

In October I co-chaired an Assembly Hearing on the important but obscure issue of the impact of "proof of work" cryptocurrency mining and the State's ability to meet greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Cryptocurrency is a form of currency that only exists digitally and is managed through a decentralized system for verifying and recording transactions or for issuing new coins into circulation. Cryptocurrency is an exciting new form of commerce that is receiving attention and investment around the world. Operating outside of the centralized banking system, transactions are validated through a process of transaction authentication.

There are several different methods of cryptocurrency authentication.

In one method, called "proof of work" mining, each transaction is assigned a complex mathematical equation that users within the currency compete with one another to solve. Successfully competing in this process requires the use of increasing amounts of computational power. This has led to a rapidly growing industry of cryptocurrency "miners" who run large, consolidated operations of thousands of computers operating 24 hours a day to validate as many transactions as possible. Given the high energy demands, cryptocurrency mining companies have been reactivating shuttered power plants to access electricity production at reduced costs.

At the hearing we heard from five professors, representatives of statewide and regional environmental groups, and local advocates who have "proof of work" mining facilities in their regions.

The energy use and climate change issues raised at the hearing have been raised previously in and around the country, in Europe and Asia, and by economic leaders like Janet Yellen and Bill Gates.

The 2019 Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) established the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 85% of the 1990 levels by 2050. I have played a leadership role in the Assembly's examination of the impact of high-energy consuming industries, such as "proof of work" cryptocurrency mining, as to the ability of the state to meet the CLCPA greenhouse gas reduction goals, state agency responses, and existing statutory and regulatory permitting processes for cryptocurrency mining to determine what, if any, changes are needed.



The Assembly Committee on Science and Technology, which I chair, hosted a hearing with two other Assembly committees on the important but obscure issue of the impact of "proof of work" cryptocurrency mining and the State's ability to meet greenhouse gas reduction goals.

Otis Legislation to Provide Workers Electronic Notice of Employees Rights

One of my priorities for the 2022 Legislative Session will be to secure Senate passage of a bill I passed in the Assembly this year to provide workers notice of their rights under labor and health laws in a more accessible form.

Some of the best ideas for legislation are based upon common sense. We are all familiar with the fine print notices of employee rights that appear at workplace bulletin boards or outdoor worksites. They are often hard to read and not necessarily easy to take home and ascertain one's rights.

Current law requires posting of Department of Labor and other documents to make sure employees have access to information regarding their rights as employees. These documents are often

lengthy, detailed and appear in small print and are generally posted at an indoor work location or on walls or fences at outdoor work locations such as construction sites.

My legislation would require that these workplace legal notices regarding the rights and protections of workers be made available by employers to employees electronically, either by e-mail or website.

The bill passed the Assembly in June and I am hopeful for Senate approval in the new year. I have no doubt that this legislation will empower workers by making sure they have meaningful access to the legally required notice of their workplace rights. Electronic access will ensure that access to notices keeps pace with today's technology and make for a better workplace.

The NYS Open Meetings Law After the Pandemic

During the pandemic, temporary changes were made to the NYS Open Meetings Law to allow local governments, boards of education and other government entities to conduct meetings safely, using remote meeting technologies, and to make those meetings accessible to the public. In New York State local government, meetings are meant to be held in public places, properly noticed and welcoming to public observation and participation. Decisions and deliberation are supposed to take place in these public meetings. These policies are outlined in New York State's Open Meetings Law and Freedom of Information Act.

Due to the pandemic, in-person local government meetings were replaced with online meetings. The mixed positive and negative consequences of the Covid-19 meeting rules quickly became obvious. One positive was that through remote access, members of the public could view and participate in public meetings from the comfort of their homes. In some ways access to meetings increased. One negative was that the public lost the ability to view the decision-making process in person or to connect with others that may attend a meeting with concerns about the same issues. Many felt officials were more insulated through the remote process. The remote format deprived residents wanting to make

a statement on an issue.

I participated in a hearing of the Assembly Local Government Committee to hear comments on what rules we should use after the pandemic is over. We heard testimony from representatives of local governments, school boards, newspapers, groups representing disabled individuals and others interested in taking the positives from the remote access model while bringing back in-person meetings. We will be reviewing the many issues and proposals discussed at the hearing before crafting new legislation to be adopted next year. The current pandemic rules expire on January 15, 2022.

