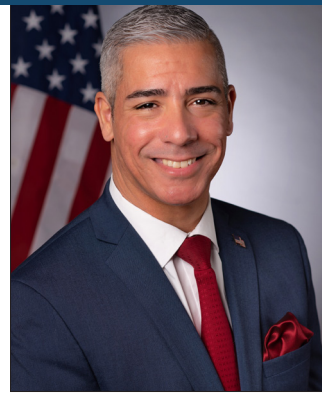


Westchester County Legislator
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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Winter 2022/23 Newsletter



Colin D. Smith

District 1 ~ Cortlandt, Peekskill, Yorktown
Chair, Legislation Committee



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

2022 has been a busy year for passing legislation here at the Board. As the Chair of the Legislation Committee, it is very gratifying to lead when we have been so actively engaged in improving the quality of life for Westchester residents. The laws we have passed encompass a wide range of protections such as the **Salary Range Transparency Law**, the **Hate Incident Reporting Law**, the **Flood History Disclosure Law**, and additional laws to safeguard us when seeking access to healthcare, in firearm ownership, and from having allergic reactions in restaurants. Ensuring equity and safety for my constituents in District 1, and for our constituents throughout the County is the most important work of a Legislator, and my number one priority.

As I turn from the accomplishments of 2022 to reflect on the new year, I have goals and priorities in my mind. But also in the forefront of my mind is that adversity and hardship can strike at any time and without warning. Our lives can change in an instant. All the more reason to plan for the unexpected, and to codify our rights and safety with thoughtful, forward-thinking and comprehensive legislation. And all the more reason to live life to its fullest every day by connecting at community events, speaking out for what we believe in, and paying tribute to those who deserve recognition.

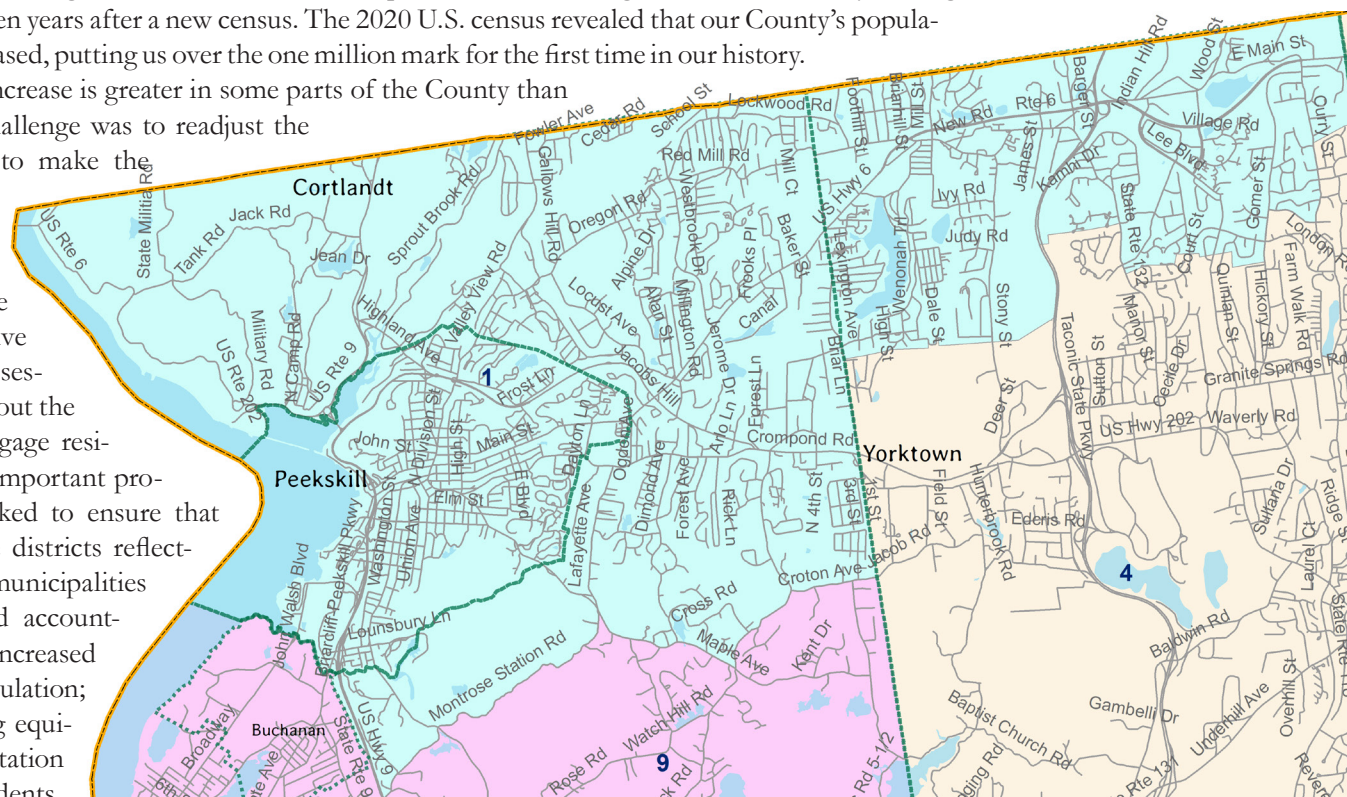
I wish you all a healthy, safe and prosperous 2023 and look forward to seeing you, hearing from you and working for you as your County Legislator.

Sincerely,

Reassessing Westchester County's Legislative Districts

A major undertaking at the Board has been the process of reassessing Westchester County's 17 legislative districts, as is required every ten years after a new census. The 2020 U.S. census revealed that our County's population had increased, putting us over the one million mark for the first time in our history.

