

Westchester County Legislator **TYRAE WOODSON-SAMUELS**

Proudly Serving the 13th District



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Spring 2021 Newsletter



Tyrae Woodson-Samuels

District 13 ~ Mount Vernon



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

This has been such a tough year for so many of us, and for families and businesses throughout our district. Mount Vernon has been resilient, and our community has stepped up — sometimes to mourn those we’ve lost, and sometimes to volunteer to make things better. As a son of Mount Vernon and lifelong resident, I know that we can come through this together and emerge stronger.

Last year, I was honored to succeed longtime Legislator, the Hon. Lyndon D. Williams, a true mentor to me in public service, here in the 13th District. During my first term as County Legislator, I have seen economic hardship close up, but I have also seen the power of collaboration and partnership in government.

As vaccines roll out and we begin to see the possible easing of this tragic pandemic, we must plan for a stronger future together. That’s why my legislative priorities at the County reflect the very real needs I see in Mount Vernon every day. Together with our Chairman Benjamin Boykin and the team of

County Executive George Latimer, we are working to make sure that our business districts have the chance to recover, that our public spaces are preserved, that healthcare is available, and that police reform and public ethics are central to improving how government serves the people.

I’m honored to represent you at the County level in White Plains, so you should know a bit more about my background. Most recently, I served as Deputy Director of Constituent Services for Congressman Eliot Engel, leading his Westchester community response. I worked with residents and public officials on policy issues such as healthcare, immigration, gun safety initiatives, Social Security and senior issues, regional environmental concerns and more. I’m a board member of the Fleetwood Neighborhood Association, and former member of the Board at the Shamoya McKenzie Foundation and the Community Service Associates Soup Kitchen, where I continue to volunteer. I have also worked in leadership positions with the NAACP and as a mentor in President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative.

I also played a little football in my younger days and made history as the first African-American quarterback in Iona Prep history, winning a state championship and earning Journal News Player of the Year, First Team All-State, and First Team All-County honors. Nowadays, I quarterback the Woodson-Samuels Group, LLC, a real estate consulting firm based in Mount Vernon.

Please know that as your Legislator, my door is always open. While so many meetings have been necessarily virtual over the last year, staying connected is more vital than ever. I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know how I can better serve you, the people of Mount Vernon, and all of Westchester County.

Sincerely,

SAVING MOUNT VERNON HOSPITAL

Closing Mount Vernon Hospital during the late stages of a deadly pandemic is a potentially devastating blow to our community. I join with my colleagues in City and State government in seeking a solution to keeping the hospital open, and indeed, expanding services for a community that needs them.

My office is working directly with both Montefiore Health Systems, which currently holds the state permit for the hospital, and advocates like the New York State Nurses Association to find a solution that expands public healthcare in the district.

The County has also asked our State legislators to pass a measure to require hospitals in municipalities of less than 250,000 residents to obtain approval from voters at a mandatory referendum before closing. It is government’s responsibility to protect people in need.

Protecting and expanding access to health services is vital, especially now. I was pleased to vote for a 2021 County Budget that included increased funding for the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, to assist the center in continuing to provide high quality healthcare services and free COVID-19 testing. ■



ENERGETIC ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, we must continue to pursue energetic and vigorous economic development in our communities, particularly those that have been historically underserved. As a business owner myself, I believe the public sector must support our small businesses in every way possible — through public-private partnerships, special grants, and other programs. In our district, areas that are prime for assistance include Gramatan Avenue, 4th Street, 3rd Street, Sandford Boulevard, along with portions of Fleetwood.

Local businesses have been ravaged by COVID-19, and at the County we are working to foster an environment that is conducive to their reemergence. Improving economic activity will help us continue to



fund essential public services at a time when people are relying on government more than ever, and it also will ease the burden on homeowners.

