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Proudly Serving the 13th District



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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

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Fall/Winter 2022 Newsletter



Tyrae Woodson-Samuels

District 13 ~ Mount Vernon
Chair, Housing Committee



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

It's an honor to update you on the work we're doing at the County level to benefit our community in Mount Vernon, and Westchester as a whole. While we still face many challenges, I learned during my time as a competitive athlete that you must also create the space to celebrate the big wins. And this year, we've all had one of the greatest victories for public works in our community in the last quarter century.

In what was something like a Super Bowl victory for Mount Vernon — and indeed, the entire region — Memorial Field re-opened this fall with a home football game between Mount Vernon High School and our friends in Yonkers. This was the result of successful cooperation and collaboration involving public officials from the City of Mount Vernon and Westchester County. A significant investment of public funds has created what will be a true mecca for sports and culture and community events in Mount Vernon, a real gateway to the city. I was deeply honored to play an important role by working to make sure the Board of Legislators approved the final round of funding. And I was thrilled to be part of the re-opening, for which so many worked so hard for so long. Sometimes tenacity pays off, and I'm deeply grateful for the partnerships that made this happen.



As you know, Mount Vernon welcomes investment in our public facilities and community programs, and it's my job as your Legislator to make sure that we're well represented in budget discussions. This year, we won funding to fix the Willson's Woods wave pool, increase funding to the Feeding Westchester Food pantry, restore \$2M in much needed funding for the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center, and fund the Landlord Tenant Assistance Program.

We will continue to work to make sure Mount Vernon is at the table for vital discussions on public safety, women's rights, access to recreation, quality of life issues, and much more. As I look forward, our priorities include investments in infrastructure and parks, access to broadband Internet services, fair housing and equitable development, and improvements in public safety with the resources needed to get the job done.

As your Legislator, I serve as your representative in White Plains, where decisions are made on the future of Westchester County. Your ideas and input are *always* welcome, and I look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible in the months ahead. We had a great "win" this year for Mount Vernon, and there's much more work to be done. Let's move forward together.

Sincerely,

Memorial Field



Due to supply chain issues and unforeseen circumstances earlier this year, the completion of Memorial Field hung in the balance. On April 25th, 2022, The Westchester County Board of Legislators, led in this instance by myself and Board Chair Catherine Borgia, worked with County Executive George Latimer, Deputy County Executive Ken Jenkins and staff to secure the \$10,000,000 necessary to finally finish the long awaited project. On Wednesday, September 21st, we held a soft-opening and ribbon cutting for Memorial Field, the crown jewel of Mount Vernon. As a former Mount Vernon Razorback who once played every weekend there, it was truly special to help deliver this project to the residents.

The new stadium is equipped with 3,900 seats; a new scoreboard; a lighted field equipped for football, soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey; an 8-lane track; a sound system capable of handling major concerts or events; 3 tennis courts and a skate park. The project utilized MWBE contracts and created nearly 400 labor jobs.

Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center's Funding Restored

For the first time in nearly a decade, the County restored \$2,000,000 in much needed funding for the Mount Vernon Neighborhood Health Center. This money will go towards expanding primary and preventative health services for uninsured and under-insured clients, who make up nearly 25% of all MVNHC's patients. A few of MVNHC's services are: primary care, specialty care, dental care, vision care, behavioral health, pharmacy, laboratory and transportation services plus many others. The institution also played a central role in the midst of the pandemic serving as a hub for COVID-19 vaccinations, Monkeypox vaccinations, and testing. I'm happy to have been part of the effort to provide the Mount Vernon Health Center the resources necessary to continue to serve our community at a critical time in history.

Wilson's Woods wave Pool Rehabilitation

Unfortunately, this past summer the wave pool at Willson's Woods Park was shuttered due to infrastructural complications. Joined by my colleague, Legislator David Tubiolo who represents parts of Mount Vernon, along with other colleagues on the BOL and County Executive teams, secured \$7,000,000 (\$1,000,000 in contingencies) to rectify this issue! We're looking to bring the pool back good as new in time for Spring/Summer 2023 for all to enjoy!



Reginald A. LaFayette County Office Building

Following the sudden passing of my friend and mentor, Reginald A. LaFayette, County Executive George Latimer, along with my BOL colleagues and I, vowed to honor the long time Westchester leader and Democratic Commissioner of the Westchester County Board of Elections. We followed through on that vow by passing legislation that would rename the County Office Building located on 100 East First Street in Mount Vernon, the "Reginald A. LaFayette County Office Building." Reggie was a great friend to many and renaming this building in his memory is the least we can do to honor his legacy.



Fighting Hunger & Food Insecurity



Feeding Westchester & A Brand New Neighborhood Refrigerator Program

Results over rhetoric is the mantra I live by. The County is cognizant of the pressures Westchester families and residents are under due to record high inflation. Data shows that the average family now has to spend an additional \$500 per month for the same amount of groceries and home-based fuel and utilities as they did previously. To combat this difficult economic reality, my colleagues and I increased funding to Feeding Westchester Food pantry by \$700,000. This doubles what is included in the 2022 budget and covers the increased cost of food and fuel. Feeding Westchester has experienced an increase this year of \$0.71 per pound across the foods they provide, compared to \$0.60 per pound last year. Overall, they are seeing an 18% year over year increase in food costs. Our effort to increase funding will assure that they can continue to

serve residents on a daily basis in Mount Vernon and Westchester County.

