



Westchester County Legislator

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Proudly Serving the 16th District



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WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?

Your comments and ideas result in improvements that strengthen our communities and policies that improve our quality of life in Westchester County. Please tell me what's on your mind. I'm always interested to hear from you.

[illegible]

Name_____E-Mail_____

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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Spring 2021 Newsletter



Christopher A. Johnson

District 16 ~ Yonkers

WESTCHESTER COUNTY

Christopher A. Johnson
Majority Whip
Legislator, 16th District
Chair, Committee on Social Services



BOARD OF LEGISLATORS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Committee Assignments:
Budget & Appropriations
Labor & Housing
Public Safety
Public Works & Transportation

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I hope you are making the best of the year thus far. Last year, navigating the COVID-19 pandemic and relying upon the government and its agencies became critical to our survival in a number of ways. This year as we continue to become accustomed to the new normal COVID-19 has created, it's more important than ever that your representatives continue to do the work necessary on your behalf, and I work hard everyday to provide that service.

This means maintaining communication with you by mail, email, phone and social media. Listening to you when you say we need police reform. Hearing your concerns related to departments like Social Services. Funding local nonprofits which continue to provide educational and creative opportunities for our youth and other members of the community and leading conversations with state and local colleagues on improving quality of life for us all.

As always, my office is available to talk with you and collaborate on ways to improve the quality of life for residents of the 16th District. On the back of this newsletter you will see all the ways to get in contact with me, submit feedback and keep in touch. Please reach out with any questions or concerns.

All the best,



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CONTINUING TO RESPOND TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS



At the Board of Legislators, we continue to work daily to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. Meetings continue to be remote. As Chair of the Social Services Committee, meeting days are normally

every Tuesday at 10AM. To get the upcoming agenda and tune in please visit westchesterlegislators.com. Information for upcoming meetings are usually available the Friday before.

Thankfully, a Yonkers site for the COVID vaccinations has been set up. This has helped to increase access to vaccinations as well as alleviate the wait times we have seen when the vaccine first became available. Getting the COVID vaccine is the best way to prevent the spread of the virus. I was able to get my first dose recently.

I also recognized that many of our homeless who want the vaccine have

been unable to do so because of lack of access to technology and transportation, amongst other issues. On March 23rd I held a meeting with our Social Services Department to discuss how we have been responding to this need. We have been able to begin to assist our homeless at each shelter to sign-up and receive the vaccination. This process will continue until everyone who wants to receive one is able to.

This crisis continues to affect all of us, and as your representative I will continue to advocate and take action where necessary to insure we are doing our best to keep each other safe. ■

The changes in socializing have limited the ways I have been able to interact with you all. A couple of weeks ago my office and the Mediterranean People and The Community (MPAC) handed out drinks, breakfast, masks and sanitizer at some of the local senior buildings and chatted about what was happening in the community. I have also stood alongside some of you as we spoke out against Asian hate. I also had the honor of standing alongside members of our immigrant community who were fighting for fair treatment of excluded and essential workers. It was good to connect with some of the community and talk about what has been going on. ■