In the 2021 County Operating Budget, we approved millions for economic development programs. Economic development also was central to the 2021 Westchester County Joint State Legislative Package that we released in partnership with County Executive Latimer to the New York State Assembly and Senate delegation. It included support for the expansion of downstate casino licenses, investing in infrastructure projects in Westchester, and ensuring that sales taxes from legalized marijuana products is delivered back to the local community. ■

OUR COMMITMENT TO COMPLETING MEMORIAL FIELD



Continuing the leadership of my predecessor the Hon. Lyndon D. Williams, progress at Memorial Field remains

strong, reflecting the partnership between government at the County and City and State levels. Thanks to the collaboration

of County Executive George Latimer, Deputy County Executive Ken Jenkins, Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard and my colleagues in the Legislature, government is working together on this vital \$29 million project, which will restore the field and stadium to a stature worthy of Mean Joe Greene (who famously filmed a TV ad there in the 1970s).

The new Memorial Field will be a modern, world-class venue Mount Vernon deserves, with a state of the art NCAA-regulation synthetic turf multi-sport athletic field, a certified all-weather eight-lane running track, renovated tennis courts and a skate park. Grandstands for 3,900 spectators will also house full locker room and training room facilities and will recall the appearance of the original grandstands. Additional on-site amenities will include an entry plaza, ticket booths, a concession stand, restrooms, wrought iron fencing and landscaping. ■

REBUILDING 4TH STREET PARK

For years, the legendary 4th Street Park — an iconic Mount Vernon amateur sports venue and vital community amenity — suffered from disrepair and vandalism. This year, as part of the Westchester County budget agreement, I secured a \$2 million capital allocation to repair and restore the park. This vital outdoor space is particularly important to me, as I played there as a youth. I thank County Executive George Latimer for including the project in the Capital Budget. Our community needs our outdoor spaces for people of all ages. ■

UNIVERSAL BROADBAND FOR ALL COMMUNITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has illuminated just how persistent the digital divide remains; and our increasing reliance on the internet for work and school gives new urgency solving this inequity.

The federal American Rescue Plan passed earlier provides the County with \$187 million and allows us to use part of that money for broadband infrastructure, and the Plan also contains other dedicated money for broadband projects nationwide. I pledge to work with my colleagues in County government and at the State and Federal level to make sure that we seize this opportunity to provide this basic necessity to all our communities to encourage innovation, entrepreneurship, digital learning opportunities and a greater sense of connectedness. ■

GOVERNMENT ETHICS AND POLICE REFORM

Public service must be ethical and transparent. Law enforcement demands fairness and equity. As County Legislator, I was pleased to vote to approve two historic improvements in public accountability.

This year, the Board of Legislators passed a major overhaul of the Westchester County ethics law, designed to make the rules for good governance stronger and more transparent. The new code explicitly covers things like the use of County positions for personal gain, requirements related to contracts where employees might have a material interest, prohibitions on inducements to making political contributions and more. The new provisions also will make the annual financial disclosure form that is required of elected officials and other County employees easier to understand and complete.

I also voted to adopt the report of the County's Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force, one of the most important public documents our County government has produced.

As a young Black American, I can



speak from experience about the need for police reform. The killing of George Floyd helped awaken this nation to the responsibility we all share to ensure that public employees actually act on behalf of all the public, with compassion and accountability. Our community also understands the need to balance public safety

and respect for the law with impartial justice and fairness.

The Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force created a strong list of 51 recommendations that will improve public safety in our County and in our communities. Our job now will be to get to work diligently to implement these reforms. ■

DIVERSITY IN PUBLIC SERVICE

I'm honored to serve as the Chair of the Appointments Committee and the Co-Chair of the Minority Affairs Task Force on the Board of Legislators. These leadership roles involve the pursuit of greater diversity in public life. Government must represent the full breadth of the communities we serve. Our diversity is our strength.

In just the first quarter of 2021, the Appointments Committee has already moved the appointments of 49 individu-

als to serve in crucial County positions, including on the County's many important Advisory Boards. These Advisory Boards provide an important seat at the table for Westchester residents that help shape County policy.

We have approved appointments to the African American Advisory Board, the LGBTQ Advisory Board, the Arab American Advisory Board, the Women's Advisory Board, the Human Rights Commission, the Westchester Community

College Board of Trustees, the Advisory Board on People with Disabilities, and the County's first Asian-American Advisory Board, created in 2019 by County Executive George Latimer. The appointments we have approved to the latter board have taken on even greater significance this year as the recent spate of hateful attacks on Asian-Americans made approving appointees to the board an important step in seeking justice and fairness for that community. ■