



Assemblyman Steve Otis



Legislative Update

Spring 2023

Dear Friends,

The new year has brought a new season of advocacy on issues affecting Sound Shore communities. The needs of families, school districts, local governments, not-for-profits and businesses remain the focus of my work. This newsletter covers some of the highlights and includes a report on the recently adopted state budget. More detail can be found in my regular e-mail blasts, which are also archived on my Assembly website.

As Chair of the Assembly Science and Technology Committee, I have been able to target diverse issues such as digital equity and inclusion, data privacy, reproductive health privacy, environmental and climate change issues, broadband access, EV charging infrastructure and cybersecurity. This work will continue throughout the year.

Another priority of mine is working with local groups to help secure state funding for local projects. My staff and I provide in-depth assistance in identifying, supporting and securing funds that help local not-for-profits by successfully funding their programs and capital projects.

As always, please contact my office with your ideas for legislation, issues with state agencies, or any issue on which I can be helpful. It is a privilege to serve the Sound Shore in the State Assembly. My staff and I work every day to win results for the communities I represent and on the statewide issues where I have been able to play a leadership role.

Warm regards,

Steven Otis
State Assemblyman



Digital Inclusion Programs Embraced by Statewide Effort

One of my priorities is to support digital inclusion programs that provide broadband access, devices and training to individuals in need of digital literacy. I am working with advocates across the state and with national experts on this important equity issue.

An important part of this effort is a statewide series of regional meetings on digital equity that will help NYS draft a digital equity plan required for the 2024 round of federal funding. Our regional meeting, which I helped organize, was held at Purchase College on March 24, sponsored by New York State's ConnectALL office and the STEM Alliance.

I spoke at the Mid-Hudson meeting and at the Capitol Region meeting held in Albany. At both meetings, I emphasized the importance of using local groups to deliver digital literacy programs. Organizations that know how to run programs need to partner with groups that serve clients in need of broadband access, equipment and training courses to become digitally proficient.

In Westchester I have provided significant state funding to support these programs in the Sound Shore and am working with my Assembly colleagues to bring additional funding to these programs across the state. This is an equity issue we know how to address. It has been a privilege to work with groups throughout the state who do this important work. In Westchester, the STEM Alliance, based in Mamaroneck and led by Meg Kaufer, is one of the statewide leaders making digital inclusion programs a reality.

If you would like to submit comments for the statewide plan, please submit them to the NYS ConnectALL office at <https://broadband.ny.gov>.

State Budget Includes \$17.5 Million for Village of Mamaroneck Flood Project

State Senator Shelley B. Mayer and I worked together to include \$17.5 million in the state budget to provide New York State's share of funding for the Mamaroneck Sheldrake US Army Corps of Engineers flood project. The funding will allow the Mamaroneck project to proceed to construction. We worked closely with our legislative leaders in each house, Governor Hochul, and Commissioner Basil Seggos of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation on the state contribution that will be pooled with federal and county funds.

The Mamaroneck ACE project is one of the most important flood mitigation projects in Westchester County, given the repeated flood damage suffered by Mamaroneck in numerous storms. The Army Corps has led the studies for this project for decades with NYS participating in cost sharing with the federal government, the village, and the county. The state funding included in the budget will go to the construction work to implement the projects outlined in the study. The Army Corps is now evaluating new hydrology data from Hurricane Ida in order to make any modifications that may be warranted to improve the resiliency of the project.

This work is a partnership with every level of government, including US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Congressman Jamaal Bowman, Mamaroneck Village Mayor Tom Murphy, County Executive George Latimer and County Legislator Catherine Parker.

State Budget Includes Funding of Importance to Westchester

Our 2023-24 adopted state budget brings important victories on a wide range of issues of importance to the Sound Shore communities I serve and on statewide issues of significance. One important theme in the budget is to address a variety of affordability issues by controlling costs to property taxpayers, local governments, and school districts, as well as aiding businesses and not-for-profit organizations.

