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Proudly Serving the 16th District



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RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused deep personal loss, economic instability and dislocation across the County. At the Board of Legislators, we continue to work daily to respond to the crisis.

Westchester was one of the country's first COVID-19 hotspots. Working together with County Executive George Latimer, our County health department, federal, state, and local officials, the County was able to scale up testing, expand hospital capacity, make safety changes to our bus system, provide personal protective equipment to medical personnel, and enforce health and safety measures such as requiring masks and social distancing.

To help mitigate the financial impact to taxpayers, we moved quickly to enact a

range of property tax relief measures -- extending the deadlines for taxpayers facing COVID-19 related hardship and slashing late payment penalties for every other property taxpayer during this crisis.

Because of our budget discipline last year, we had leeway in this emergency to respond rapidly to the dramatic loss of County revenue resulting from the pandemic -- including reallocating \$10 million that had been earmarked for the County's rainy day fund, and reducing spending by at least \$11 million by bonding for certiorari repayments and annual pension contribution costs.

At the Board, our investments in upgraded information technology have allowed us to work continuously without

interruption for the people of this County. We have not missed a single Board meeting.

But our work is not done.

Public health and mental health services remain crucially important. We need to continue to support programs to provide for residents facing food insecurity. We must prepare for challenges Westchester families and businesses will face when moratoriums on evictions are lifted. And soon we will begin debating a 2021 budget that will be deeply challenging. We remain committed to ensuring that we provide the support that Westchester residents and businesses need during the pandemic with the fiscal responsibility that Westchester taxpayers deserve. ■

Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Fall 2020 Newsletter



Christopher A. Johnson

District 16 ~ Yonkers



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This year has been quite the journey thus far. I first would like to say that despite the challenges we were presented with these last few months, I hope you and your families are doing well.

While COVID-19 brought about unforeseen obstacles this year, I have still done my best to continue working on the issues that matter most to all of you. From quickly adapting to the changes presented by COVID-19, to ensuring the safety of all of Westchester's residents, to supporting police reform efforts amidst the tragedies we have seen both locally and around the country. At the heart of every decision I've made, every law we pass, and every issue worked on, the best interests of the residents of the 16th District are in mind.

As this year comes to a close, it is important we reflect on our accomplishments and take a look ahead. This budget season will be a challenge, but one we will get through. Now more than ever I must keep you informed while continuing to fight on your behalf for a better quality of life. This summer wasn't the same as I didn't have the opportunity to run into you at events and gatherings like we usually do. So I ask that you also keep me informed by reaching out to my office by phone or email. Together we will continue to make a difference for residents of the 16th District.

All the best,



FUNDING OUR NONPROFITS

One of the greatest pleasures of being a County Legislator is the ability to fight for proper funding of our nonprofit organizations. In the 2020 Budget, I was thankfully able to include monies for three special nonprofit organizations in Yonkers -- The Nepperhan Community Center, Inc., Birth From The Earth, Inc. and The Westchester Untouchables. These organizations are to receive nearly \$20,000 to assist with robust programming for families throughout Yonkers and beyond. ■

CAPITAL PROJECTS

KEEPING OUR WATER SAFE! A number of capital projects have been approved in and around the district to improve quality of life. The Yonkers Joint Wastewater Treatment Plant continues to be upgraded and modernized including replacements of diesel-fired engines with efficient, gas-fired ones; aeration system upgrades; upgrades to generators, blower and electrical systems; and

modernization of odor control technologies, among other upgrades.

REPAIRING WIGHTMAN MANSION AT LENOIR PARK! Funds have been approved for the design and reconstruction of Wightman Mansion at Lenoir Park. A historical building that has been sorely neglected. When I was first elected, I took a tour of the beautiful property with hopes of the County being able to

rehabilitate it for residents and tourists to enjoy.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO SUPPORT AFFORDABLE HOUSING! Five million dollars have been approved to assist with infrastructure improvements at 178 Warburton and Cottage Place Gardens in Yonkers. The project will support the construction of a park, play equipment, new curbs and sidewalks and more. ■

SUPPORTING POLICE REFORM

2020 sees us dealing with another crisis – responding to the calls for police reform sparked by the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota.