As a former mayor, I follow these issues closely. The success or failure of local governments around the state in conducting remote meetings often depended upon the technology choices they made in providing remote access. My goals in this process are to make sure that the public's access to the decision-making process, their ability to speak and to have access to key information are protected. My expectation is that the current rules will be temporarily extended in January and a revised new statute with permanent rules will be introduced and shared with the public for comment before adoption.



The holiday season brings events in every community to draw shoppers to local retailers. I attended the Port Chester tree lighting ceremony with Village Trustee Alex Payan, Mayor Luis Marino, County Legislator Nancy Barr, Trustee Joan Thomas, Port Chester schools superintendent Dr. Aurelia Henriquez, and Curt Lavalla of the village planning department.

My Port Chester district office is currently accepting applications for spring internships from high school and college students. Interns will engage in legislative research, participate in hearings and events, letter writing and constituent services. Although internships are unpaid, we will work with you to provide documentation for school credit and letters of recommendation. If interested, please contact Lisa Urban at urbanl@nyassembly.gov.



Assisting the Ridge Street Elementary School Reopening

In September, Senator Mayer and I intervened on behalf of the students, parents and Board of Education of the Blind Brook School District to help resolve building opening issues after construction at the Bruno M. Ponterio Ridge Street Elementary School.

The delayed September school opening for in-person learning was extremely concerning to parents, educators community members. We shared those concerns and facilitated a productive working relationship between the State Education Department and the school district with the urgency needed to open the school as quickly as possible.

This was possible thanks to the focus, leadership and attention of

Commissioner Betty Rosa and the hands on assistance from the State Education Department and their commitment to the students and families of Blind Brook. When construction-related building code issues at the school were identified, Commissioner Rosa provided an unprecedented level of guidance, expertise and SED staff support to assist the district in completing needed work and reopening the school as quickly as possible.

An important part of my job is to respond with urgency when a crisis arises and work with everyone to help solve unexpected problems when they surface. In this case, parents, school officials, the community and the State Education Department worked together.

Technology Loophole Closed to Allow Electronic Signature for Funeral and Cemetery Documents

My legislation to correct a loophole in the law that prohibited funeral directors and cemeteries from utilizing electronic signatures passed both houses and was signed into law. The legislation authorizes the use of electronic signatures for documents that are routinely used by funeral homes, cemeteries and crematories in their funeral and

cemetery services. This legislation closes a loophole in the law also recognized as problematic during Covid-19. The heightened difficulty in executing these documents, often involving next-of-kin located around the country, made it clear that the 2004 law needed to be corrected.

Rye Town Court Legislation Signed into Law

In 2020 the village of Port Chester determined that it would close the village court and by operation of law, those responsibilities would fall to the Town of Rye. While state legislation is not required for a village to dissolve a village court, new legislation was necessary to help the Town of Rye transition to taking on the responsibilities and heavy caseload of the village court.

Town of Rye Supervisor Gary Zuckerman and the Town Board took the new responsibilities seriously and were determined to plan for the new court so that the transition would be seamless. Senator Shelley

Mayer and I worked with the town on the details of the authorizing legislation. The town has carefully reviewed the anticipated workload. With the dissolution of the village court and expansion of the town court, the result will be a reduction of one full local justice position while still handling the court's caseload. The town will reorganize the court to meet the caseload.

Our legislation was drafted, passed and signed into law in time for the court transition date of May 15, 2021. The Town Court will operate where the Village Court previously resided, at 350 N Main St. in Port Chester.



I joined Governor Kathy Hochul, Senator Shelley Mayer, County Executive George Latimer, and other officials at the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Center to spread the word about the availability of vaccinations for children in the 5-11 age group. Governor Hochul also announced the 'Vaccinate, Educate, Graduate' scholarship program for children ages 5 through 11 who receive their first vaccine dose by December 19th can enter for a chance to win a full scholarship to any SUNY or CUNY.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman
**Steve
Otis**

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I joined Town of Rye officials at Crawford Park to mark the Town's American Green Zone Alliance (AGZA) certification. The park has transitioned to 100% electric lawn and grounds equipment.