Education funding has long been a priority of mine, and this budget completes the full funding of Foundation Aid as part of a plan that includes \$34 billion in total aid to school districts, an increase of \$3 billion. The Foundation Aid total will be \$24 billion providing every district 100% of the funding each was due based upon the aid formula. For many years I organized the effort within the Assembly to advocate for full funding for districts disproportionately underfunded within the school aid distribution. The budget also includes \$150 million in new funding for Universal Prekindergarten programs with increased benefit to suburban districts. We also provided additional funding for school meal programs, which educators have highlighted as an important tool in improving learning. These budget allocations help reduce education costs borne by property taxpayers.

I also successfully advocated for increased funding for SUNY and CUNY to avoid a tuition increase this year and increased funding for a variety of college tuition financial aid programs. Financial stability for higher education and affordability to students have been a priority every year. I have also worked to win funding increases for special act school districts serving blind and deaf individuals, such as Westchester based New York School for the Deaf.

Another area where I have played a leadership role has been on environmental issues. The budget includes \$500 million in new funding for New York's clean water programs, including the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act grant program I helped establish in 2015. I also supported funding for lead pipe replacement and \$400 million towards the state's Environmental Protection Fund.

In addition I was involved in the efforts to move ahead with important climate change and clean energy programs, which were part of the budget discussions. On the issues of all-electric building standards for new construction, expanding our drive to build new renewable energy facilities, improving our electric transmission grid, electric vehicle charging infrastructure and rebate program to control costs to consumers, I have been an active participant in seeking well-crafted solutions. This budget makes great strides forward on all these issues, but our continued attention to make sure the transition to cleaner energy works will require monitoring and adjustment if we are to meet our goals and protect consumers.

In the budget process we also have good news on expanded access for affordable child care and additional resources for mental health services. Our additional funding for MTA will lower a planned fare increase and provide financial stability to mass transit weakened by changes in ridership. There will be long-deferred Medicaid rate increases to health care providers and phased-in increases in the minimum wage starting in January with increases after 2027 to be tied to the inflation rate. We also expanded the Empire State Child Tax Credit, which will now include children under the age of four. This will help keep an additional 900,000 children out of poverty.

The budget also included a variety of economic development and small business assistance programs, which I supported in the budget process. These include funds for downtown revitalization, assistance to small business, and support for technology businesses, all building on our success in attracting semiconductor manufacturing to New York and expansion of our film production tax credit program, which has brought projects to our state and the Hudson Valley. We also increased funding for arts organizations.

The budget also included extensive discussion on non-budget issues related to public safety and housing. Modifications were made to the rules related to bail. We made provisions for increased funding for a variety of anti-gun violence programs and increased commitment to cybersecurity. We also provided additional funding to protect reproductive health care supporting patients and providers. In addition, we enhanced privacy protections for personal health care data, a topic I have worked on as Chair of the Assembly Committee on Science and Technology.

The budget process does not occur in isolation. I was an active participant in the Joint Budget Hearings held in Albany and helped organize the Assembly Westchester Delegation's local forum. Our annual Westchester budget meeting was highly informative, providing our delegation with the details necessary to help us advocate for a variety of issues, including education, social services and transportation. We heard from over 70 speakers representing important organizations and several municipalities across the county.

These are just some of the budget highlights. As with any budget, many of the areas where the Senate, Assembly or the governor supported additional funding or different approaches, budget negotiations result in a compromise. The budget is a very good one for New York. We certainly need to return to discussion of how we can assist in the creation of affordable housing as a partnership with communities and their specific needs, whether they be in New York City, the suburbs, like Westchester and the Hudson Valley, or upstate New York. Links to additional state budget documents can be found on my Assembly website.

SOMOS Conference Workshop on Not-For-Profit Programs Serving Hispanic Communities Outside of NYC

As I have done in the past, I host a panel discussion at the annual Albany SOMOS conference on not-for-profit organizations from upstate and the suburbs to discuss their work providing services to Hispanic communities outside of New York City. The State Legislature's Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force presents a series of workshops on issues that impact Latino communities at the annual SOMOS conference, which is sponsored by Somos, Inc.

