



Dear Friends,

First of all, **THANK YOU** to everyone who came out for **Saturday's food drive supporting the [Community Center of Northern Westchester](#)**. Through your efforts and generosity, we donated over 1,330 pounds of food and other needed items. Kudos to the organization's wonderful Executive Director Clare Murray, and her staff and volunteers, for helping to make our first Service Saturday so seamless!



On a more somber note – and before we get to other topics – as I am sure you know, **last Tuesday Governor Cuomo did the right thing for the people of New York and tendered his resignation, effective August 24**. If you did not see the statement I released following the announcement, [you can read it here](#).

Needless to say, this is a sad turn of events for our state. The Governor performed extremely well in guiding the state through the pandemic and in leading on tough issues such as women's reproductive rights, marriage equality, gun safety legislation and fighting the climate crisis. That said, no person is above the law.

No doubt, this has been gut-wrenching for the women who bravely came forward to share their accounts, enduring untold hours of inquiry. And this certainly has been a painful time for our state. However, as I mentioned in [my statement](#) following the resignation announcement, **I have the utmost confidence in Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul to lead us through this difficult time, and as a member of the legislature, I look forward to working with her.**

And, despite the disruption, we must march forward...

Beating COVID-19 Will Take All of Us

In addition to the Governor's resignation, the other perhaps not-so-recent development is the continued spike in COVID-19 cases in Westchester, in New York State, and around the country. I am particularly concerned for those struggling states whose executive's actions seem to be dictated by concern for something other than science and the health and well-being of their residents.



Fortunately, many governors on both sides of the aisle throughout the country (including New York, as I am sure Lt. Gov. Hochul will pick up the mantle), are working hard to protect their citizens. Nonetheless, the Delta variant is incredibly contagious and dangerous to those who are not vaccinated. As I have mentioned before, [more than 99% of the COVID-19 related deaths are among the unvaccinated](#). And while there are breakthrough cases, CDC data suggests that [more than 99.99% of fully vaccinated people have not had a severe breakthrough case](#). The vaccine works. It is safe and effective.

Please, if you are not vaccinated – for your sake, and the sake of others who are not eligible or otherwise able to be vaccinated at this time – get yourself vaccinated. Scheduled and walk-in appointments [are widely available at state sites](#), including at the Westchester County Center, which has available both the Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines. You can also look for availability at [non-state-run sites near you](#).

Also, **given the high level of transmissibility of the Delta variant – which can be spread by those who are vaccinated – please consider wearing a mask indoors when outside your home**. In my Assembly office, although we are all fully vaccinated, we have recently returned to wearing masks for the safety of those who visit our office, for our own safety, and the safety of our families. Thank you to all the area businesses who are likewise urging their customers to don masks when they enter the building.

Only by working together and doing our part, will we be able to put this pandemic behind us.

Finally, with the school year almost upon us, and the number of children contracting COVID-19 rising due to the Delta variant, [I wanted to share this article from Dr. Lena Wen](#) on what parents can do to help keep their children safe. I know many parents are concerned about this – especially those with children under the age of 12 who are not yet eligible for the vaccine – and this article provides some very straightforward tips and advice.

[Getting Emergency Rental Assistance Back on Track](#)

One of the key responsibilities of the NYS legislature is oversight, including the implementation of state funding programs. Are public dollars being spent properly in accordance with the law and regulations? With the severe, crippling impact of the pandemic on so many areas of the NYS economy, are pandemic relief dollars quickly being disbursed to eligible persons in need?

I joined several of my Assembly colleagues in Manhattan last week for a public hearing to examine the application process and implementation of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). New York received approximately \$2.6 billion in federal funding to enact ERAP, which provides residential rental and utility assistance to households that have been unable to pay their bills due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) administers ERAP.

The hearings were called because so little of the money has been disbursed. The federal government is authorized to reclaim funds if at least 65% of the original allocation is not utilized by September 30. In fact, during the legislature's budget hearings, members of the legislature repeatedly stressed with administration officials the importance of getting that money out the door. **Yet as of July 1, less than \$1 million of the ERAP funds had been disbursed.** As one witness testified, "The implementation and administration of ERAP can best be described as a hot mess."

In his testimony, Michael P. Hein, the Commissioner of OTDA, stated that his agency had reported to the U.S. Treasury that considerable progress had been made since then. He stated that \$450 million had been obligated and that they were well on the way to meeting the obligation to avoid a clawback of the funds by the federal government. And while this is a positive development, just because the funds being obligated may meet federal requirements, it does not mean sufficient funds have been disbursed to the landlords whose tenants couldn't pay due to the pandemic. ([You can view my questioning of Commissioner Hein during the hearing by clicking here.](#))

The testimony which followed from tenants, tenant representatives, and small landlords painted a picture of a program riddled with significant problems from the outset: inadequate staffing, a portal for applications that went live but for weeks failed to function properly, call centers with insufficiently trained personnel, and significant delays in processing applications (sometimes taking well over eight weeks, often with inaccurate and inconsistent OTDA response). Tenants and tenant representatives testified that it was commonplace for applicants to spend hours trying to file, only to find themselves later rejected with the response that properly uploaded documentation had not been received.

Funds are not getting to those in dire need and taxpayer dollars are wasted in systems that don't function properly. While I am cautiously optimistic that we can set this program right, it is not the first time that a new state funding program has been established which fails to function well. Highly professional and experienced technology experts *must* be involved from the outset in creating the platforms and portals at the heart of processing and dispensing funds. We also need to take a hard look at staffing levels and training. I will be pushing hard for these remedies moving forward.

[Did You Miss Our Emergency Preparedness Forum?](#)

For those of you who were unable to attend the virtual forum I co-hosted with the Red Cross, *Prepare, Respond, Recover: What to do When Disaster Strikes*, you can watch it by [clicking here](#) or on the image below. **Thank you to the Red Cross for putting together this invaluable presentation on how to prepare, respond and recover from local and large-scale emergencies**, including natural disasters, manmade disasters, technological/cyber disasters, and active shooter/active violence situations.



[A Call for First Responders](#)

On a somewhat related note, **last Wednesday night I attended my first South Salem Fire Department Annual Carnival & Parade**, back after a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now that I have had the pleasure of attending, I can understand why so many Lewisboro residents consider it one of the most fun nights of the year!

The parade featured volunteer first responders - fire departments and EMS. And they came not only from Lewisboro, but from many of the area towns.



After the parade, I had the opportunity to speak with some of these volunteers, thanking them for all they do, and letting them know to reach out to my office if we can be of any assistance. They only had one request: **please put in a plug for volunteers.**

I promised I would do that, and I am keeping that promise.

The men and women who donate their time to keep our communities safe are owed a real debt of gratitude. Unlike jurisdictions with professional firefighters and EMS, there would be no emergency services in many areas without their bravery and sacrifice... and they are always looking for people to join their ranks.

If you are in a position to volunteer your time with your local EMS or fire department, please look into joining! And of course, if there is anything my office can do to help connect you with your local volunteer departments, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Finally, to all our first responders – volunteer and professional – thank you for everything you do to keep our communities safe. You are true heroes.

As always, if there are any issues that you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at burdickc@nyassembly.gov (or simply reply to this email). **Please also follow me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up-to-date information.**

Miss any of our previous newsletters? You can [find them here](#).

Sincerely yours,

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