Because the increase is greater in some parts of the County than others, the challenge was to readjust the district lines to make the population of each district as equivalent as possible. We conducted five public input sessions throughout the County to engage residents in this important process. We worked to ensure that our legislative districts reflected our local municipalities accurately and accounted for our increased County population; the goal being equity in representation for all our residents.



Leveling the Playing Field for County Residents

Recognizing the importance of equity, this year the BOL passed a vital piece of legislation and supported the proposal of a state law that will level the playing field for all. The job market is very competitive in our post-COVID world. We know that there can be uncontrollable factors that make landing the job of your dreams a lot more difficult.

- The **Salary Range Transparency Law**, passed on May 9th, requires employers in Westchester with more than four employees to include expected salary ranges when posting jobs to combat gender- and race-based pay inequity.
- The Board backed the **NYS Clean Slate Act**, which automatically seals criminal records from civil review for qualifying people who have served their time and maintained a clean record. While the bill did not pass the State Assembly, we look forward to seeing this legislation return for consideration next session.

1. Military Veteran Recognition Ceremony in the Village of Buchanan; 2. Marching in the Peekskill St. Patrick's Day Parade; 3. At the Yorktown Pride Parade; 4. Speaking at the NYSNA "Safe Staffing" Rally; 5. With the Peekskill Police Department at the Peekskill Middle School's Saturday Academy

County Surplus Results in Inflation Relief for Taxpayers

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.
- **No-Fare Bee-Line Buses** from June 1 – August 31 and December 7 - December 26, 2022
- **Free Weekday Admission to County pools and Glen Island Beach** from July 5 - August 31, 2022
- **Free Commuter Parking** at the North White Plains Commuter Lot and the County Center parking lot from July 1 – August 31, 2022.
- **County Civil Service Exam Fee-Waivers** through December 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 homeown-

ers, but to renters as well, depending on the structure of the unit's heat and electric use.

- The **Senior Citizens and Persons with Disabilities Home Owner's Tax Exemption**, which expands income eligibility for property tax exemptions by increasing the maximum household annual limit from \$29,000 to \$50,000 to allow more residents the ability to age in place within their current communities, especially for those on fixed incomes, by maintaining affordability.
- The **BOL unanimously approved the annual budget for SUNY Westchester Community College with a 0% 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.

Additionally, through the **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)**, Westchester County was allocated \$187,926,698 in March, 2021. The County has until December 31, 2024 to obligate the funds ac-

ording to the Federal guidelines, and has allocated them to these critical areas:

- Public Health Investment
- Healthy Mom, Healthy Baby Home Visiting Program
- Non-profit Grant Program
- Small Business Development Assistance
- Tourism & Hospitality Development and Promotion
- Workforce Development Job Training
- Affordable Housing Development & Multi-Family Unit Rehabilitation
- Wastewater Infrastructure
- Revenue Replacement

Fiscal Responsibility

Responsible fiscal management is reflected in our ratings—Moody's has reaffirmed the County's bond rating at "Aa1" with a "Stable" outlook. Fitch Ratings assigned an "AA+" rating to bonds issued by the County and upgraded our Rating Outlook to "Positive" from "Stable," and Standard and Poor's issued an AA+ rating with a "Stable" outlook.

Protecting Our Health, Safety and Well-Being

After two years centered around the COVID pandemic, it was necessary for the Board to seek other ways to help keep the general public healthy in mind and body. We passed extensive and substantial legislation to address public health, safety, and well-being.



REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE FACILITIES ACCESS ACT: The law 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.

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.

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 of the significantly increased risk of suicide, homicide, death during domestic disputes, and the accidental deaths of children or others to those who own firearms. 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.



FOOD ALLERGIES: A major health concern for many Westchester families and people across the nation, especially when it comes to choosing where or whether to dine out. In fact, every 3 minutes in the U.S., a food allergy reaction sends someone to the emergency room, and around 1 in 11 Westchester residents live with food allergies. In an effort to further educate restaurant owners and employees on the dangers of food allergies, the Board approved a Food Allergy Safety Training law. The bill also requires the posting of signs certifying that employees have completed the training, lists the nine major food allergies, as well as symptoms of an allergic reaction

and actions to take in cases of a reaction.

MENTAL HEALTH: Our Board revised long-standing mental hygiene language in the County Charter and sections establishing the Department of Community Mental Health that is offensive to people with developmental or learning disabilities. The new language will refer instead to "individuals with mental illness" and "individuals with developmental disabilities" and will bring the language in the County's laws in line with the County's person-centered approach to policy and programs.

FLOOD HISTORY DISCLOSURE: We also unanimously passed a Flood History Disclosure Law 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.



1. Celebrating Black History Month by Honoring Kecia Palmer-Cousins; 2. Celebrating the One Year Anniversary of the Kinsaito Art Center in Verplanck; 3. Career Day at Woodside Elementary School in Peekskill; 4. At the Eagle Scouts' Ceremony in Yorktown Heights; 5. At the County Memorial Day Observance

Reopening to the Public

The Board of Legislators officially resumed in-person meetings on September 12, 2022. In order to provide fair civic involvement, we instituted a hybrid model, requiring participants to register through Webex (an online teleconferencing system) to participate remotely and attend via livestream, as well as permit physical attendance for all of its meetings. Aside from its bi-weekly Board meetings, all County legislative committee meetings are subject to the new model. Information on how to participate for Public Comment and Public Hearings by video conferencing, telephone, or in-person, can be found on the Board's website at westchesterlegislators.com/meetings.