Much of the SOMOS conference is focused on NYC issues, but the challenges outside of the city are often different. This year I hosted the workshop with Assemblyman Phil Ramos, a colleague from Long Island. We had an outstanding panel of not-for-profit leaders providing programs and services from Buffalo, Albany, the Hudson Valley and Long Island. The panel was exceptional with each panelist bringing decades of experience. They discussed the challenges of providing human service, health care, legal and cultural programs to the communities they serve. Immigrant communities also face discrimination in housing and employment, made more difficult in less urban settings where individuals may be more geographically isolated from family and supportive services.



SOMOS Conference In Albany

At a panel discussion on Urban and Upstate Latino Communities during the annual SOMOS Conference, workshop panel participants from left to right: 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.

Expanded Access to Health Insurance Will Help EMS Programs Retain Staff

Following a series of meetings that Senator Shelley Mayer and I had with NYS Comptroller's Office and the NYS Department of Civil Service, the DCS recently adopted a policy change that enables active members of volunteer ambulance and EMS organizations serving one or more municipal corporations to be eligible to participate in the New York State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP).

This decision reflects the recognition by both offices, long advocated by Senator Mayer and I, that EMS agencies serve as extensions of municipalities rather than quasi-public organizations. Legislation we sponsored (S4020/A3392) led to the change of policy, which was announced on February 10th. The change will help some services attract and retain EMS workers with the easier access to health insurance the change in policy brings. The statewide challenge has been longer response times driven by staffing shortages. The regulatory change we achieved has now been codified in law with inclusion of language in the recently adopted state budget.

Our legislation, which included the health insurance change now in effect, covers additional changes in law to create a sustainable EMS system in New York by elevating the essential nature of EMS services, making sure that EMS coverage is required, better funded and better able to retain staff. These are the changes sought by the local officials and first responders with whom we are working. The challenge has been that the wide variety of ways EMS services are provided throughout the state presents the complexity of rationalizing needed improvements for some providers that may not be acceptable to others. We look forward to continued work on these issues through the legislative session.



Above: Senator Shelley B. Mayer and Assemblyman Steve Otis with Rye Brook Village Administrator Chris Bradbury, Westchester County Emergency Services Commissioner Richard Wishnie and Susan Spear, Deputy Commissioner of OEM, with EMS leaders to applaud a landmark policy decision.

Continued Success on Clean Water Issues

Port Chester and Rye Receive Major Grants; Increased Funding Sources On the Way

Clean water issues are vitally important to the Sound Shore and the entire state. The new year brings good news on many fronts. I have continued to play a leadership role in attracting increased resources for local projects.

The Village of Port Chester and the City of Rye have each been awarded \$10 million grants from the state's Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program. The funding will help each community implement wastewater system improvements. These are major grants that will significantly reduce the burden on local taxpayers for needed upgrades. With this funding, both municipalities will make significant upgrades to their sewer systems and reduce the amount of untreated wastewater entering Long Island Sound during storm events.

With the passage of the Environmental Bond Act, state agencies are now developing plans to begin new programs to address clean water, flood resiliency and shoreline protection programs. A new stormwater grant program I proposed will be one of those programs.

The Boys and Girls Club of New Rochelle to Use State Funding for Anti-Violence Programs

Other Grants Help Fund Local Projects

In response to incidents of gun and youth violence, I was able to secure state funding to assist the Boys & Girls Club of New Rochelle (BGCNR) in offering positive programs to provide anti-gun, anti-violence, and mental health programming, and make a difference in the lives of New Rochelle citizens. The \$100,000 state grant will supplement existing BGCNR programs that address the needs of New Rochelle teenagers, allowing the organization to expand its social/emotional learning and mental wellness initiatives, encourage positive dialogue with local law enforcement, and offer targeted sessions on gun awareness and safety.

