

# Westchester County Legislator **TYRAE WOODSON-SAMUELS**

*Proudly Serving the 13th District*



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# Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

*Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years*

Winter 2023/24 Newsletter



## Tyrae Woodson-Samuels

Minority Whip & Legislator, 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 find it more important than ever to focus on the kitchen table, pocket-book issues that improve the day-to-day lives of everyday working class residents.

As you know, it's my job as your Legislator to make sure that we're well represented in budget discussions. I'm proud to say that the district has much to be proud of in this year's budget. We successfully secured \$3 million in the Capital Budget to upgrade our ShotSpotter technology to combat senseless gun violence and improve overall public safety in the city. We passed significant legislation to protect vulnerable residents and the environment. And for the fourth year in a row, we've crafted a balanced budget with zero percent increase to the County property tax levy.

As we embark on a new year, I 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 easing the financial burden that inflation and shifting interest rates cause, fair housing and equitable development investments in infrastructure and parks, access to broadband Internet services, and improvements in public safety with the resources needed to get the job done.

In my newly-elected role as Democratic Majority Leader, I will better serve as your representative in White Plains to champion causes of priority in our District and beyond. Your ideas and input are always welcome, and I look forward to meeting with as many of you as possible in the months ahead to move forward together.

Sincerely,



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From public health alerts to information about upcoming events in our community to breaking news on legislation that affects you — **sign up now!**

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## Increased Funding for Childcare

Understanding the financial strains many families face, we have successfully advocated for reducing the parent contribution in subsidized childcare programs from 10% down to 5%. This significant decrease is a step towards making quality childcare accessible to more families in our community. Furthermore, we have expanded our efforts to combat food insecurity among our youngest citizens, ensuring that children in these programs receive not only educational support but also the nutritional sustenance they need to thrive. These initiatives underscore our commitment to fostering a supportive and nurturing environment for all our children. ■



There are thousands of dollars in **UNCLAIMED FUNDS** currently being held by the NYS Comptroller's office.

Visit <https://ouf.osc.state.ny.us/> to verify if you have money waiting and, if so, file a claim!



Annual Thanksgiving Diversity Breakfast



Mt. Vernon Public Library's Annual Comic Con Event



Celebrating Caribbean-American Heritage Month



Thanksgiving Turkey Drive with Members of Yusuf Muslim Islamic Center



With Mt. Vernon Youth Bureau Dir. Debbie Burrell-Butler, staff, & beneficiaries

## Willson's Woods Back Open



Thanks to the funds we secured in last year's budget, extensive repairs and improvements have been made, bringing this beloved facility back online. Our timely investment ensured that the pool was ready just in time to provide a much-needed respite from this year's scorching heat. Wave-seekers, sun-seekers, and swimmers of all ages enjoyed the enhanced amenities of our community pool. Willson's Woods Wave Pool's reopening was a testament to our commitment to enhancing recreational facilities for the enjoyment and well-being of our residents. ■

## Narcan Training for County Employees



As a crucial component of our strategy to tackle the opioid crisis, we're kicking off the Narcan Training for County Employees Initiative. This will provide County staff with essential training in administering Narcan, a life-saving measure in opioid emergencies. It also signifies the start of a wider public service campaign aimed at educating County residents about the opioid crisis. Our objective is to arm our community with both the knowledge and means to respond to this urgent public health challenge, fostering a safer and more informed environment for everyone. ■

## Access to Counsel

As Chair of the Housing Committee, it is my mission to ensure fairness and justice within our community's housing system. Our committee has worked tirelessly to shepherd the Access to Counsel Bill to completion, a crucial step towards protecting the rights of our most vulnerable residents. This landmark bill, which was approved unanimously, guarantees legal representation to household tenants facing eviction and other covered proceedings, provided their annual income is at or below 300% of the federal poverty line or 60% of the County's Area Median Income (AMI), whichever is higher.

This new law is a game-changer in leveling the playing field for low-income households, offering them access to free legal representation in situations where they are at risk of losing their homes. It addresses a critical gap in our current system, where a large majority of tenants do not have legal representation in housing court, leading to unfair outcomes and exacerbating housing insecurity. Our commitment to this bill reflects our dedication to creating a more equitable community, where every resident is afforded the protection and support they need, especially in their most vulnerable moments. ■



At the signing of the Access to Counsel Bill

## Commitment to Affordable & Senior Housing

As we navigate the ongoing housing crisis in New York State, our commitment to affordable housing options for our community remains stronger than ever. In 2023 alone, we have allocated a substantial \$90 million towards developing affordable and workforce housing in Westchester County. This significant investment reflects our understanding of the Area Median Income (AMI) dynamics in our region, ensuring that the housing units we create are genuinely affordable for Westchester residents.