In the same vein, I'm happy to have co-founded the brand new Neighborhood Refrigerator Program in collaboration with Westchester Latinos Unidos, a local non-profit in Mount Vernon.

This program is meant to combat hunger, food insecurity and will also promote healthier food alternatives to our residents. Mount Vernon unfortunately is classified as a food desert – an area where people have limited access to a variety of healthful foods. Having a community fridge located in the densest part of our city is vital. Those who are in need can swing by and grab food and those of us who have a bit extra during these trying times can donate to help their neighbors! The refrigerator's location is 241 S 9th Ave, in front of the Levister Towers Management Office.

Landlord Tenant Assistance Program (LTAP)

Over the past two years, our property owners and tenants have faced serious challenges navigating the pandemic. Through LTAP, eligible landlords/owners may receive up to \$25,000 per rental unit that qualifies towards needed repairs in exchange for maintaining rent increases at certain levels. The funds may be used for necessary repairs of rental properties that house up to eight units in a single building. Repairs should include correcting any physical condition related to tenant health

and safety, as well as other improvements to prolong the life of the building. Essential improvements may include but are not limited to, replacement of a roof, electrical upgrades, windows, accessibility ramps, plumbing, and heating systems. All regions within Westchester County are eligible. Cosmetic remodeling or substantial reconstruction are not covered. A soft mortgage for ten years and a Declaration of Restrictive Covenant will be recorded against the property.

Combating Inflation

Record-high inflation wreaked havoc on the economy beginning late spring of 2022. To counteract price increases, the County was able to use surplus sales tax revenue to fund relief measures aimed at keeping more money in your pocket. In partnership with County Executive George Latimer, we were able to deliver the following money-saving policies:

- **GAS TAX HOLIDAY**, capping tax at \$0.12 per gallon from June 1 – August 31, 2022.
- **ELIMINATION OF THE SALES TAX ON RESIDENTIAL ENERGY**, such as home heating oil, propane, natural gas, electric, coal, and wood, on a quarterly basis beginning December 1, 2022. The savings applies not only to homeowners, but to renters as well.
- **FREE BEE-LINE BUS RIDES** for all from June 1 – August 31, 2022.
- **FREE WEEKDAY ADMISSION TO COUNTY POOLS AND GLEN ISLAND BEACH** from July 5 - August 31, 2022.
- **COUNTY CIVIL SERVICE EXAM FEE-WAIVERS** through December 31, 2022.
- The BOL unanimously approved the annual budget for **SUNY WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE** with zero tuition increase. The budget includes an additional investment from the County of \$557,000 to maintain tuition affordability for its largest academic institution amid record-high inflation. This marks the second consecutive year without a tuition rate increase. The total budget appropriated is roughly \$149.5 million.



Protecting Our Health, Safety, & Well-Being



At the signing of the Reproductive Health Care Facilities Access Act

THE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE FACILITIES ACT: This year, I was happy to vote in support of The Reproductive Healthcare Facilities Act, a law that protects health care facility workers and people seeking medical treatment from being physically prevented or otherwise intimidated while trying to obtain rightful, private services from their health care providers, including pregnancy terminations. It bars physical harassment of people entering or exiting, damage to the premises, and attempts to intimidate people within 25 feet of the building. The bill, which took roughly over a decade to pass, was signed immediately into law by County Executive George Latimer on June 27th.

FIREARM WARNING LABEL: Studies show that households of lawful firearm owners are at a greater risk of victimization than households that do not own firearms. Understanding these statistics, the Board was able to pass a commonsense Firearm Warning Label law. This measure requires gun stores to post signs warning those with access to firearms of the significantly in-

creased risks of suicide, homicide, death during domestic disputes, and the accidental deaths of children or others. The label also adds contact information for the County's Crisis Prevention and Response Team and the National Suicide Hotline. Besides being displayed at retailers, the warning would also be given to people seeking gun licenses in Westchester.

HATE INCIDENT REPORTING: State statistics show hate incidents have been on the rise since the coronavirus pandemic started. The majority of serious hate incidents are not addressed by federal and state laws because they do not rise to the level of criminality. It is for this reason that the Board passed a Hate Incident Reporting law requiring local police departments to report all bias-related crimes and incidents to the Commissioner of Public Safety. These incidents will also be tracked by the County's Human Rights Commission.

SALARY RANGE TRANSPARENCY LAW: For far too long, the job search and salary process has lacked true transparency and as

a consequence, has stymied upward economic mobility for working class people. Passed on May 9th, this new law requires employers with more than four employees to include expected salary ranges when posting jobs to combat gender- and race-based pay inequity. Employers are now required to include an expected salary range when they post a job opportunity in Westchester.

FLOOD HISTORY DISCLOSURE FOR TENANTS: Earlier this year, we unanimously passed a Flood History Disclosure measure for tenants. This measure requires property owners to disclose the flood history of a building prior to the signing of a lease with a tenant. The measure applies to both residential and commercial leases. If flood history is not disclosed before a lease is signed, and a renter subsequently suffers flood damage, the law will give the renter the right to sue to recover damages. Landlords must make the disclosure if the property has flooded at least once during the ten years immediately preceding the date of the lease and has caused flood damage to any portion of the premises. If a renter sublets their property, they will also be responsible for disclosing the information.

