



Assemblymember DAN QUART

Community Update

Spring 2019



Dear Neighbor,

As we welcome spring, I wish you and your loved ones a blossoming season ahead. For our neighbors celebrating Passover, I hope your holiday is filled with life and joy! While we embrace the warmth and renewal of the coming months, I want to tell you about the work I've been doing in Albany.

It has certainly been a productive session thus far. We have managed to overhaul our ailing election system and pass the Reproductive Health Act to protect women's reproductive rights. We fought tooth and nail to hold the state's first hearings on sexual harassment in the workplace in 27 years. We passed GENDA and a ban on gay conversion therapy. And while at the federal level our country may be at an impasse, here in New York we secured common sense gun control.

As we continue to work with the Governor on the budget and as the legislative session progresses, I look forward to delivering you more good news. As always, if there is anything I or my office can do for you, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Warmly,

Dan Quart

Amending New York's Outdated Gravity Knife Law

In March, Senator Robert Jackson and I introduced legislation to decriminalize gravity knives in New York State. Although gravity knives, as defined by the current statute, are no longer manufactured, a broad interpretation of the law by overzealous prosecutors has left working class New Yorkers and New Yorkers of color vulnerable to arrest. Under the law's current application, any knife that can be opened with a flick of the wrist can be deemed illegal.

Used by many professionals from skilled trade workers to artists, these common pocketknives can be purchased at almost any sporting goods or hardware store in the city. Yet, despite their wide use and availability, the possession of a so-called 'gravity knife' continues to be a Class A misdemeanor, punishable by up to one year in prison.

This statute is almost exclusively enforced in New York City, and specifically in Manhattan. In New York City, over a ten-year period, 60,000 people have been arrested — 86% of them Black or Latino. The law unfairly targets working class people, who have shown no intent on causing harm and are simply trying to do their job. It's time for this archaic law to go.



Erin L. George (Citizen Action of NY), Katie Schaffer (JustLeadershipUSA), Senator Robert Jackson, Assemblymember Dan Quart, and Martin LaFalce (Legal Aid Society) hold a press conference urging swift action on gravity knife reform.

The Ongoing Fight for Criminal Justice Reform

While previous years have proved disappointing, this will be the year we pass comprehensive and meaningful criminal justice reforms, and start on the long road to fixing our broken, two-tiered criminal justice system. Although cash bail was intended to secure a person's return to the courtroom, its original purpose has since been warped. Every single night, thousands of New Yorkers who haven't been convicted of a crime languish in county jails across the state, simply because they can't afford to buy their way to freedom. Oftentimes, these New Yorkers are forced to

consider an impossible choice: to sit in prison for days, weeks, months, even years until their trial or take a plea deal – even if they don't know the evidence in their case and even if they are innocent, just so that they can go home to their families.

The Assembly, the Senate, and the Governor have been working tirelessly with advocacy groups to amend New York's cash bail, discovery, and speedy trial statutes. And I assure you, before session is up, we will get this done.

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Providing a Safe Workplace For All

Last spring, I was approached by members of the Sexual Harassment Working Group – a group of seven former legislative employees who had experienced sexual harassment or assault while working for the state legislature. After discussions about the pervasive culture of sexual harassment in Albany, we decided to work together to call for a public hearing on sexual harassment and give survivors a platform to tell their stories. In February, that hearing materialized and legislators, including myself, heard from both experts and survivors about the steps we need to take to provide concrete protections against sexual harassment and assault in the workplace.

I was deeply moved by the testimonies of every single person who stepped up to share their experiences with us. The women and men who reported their harassment and/or assaults were undermined and met with disbelief. In some cases, their abusers faced no consequences. What we heard over and over again was that for years, the state has failed victims of sexual assault; we cannot fail them again.

Albany is a better place today than it was yesterday. It is changing, albeit slowly. I will continue to advocate for workplace safety for all, gender equity, and elevate the voices of survivors.



Assemblymember Quart and colleagues at New York's recent hearing on sexual harassment in the workplace.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Making Voting Easier for New Yorkers

Prior to this legislative session, New York had some of the worst election laws in the country. Our laws made it harder, not easier, for people to vote. When New Yorkers told us that the lines were long and the NYBOE disorganized, we went to Albany and we passed a series of reforms to facilitate the voting process.

We passed significant reforms that included:

- Early voting
- Pre-registration for 16 & 17 year olds
- Consolidated state and federal primaries
- Same day voter registration
- Voting by mail

The easiest way to suppress the vote is by making it extremely difficult to cast one. Our antiquated election laws have long discouraged millions of New Yorkers from voting. Yet, all while the odds were stacked against us, in 2016, New York had its highest voter turnout since 1994 – almost half of all registered voters cast their ballot. While this is promising, I know we can do better and I hope these changes encourage voters to exercise their civic duty and their most important right.



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Congestion Pricing: A Step in the Right Direction

We've all heard our fair share of MTA horror stories: students have missed exams and even their own graduations, people have missed court appearances, arrived late to job interviews, and lost work all because our public transit system is in desperate need of repairs. We've experienced our own personal disappointments and frustrations as we've sat on unmoving trains, watching the minutes tick by.

Public transportation is critical to our everyday lives. Millions of New Yorkers ride the subway every single day and we're tired of the constant delays and breakdowns of the system. These failures are not inevitable and they are not beyond repair but

we have to face the facts: increasing fares and asking riders to single-handedly shoulder the financial burden won't provide the substantial funding needed to fix our subways. That's why I support congestion pricing.

Congestion pricing will generate an estimated \$15 billion through 2024, creating additional revenue streams to fund improvements to the MTA, all while reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and alleviating the burden of traffic in our neighborhoods. New Yorkers deserve a reliable public transit system that works and it's long past time we got one.