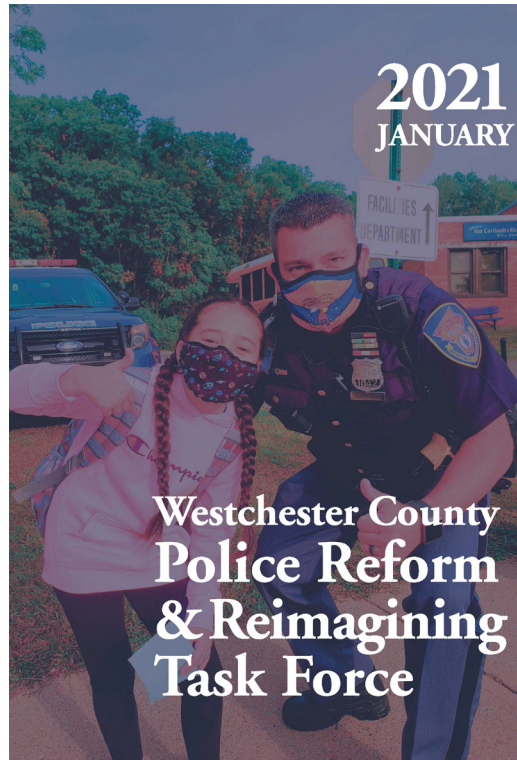


COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

SUPPORTING POLICE REFORM

With the chaos that ensued last year as it relates to police brutality, New York State mandated that municipalities develop a police reform and reimagining plan by April 1st. Westchester County developed a task force aimed at reinventing and modernizing police strategies and programs based on community input. After 7 months of meetings with a 38 member Task Force, recommendations from the Task Force were submitted, public comment sessions were held, and a final report was issued. On March 22nd, we approved the report.

The adoption of the report establishes a blueprint for police reform intended to promote more equitable policing in Westchester. The 177-page report contains 51 recommendations for the County's police, correction and other public safety operations including implicit bias and intercultural competency



training for law enforcement personnel, a formal review of the County Department of Public Safety's use of social media for branding and community outreach, creation of community liaisons, increased multi-lingual communications and more.

In addition, after conversations with Yonkers police department, I was able to get \$5 million dollars in the Westchester County Budget for Westchester Police Departments to potentially use for body cameras.

We know that those who are tasked with protecting our communities have a difficult job. But they should also be held to a high standard. The loss of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and in Westchester, Christopher Ridley, Kenneth Chamberlain Sr., Reynette Taylor, Danroy "DJ" Henry Jr. and others proves there is still work to be done. ■

As Chair of the Social Services Committee my goal is to become more engaged in the department's operations and work together toward improvements. Through this role I have learned a wealth of knowledge as it relates to Veteran Affairs, domestic violence, homelessness, Child Protective Services and more.

HOMELESSNESS — The lack of affordable housing is the biggest threat to our homeless population. Many of the people in our shelters work and simply cannot afford a place to live. A subset of that population are not formally placed in our shelters and instead choose to live at our drop-in shelters where no identification, payments or paperwork are required. A few years ago the drop-in shelter we knew as The Sharing Community closed. While we identified a new contract through the YWCA of Yonkers and a new location at 10 St. Casmir Avenue in Yonkers, we quickly realized

there was much work to be done in order to get the new location ready. Therefore YWCA was able to identify 68 Palisade Avenue as a temporary solution for our men's drop-in shelter. Many construction related items as well as permits and zoning variances needed to be issued. On March 16th, during the Yonkers Zoning Board meeting, I submitted comments urging them to grant the variance needed to 10 St. Casmir to operate, which they did. The following week I held a meeting with the Social Services Department to discuss the final plans for the new shelter at 10 St. Casmir. It's been a long time coming, but we are finally pushing toward the finish line.

CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS) — Last year, my office received a call from a constituent who was having an issue with the Child Protective Services system. She had concerns about the validity of claims that were filed with the department and

expressed the need for a local citizen review panel for Child Protective Services. Around the country we have also witnessed the under reporting of Child Protective Service claims as it relates to whether or not a child's life could be saved if someone spoke up.

We discovered that an Eastern Citizen Review Panel comprised of 13 community members did exist but that board was responsible for 40 counties, including Westchester. This size case load would no doubt allow resources to run thin and investigations to possibly not get the attention they deserve. That's why I sponsored a resolution calling on New York State to change the structure of the CPS Review Panels and create a subcommittee covering Westchester and 8 other Lower Hudson Valley Region counties, allowing for a more condensed use of resources for complaints brought before the panel. ■

FUNDING OUR NONPROFITS

One thing that has remained constant throughout the last year is the need to continue to support our nonprofit organizations. I am thankful that we were able to provide increases to local nonprofits like Birth From the Earth and also provide first time funds to organizations like the Yonkers African-American Heritage Committee and Yonkers Arts. ■



RESTORATION OF BUS SHELTER IN GETTY SQUARE

Getty Square is a hub for businesses and the center of many of the bus routes used in Yonkers to get to and from places. New sidewalk construction by the City of Yonkers caused the bus shelter to have to be moved temporarily in order to complete the construction. My office heard your complaints and worked together with the Yonkers Department of Public Works (DPW) to get the Bus Shelter replaced. ■