



Assemblyman

Steve Otis



91st Assembly District

Larchmont - Mamaroneck - New Rochelle - Port Chester - Rye Brook and Rye

March 31, 2023

Dear Friends,

March has been a busy month in state government. We are deep into the state budget process, which I will detail in this newsletter.

We held the annual SOMOS conference in Albany where I co-hosted a workshop featuring not-for-profit leaders from upstate and the suburbs discussing their work in providing services to Hispanic communities outside of New York City.

I have also been continuing my advocacy on digital inclusion and equity issues. The [NYS ConnectALL](#) office and [The STEM Alliance](#) hosted the Hudson Valley Regional Meeting at Purchase College as part of the NYS planning process for 2024 digital inclusion federal funds. I was one of the speakers at the session, sharing my vision on the importance of community groups in providing digital inclusion programs.

As always, do not hesitate to contact my office if we can be of assistance at 914-939-7028.

Warm regards,



Annual SOMOS Conference In Albany



Every few years I host a panel discussion at the annual Albany SOMOS conference on the topic of not-for-profit organizations from upstate and the suburbs discussing their work on providing services to Hispanic communities outside of New York City.

Much of the SOMOS conference is focused on NYC issues, but the challenges outside of the city are often different. This year we had an outstanding panel of not-for-profit leaders providing programs and services from Buffalo, Albany, the Hudson Valley and Long Island. This year's panel was exceptional with each panelist bringing decades of experience providing human service, health care, legal and cultural programs of great value. The discussion was so compelling that the talk went 30 minutes over

our allotted time, and no one from the audience left the room. I hosted the workshop with Assemblyman Phil Ramos, a colleague from Long Island.

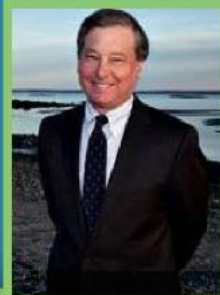
Pictured above: Julie Burgos, Second VP for Long Island Latino Teachers' Association; Cas Rodriguez, Hispanic Heritage Council of Western New York; Pilar Moya-Mancera-Executive Director of Housing Help, Inc.; Beatriz Diaz Taveras - Executive Director of Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York; Assemblyman Phil Ramos; and Assemblyman Otis. Not pictured in this photo: Micky Jimenez, Regional Director for Capital District Latinos.

The New York State Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force presents

Suburban and Upstate Latino Communities

Hosted by:

Phil Ramos
Deputy Speaker
NYS Assembly



Steven Otis
NYS Assembly

The workshop will focus on the following issues:

- Housing
- Immigration and labor
- Arts & culture
- Post pandemic issues
- Disparities in school funding

**Saturday
March 11
11:30 AM - 12:45 PM**

**Empire State Plaza
Meeting Room 1**

Panelists:

- **Pilar Moya-Mancera**
Executive Director of Housing Help, Inc.
- **Micky Jimenez**
Regional Director for Capital District Latinos
- **Cas Rodriguez**
Hispanic Heritage Council of Western New York
- **Julie Burgos**
Second VP for Long Island Latino Teachers' Association (LILTA)
- **Beatriz Diaz Taveras**
Executive Director of Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of NY

THIS WORKSHOP IS FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Digital Equity Listening Session at SUNY Purchase



I continue to play a leadership role in supporting the digital inclusion and equity programs. Part of this process is the drafting of a NYS plan on digital equity to be submitted to the federal government for new 2024 funding from Washington. An important part of that process is a series of regional meetings held by the ConnectALL office of Empire State Development to listen to and involve local groups involved in this work and groups who need to run programs for the people they serve.

Our regional meeting, which I helped organize, was held at SUNY Purchase on

March 24. It was also sponsored by The STEM Alliance which developed a great program with the ConnectALL team. We had valuable participation from the attendees in the general meeting and breakout discussions. Westchester's voices will help mold the plan.

The themes that I emphasize are the importance of using local groups to deliver digital literacy programs. There is a need for organizations that know how to run programs to partner with groups that have the clients that need the broadband access, equipment and training courses that make digital competence a reality.

Pictured from left to right: Meg Kaufer, Executive Director of the STEM Alliance; Assemblyman Otis, Tom Scaglione, Regional Director of Mid-Hudson Empire State Development; Jodia Vanel, Program Officer of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA); and Josh Breitbart, Senior Vice President of ConnectALL at ESD.