In the past year alone, the youth of New Rochelle have been impacted by fatal shootings and stabbings incidences. The youth of New Rochelle deserve safe places to spend time outside of school and receive equity access to opportunities. The clubhouse model, long a vital part of the New Rochelle community, has been a signature of BGCNR and continues to offer meaningful positive impact for our youth and families. On all these programs I work closely with our New Rochelle State Delegation, Senators Andrea Stewart Cousins, Shelley Mayer and Nathalia Fernandez and my Assembly colleague Amy Paulin.

On a regular basis I work with local groups to secure funding for needed community programs. Assemblywoman Paulin and I have secured significant grants to assist the New Rochelle YMCA for needed renovations to their most highly used spaces including locker room updates, a new teaching kitchen, a new roof, windows and HVAC system.

In Port Chester, Senator Mayer and I provided funding for renovation projects at Columbus Park including new turf to resurface a highly used soccer field and replacement of playground equipment.

In Mamaroneck we are still in the processing phase of grants to assist with the rebuilding of the flood damaged Community Resource Center and funding to assist LMC Media with equipment to continue their great work serving the tri-community area they cover.



At the New York State Digital Equity Plan Regional Meeting held at Purchase College, 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.

New Emergency Vehicle U-Turn on I-95 at Mamaroneck/New Rochelle Border That Will Reduce Travel Time for First Responders



We received good news in December with the Thruway Authority's announcement that they had completed the relocation of a turn-around on I-95 used by the Town of Mamaroneck Fire Department and other first responders to reach emergencies on the interstate.

The relocation was necessary because of the realignment of I-95 when the toll buildings were removed shortened the distance available for fire trucks to reach the turn and respond to accidents on eastbound lanes. The change provides a quicker and safer way for first responders to reach the scene of an accident. Senator Shelley Mayer and I worked closely in this multi-year effort with Supervisor Jaine Elkind-Eney, the chiefs of the Town of Mamaroneck Fire Department and Thruway Authority Executive Director Matt Driscoll to get this done. Local officials were relentless in making the public safety case for the change and advocating for the relocation.



Assemblyman Otis at the Sustainable New Rochelle Earth Day Festival with three environmental leaders: Congressman Jamaal Bowman, Raya Salter and Paul Presendieu. Congressman Bowman has made environmental issues a major priority of his work in Congress. Raya Salter is a nationally recognized environmental attorney, a member of the NYS Climate Action Council and founder of the Energy Justice Law Center. Paul Presendieu is Chair of the New Rochelle Ecology and Natural Resources Advisory Committee. Paul and Steve sit together on the board of the New York State Association of Conservation Commissions. The Assemblyman works with all three on environmental issues facing Westchester and New York State. On this beautiful Saturday they were joined by many others celebrating Earth Day in New Rochelle.

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248



Assemblyman
**Steve
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Youth Sports Programs and AED Equipment

Last year I introduced legislation to expand the use and availability of AED (automated external defibrillator) equipment at youth sports events. AED equipment saves lives in cases of Sudden Cardiac Arrest and the equipment is already required at school buildings. With youth sports events occurring in a variety of locations, there is very uneven availability or awareness of the importance of having this equipment on-site for immediate response to a Sudden Cardiac Arrest event.

The issue gained new attention with Damar Hamlin's near-death experience in January during the Buffalo Bills – Cincinnati Bengals game. The goal of our legislative efforts is to have this equipment available at all youth sports games and practices. Even in school settings, the awareness of the availability of equipment that is already on-site needs to be improved.

My guides on this issue have been two Rye Brook residents, Alice Schoen and Dana Colasante, founders of the group "Saving Active Hearts," which is dedicated to improving AED equipment availability, training and accessibility in youth sports. Their advocacy was featured in a recent NBC News4 New York Investigative Report of the availability AED equipment at youth sports events. That story can be accessed on my Assembly website.