At the Board of Legislators, we felt we had a moral imperative to raise our voices. As a black man, and a father, I felt a personal obligation to speak up and stand out against injustices such as these for my family and the many residents I represent. In a letter to officials in Minneapolis, I was proud to sign along with all of my colleagues, we urged justice for Mr. Floyd. This is not the first time I have been public in regards to one of these national tragedies, and if we see it again, it will not be the last.

When our State Legislators began consideration of police reform bills in Albany, I also joined 15 of my colleagues in a letter, urging changes to a law that shielded police disciplinary records from public scrutiny.

The repeal of that law and other police reform measures were passed by our



State Legislators and signed into law by Governor Cuomo in June. These historic reforms – which include a ban on chokeholds by law enforcement officers, a prohibition on false race-based 911 reports,

and the designation of the Attorney General as an independent prosecutor for matters relating to the civilian deaths -- are the first steps in a process to ensure that all the actions we take in policing and public safety are fair and equitable.

County Executive George Latimer has also convened a Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force to examine police practices and training in Westchester County. The Task Force will develop a plan to reinvent and modernize police strategies and programs based on community input, in accordance with an Executive Order from Governor Cuomo. Recommendations from the Task Force are expected to be before the Board of Legislators for our review and for public comment and approval by the beginning of the new year. ■



Photo provided by Yonkers Arts, Inc. of the Black Lives Matter Mural on South Broadway in Yonkers.

PROTECTING OUR ELECTIONS

This year's elections were conducted under unprecedented conditions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A series of emergency Executive Orders from the Governor changed election dates and deadlines multiple times. Newly instituted procedures for absentee balloting meant an historic number of absentee ballots are being cast. Polling places that might normally be

available, for example at nursing homes and senior facilities, were not available this year.

Although the Board of Legislators does not have authority over how the Board of Elections conducts elections, we wanted to make sure we were providing as much assistance as possible so that Westchester voters have confidence that they will be able to vote and that their votes will be properly

counted.

Our new Election Information Gathering Task Force, convened after voting issues during the June 23 primary elections gathered information from more than 150 public comments and from committee meetings with voter advocates and the Westchester County Board of Elections Commissioners. ■

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

As chair of the Social Services Committee I have held several committee meetings throughout the year diving into issues such as Veteran Affairs, Child-care, Domestic Violence, Child Protective Services and Homelessness. Many

of our most vulnerable citizens receive assistance by way of the Department of Social Services, and during these times, many more people who would have never expected to need these safety nets are taking advantage. As I continue to chair the

committee I will work to improve these services and make recommendations for expansion of such services. It is imperative that we protect and help our residents when they need it most; this is what the system is designed for. ■

BLACK HISTORY MONTH CONCERT

Tradition continued this year with the hosting of my 9th Annual Black History Month Concert. Each and every day we are reminded of the inequalities that African Americans endure here in America. 400 years ago, in the year 1619, a ship carrying approximately two dozen human cargo, arrived in what is now known as Virginia. While there is much debate about the particular circumstance surrounding this arrival, it is clear that this earmarked the beginning of long journey of injustice for Africans in America.

On February 28th, I along with Councilmember Tasha Diaz, hosted a concert featuring choirs from all over the city of Yonkers, who sang songs of triumph and victory in relation to the adversities faced by African-Americans all of these years. Led by the Master of Ceremonies Reverend Bryan Allen, the concert garnered over one hundred community members, who enjoyed the performances interjected by historical references. After the concert vendors



such as the Census Bureau, Yonkers NAACP and the Yonkers African American Heritage Committee, connected with the audience by sharing information about their organizations. Concert goers were also provided with light re-

freshments compliment of Shoprite and a coupon sponsored by the Yonkers Downtown Bid, that allowed everyone who attended to enjoy food from local restaurants in the area at a discounted rate. ■

INTERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

It has been my pleasure these past few summers to have some of our bright young people intern in my office. For the second year, even during COVID-19, I was able to have three young people

plan their own Young People's Assembly (YPA). They had the opportunity to plan and lead a conversation around a conversation of their choice. This year they chose Police Reform. In addition to

the YPA, interns may be given a specific project, that in the past has been submitted for full review by the Board Of Legislators. Thank you to this year's interns: Kumi, Justin, and Nathalie. ■