State Budget Update – Assembly Budget Proposal Focus on Education, Affordability and the Environment

We have hit major mileposts in the state budget process. Governor Hochul submitted her budget proposal on February 1st. Since then, the legislature has sought comments from the public through lengthy public hearings, meetings with those interested in particular budget issues, and comments from the public. I helped organize the Assembly Westchester Delegation's local hearing.

This was followed by deliberation within each house over the details of the budget and how each house will counter the submitted executive budget proposal with our own proposals. Two weeks ago, the Assembly and the Senate passed our one-

house budget resolutions that form the basis for budget negotiations between the governor and the legislature.

I was very pleased that many of the priorities I advanced were included in the Assembly budget proposal. I will highlight some of these issues here. Part of the process will be the work of budget conference committees. As Chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee, I serve on the Economic Development Budget Conference Committee.

As an overview, one goal of the Assembly budget proposal is to pay attention to affordability issues at a time when increased costs are of concern to families, workers, commuters, students, local governments, school districts, businesses and taxpayers. Another important goal is to move ahead on several important environmental issues related to clean water, energy and climate change. At the same time, our proposal continues to increase the state's reserve fund to improve financial planning and provide needed funding to the MTA that are vital to our region's economy at a time when ridership and work patterns have changed since COVID-19. Below are highlights from some budget topics. Other budget issues will be updated in future messages.

Education

One of my biggest priorities has always been state support for school districts. This year brings the culmination of our determined effort to fully fund Foundation Aid, which was delayed since 2008-09 following the economic downturn of that time. For many years I organized the effort in the Assembly to push for full funding for school districts that were short-changed by reduced funding.

The state school aid funding in our budget included a total to \$34.3 billion in aid statewide, an increase of \$3 billion or 9.7 percent, over last year's budget. Included

in that total is an increase of \$2.6 billion to fully fund Foundation Aid, the first time full funding has been provided since the formula was created in 2007.

While full funding is good news, the task of creating a model to update the formula is needed. Our budget includes funding for SED to study the Foundation Aid and prekindergarten funding formulas so that SED can recommend updates and changes to both funding streams. I will be watching this process to make sure Westchester districts are treated fairly in any new modified formula.

Our budget proposal also includes an additional \$75 million for the Statewide Universal Full Day Prekindergarten grant program for a total of \$200 million in new funding for prekindergarten programs in SFY 2023-24. My colleagues and I in the Hudson Valley Assembly delegation have been pushing for additional funding and fairness for suburban districts since the Pre-K funding program was established.

I have been a longtime advocate for 4201 Schools, schools that serve blind, deaf, and severely physically disabled children. Our budget includes a \$2 million restoration and a \$10 million increase of funding for Private Schools for the Blind and Deaf (4201 schools), for a total of \$117.9 million and new funding for capital grants for these schools, which are underfunded and depend upon NYS to support capital needs. In Westchester I have been a supporter of New York School for the Deaf which serves students from Westchester, New York City and a number of other Hudson Valley counties.

Another annual focus of mine has been the state's funding streams to libraries. Our budget proposal would increase state operating funding for libraries by \$5 million over last year's total and includes a \$40 million increase to the library construction capital grant program which Westchester libraries heavily rely upon to help fund capital improvements to local libraries.

Environmental Protection and Energy

One of my budget priorities continues to be to increase funding for clean water programs that help local governments fund needed environmental projects while reducing the burden on local property taxpayers. Our one-house budget increases the amount proposed this year to \$600 million, an increase over the Governor's \$500 million proposal. The added funding would steer additional dollars to the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) grant program I helped initiate in 2015 and for the growing problem of algae blooms impacting lakes across the state. Our budget also includes \$35 million in funding for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) that provides important support to a wide variety of conservation programs across the state.

One of the most important tasks we need to address in the budget and throughout the 2023 legislative session is moving ahead on a wide variety of issues included in the recently finalized [Climate Action Council plan](#). Included is the need to establish programs to implement New York's climate goals based upon the Climate Action Council plan adopted at the end of 2022. There have been numerous pieces of legislation introduced on topics related to the transition to all-electric in new and public buildings, public renewables, fossil fuel subsidies, electric energy transmission infrastructure, prioritizing environmental justice areas for assistance and other important issues. Many of these items are also part of the budget negotiations with various versions of these issues included in the Governor's proposed budget and in the one-house proposals from each house.