Our approach is not just about building homes; it's about fostering communities where our residents can thrive. A portion of this funding, specifically \$7 million, is being directed to local municipal housing authorities. This targeted support will enhance their ability to address the unique housing needs within their jurisdictions, benefiting residents at various income levels and stages of life. I am committed to continuing our efforts in this direction, ensuring that every resident of Westchester, especially our seniors, has access to safe, affordable, and dignified housing options. ■



## Resolution Passed Opposing Con Edison (Con Ed) Rate Increases

In April, the Board made a decisive move to support our community by unanimously passing a resolution opposing Con Ed's proposed delivery rate increases. This action was in response to a proposal that would have significantly raised residential electric and gas bills in Westchester from 1/1/23, through 12/31/25, with the new rates initially set to be effective from 6/1/23.

Our opposition stems from a deep concern for the financial well-being of all residents, particularly those most vulnerable. The proposed rate increases, while

permissible under NYS law, would have had a disproportionate impact on low-income families and small businesses. As of July 2022, data from the NYS legislature indicated that 385,358 Con Ed customers in NYC and Westchester were already behind on their energy bills, carrying an average debt of \$2,146 per household.

Such rate hikes would also have had the dual effect of diminishing the purchasing power of vital federal assistance like the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP plays a crucial role in providing one-time

emergency support for utility bills to low-income families, helping them manage the costs of heating and cooling their homes. ■



## Protecting Our Health, Safety & Well-Being

**“UPON REQUEST” LEGISLATION** - This new policy mandates that single-use plastic foodware for take-out orders be provided only when specifically requested by customers. By implementing this measure, our community is actively reducing unnecessary plastic waste, demonstrating a strong commitment to fostering a more sustainable and eco-friendly environment.

**THE LEAD FREE PARKS ACT** - This Act provides for regular monitoring and remediation of drinking water sources in all County parks, ensuring they are free from lead contamination. By addressing potential health risks associated with lead in drinking water, we are taking a crucial step towards safeguarding the well-being of our residents.

**SCHOOL BUS STOP-ARM LAW** - This crucial law authorizes the installation of monitoring systems on school buses, enabling us to effectively catch and issue tickets to vehicles that fail to stop for a school bus's red visual signals and stop-arm. It is a proactive step towards enhancing the safety of our children, ensuring that they can travel to and

from school without the risk posed by inattentive or negligent drivers.

**ADDITIONAL ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS** - The expansion of Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Stations across our County promises a greener and cleaner future by increasing the availability of charging options for both County and residential EVs. From the current count of 40 operational stations, we will boost our inventory to an impressive 189 stations by early 2024. This expansion supports the growing number of EV users and reinforces our promise to reduce carbon emissions and promote eco-friendly transportation options.

**SUSPENDED BEE-LINE BUS FARES** - Alongside County Executive Latimer, we've suspended Bee-Line Bus fares for the past two



summers and holiday seasons. This decision reflects our resolve to address the pocket-book issues that matter most to our constituents. By eliminating bus fares during these key times, we are making it easier and more affordable for families to travel and enjoy time together. This initiative is just one of the many ways we are striving to alleviate the financial burdens our residents face and enhance the overall quality of life in our community.

**HOLDING HOLTEC ACCOUNTABLE** - Our persistent efforts to oversee the responsible decommissioning of Indian Point and to protect the integrity of the Hudson River have led to a landmark success, as evidenced by the Governor signing the “Save the Hudson” legislation into law in August. This essential legislation plays a pivotal role in holding Holtec accountable and preventing incidents like the release of radioactive water into the Hudson River. It's not just about environmental protection; this law is also crucial for maintaining the economic health of the Hudson River Region for future generations. ■

## No Increase to County Property Taxes

Recognizing the financial pressures that our community faces, particularly working families, seniors, veterans, and residents from all economic backgrounds, we have taken decisive actions to improve the living standards in our County. In a significant move, for the fourth consecutive year, we have decided to maintain the County property tax levy at its current rate. By keeping the tax burden steady, we are directly supporting our residents, allowing them to plan their finances with greater confidence and security. This steadfast approach not only makes our County more accessible but also promotes a robust, resilient community capable of navigating and adapting to economic challenges. Our ongoing dedication to fiscal responsibility and economic sustainability is a testament to our resolve in ensuring that Westchester County remains a desirable and viable place to live for current and future residents. ■