These issues have long been a priority of mine and I am playing an active role in supporting strong polices through the budget process and through legislation on this agenda. Earlier this week I toured the NY Independent Systems Operator (NYISO) headquarters as part of my work on these issues. NYISO is the independent entity that monitors and maintains the reliability of New York's

electrical grid. NYISO is an important tool in guiding the areas where we need to improve our electrical grid transmission infrastructure to meet the expanded need for electricity in the years ahead.

Housing

Affordability and housing have increasingly become a challenge throughout New York State, not just in Westchester County. Our Assembly one-house budget proposal includes \$1.5 billion towards a variety of programs to assist tenants, promote affordable housing and provide homeowner assistance. It includes a Housing Access Voucher Program to provide rental assistance to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It also includes a Homeownership Opportunity Connection Program to better connect residents of communities with below average homeownership rates and not-for-profit housing organizations with homeownership programs funded within the state's multi-year housing program. The spending plan would also incentivize the development of new housing in municipalities across the state and includes \$125 million in incentives for New York City and \$500 million for other cities, towns and villages. Our Assembly proposal emphasizes incentives and assistance to address the challenge of inflated real estate prices as a barrier to affordable housing. Neither the Senate nor Assembly one-house budgets included state overrides of the State Environmental Quality Review Act or local planning. Instead, both legislative proposals placed emphasis on affordable housing and funding to make such housing financially viable.

Higher Education

For a number of years, the Assembly has prioritized affordability in higher education. We again add support for financial aid programs restoring \$6 million and adds an additional \$10.2 million for opportunity programs for a total of \$213

million. We also propose raising the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) income threshold limit from \$80,000 to \$100,000. Our budget rejects proposed tuition increases at SUNY and CUNY while instead supporting these systems with needed funding to avoid a tuition increase this year.

Transportation

Stable funding for MTA to help maintain their system vital to our region's economy is a major priority in our budget proposal. Ridership has increased but is still below pre-pandemic levels. Everyone agrees that it is important that we institute funding streams to maintain the regional strength of the system. Instead of relying on an increase in the regional payroll tax, our budget proposes less regressive revenues to support the MTA system. Our budget also includes assistance for non-MTA mass transit assistance. The spending plan also includes \$1.33 billion for capital aid to localities programs to maintain and repair aging transportation infrastructure, including CHIPs, Pave our Potholes, Bridge N.Y., Extreme Weather Recovery and State Route NY. It also includes an increase of \$100 million from the executive's proposal for the Pave N.Y. program. I also support increased funding for state assistance for state and local road and bridge infrastructure and expansion of EV charging infrastructure on our highways.

Child Care

We continue to face a shortage in childcare slots and programs vital to providing families the services needed to raise children and allow parents to return to work. Last year's state budget included \$7 billion over four years to expand access to safe, affordable childcare across the state. The proposed Assembly budget for 2023-24 includes an additional \$137.5 million over the allocated amount for the second year of the four-year spending plan to better meet the need.

[Summary of Assembly Recommended Changes to the Executive Budget](#)

Albany Press Conference for Immigration Legal Services



Assemblyman Otis and Janet Rolon from the Community Resource Center in Mamaroneck at a press conference for the Immigration Legal Services Funding in the State Budget. Advocates from across the state came to Albany for the press conference including Westchester residents and CRC members pictured here.



Each year the League of Women Voters of Rye, Rye Brook and Port Chester presents a Student Civic Achievement Award to a junior who lives in and attends a high school in the City of Rye, Villages of Rye Brook and Port Chester, or the Rye Neck section of the Town of Rye, in recognition of the student's overall contributions to his or her school and community in the areas of civic engagement, advocacy, leadership or voter education.

Students eligible for the award will participate at a high level in numerous activities. In doing so, they will have proven to be exemplary leaders and excellent role models for their peers. The recipient of the Peter Larr Student Civic Achievement Award will be selected by a subcommittee of the LWV Board members. The recipient will receive \$750.

The application deadline is May 15, 2022. For more information [click here](#), or to obtain an application, contact Joan Feinstein at jfeinstein@wfsnyc.com

