

Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

2026 Midyear Update



Emiljana Ulaj

District 9 ~ *Cortlandt, Ossining, Croton, Briarcliff, Buchanan*
Chair, Intergovernmental Affairs Committee



Delivering for Westchester

- **SAFEGUARDING FAMILIES THROUGH FASTER ALLERGY RESPONSE (*GIOVANNI CIPRIANO ACT*):** Equipped County police with EpiPens and training to respond to severe allergic reactions and save lives.
- **IMPROVING TRAFFIC STOP SAFETY:** Launched the Blue Envelope Program countywide to improve interactions between law enforcement and drivers with autism and other disabilities during traffic stops.
- **PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATHS:** Established a countywide Domestic Violence High Risk Team to identify victims in extreme danger and coordinate life-saving interventions.
- **ENSURING EQUAL CHANGING ACCESS FOR ALL FAMILIES (*DIAPRS Act*):** Required diaper-changing stations in County parks and buildings to ensure equitable access for caregivers.
- **PROTECTING CONSUMERS FROM SCAMS AND PREDATORS:** Strengthened protections against deed theft, AI fraud, subscription traps, hidden fees, and data breaches through updated enforcement tools.
- **KEEPING WESTCHESTER'S FINANCES STRONG:** Westchester County again earned the highest-possible AAA bond ratings from S&P Global and Fitch Ratings. The continued confidence of these independent agencies reflects the Board's sound budgeting, healthy reserves, and effective long-term planning. This distinction keeps borrowing costs low and places Westchester among the highest-rated counties in the nation.

Dear Neighbors & Friends:

January 2026 marked the start of my second term on the Westchester County Board of Legislators. This term is only a one-year term, however, due to a change in the state law, which moves all County Legislative elections to even years.

There's so much uncertainty in this moment in our political world, and we see so much suffering in our local communities. People are struggling with the price of housing, the cost of childcare, affording their energy bills, and worrying about their children's future. At the County level, we are dealing with the effects of cuts from the 2025 H.R. 1 and trying to backfill essential services in healthcare and food assistance for local families.

At the same time, we are celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence—and I urge us to continue to fight for a future that serves all Americans.

For generations, America has shined its light on the world, providing hope for countless people living in oppressed societies. People like my family who had to live in an internment camp because they fought back against a totalitarian government. As a refugee, I've lived the American Dream, and I owe this country everything.

Although our current challenges may be great, we should never lose hope. History pleads with us to persevere. Through countless struggles, committed citizens have agitated and organized to demand our nation live up to its highest ideals.

The vision that we fight for is rooted in our sacred founding documents. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness FOR ALL. Equal justice. Equal opportunity. And a government that is committed to promoting the general welfare of its people. This is the America we continue to fight for. This is the America we don't give up on. This is the America we celebrate.

Happy 250th birthday to our blessed nation.

*O, let my land be a land where Liberty
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
But opportunity is real, and life is free,
Equality is in the air we breathe.*

—Langston Hughes

Sincerely,

Emiljana Ulaj

Emiljana Ulaj
Westchester County Legislator, District 9





Bystander Intervention Training

In December 2025, our community was deeply shaken when two young Croton children were harassed at a local grocery store and targeted because of their race. Like so many of you, I was heartbroken and outraged. In times like these, our most important job is to surround our neighbors with love and make sure our kids know without a shadow of a doubt that they belong here and we have their backs.

After speaking closely with the parents and local neighbors, it became clear that we need practical tools to protect one another. We decided that bringing our community together to learn about what we can do in these situations would be a meaningful and proactive step forward.

In January, I partnered with Tejash Sanchala, Executive Director of the Westchester County Human Rights Commission, to host a Bystander Intervention Training. It was a powerful session that gave folks practical, safe ways to step in, speak up, and defuse hostility whenever they see hate happening.

I'm so grateful to Director Sanchala and his team for always stepping up to help us navigate tough moments together. We're sending a clear message: hate has absolutely no place in Croton, and we will always look out for one another. ■

Free PFAS Testing Available for Eligible Residents & Business Owners

Earlier this year, Westchester County announced that local residents and business owners with private wells can now apply for free PFAS testing. This initiative comes through a NYS pilot program designed to protect public health and safeguard our water supply.

PFAS, often called “forever chemicals,” are toxic substances that can build up in the body and environment over time. Westchester was selected as one of just six counties to participate in this program, which offers eligible homeowners, renters, and business owners:

- **Free Well Testing:** Complete testing for

PFAS contamination at no cost.

- **Financial Rebates:** If contamination levels meet or exceed state limits, participants can receive up to \$5,000 for a whole-house treatment system or up to \$10,000 to connect to a public water supply where available.

To check your eligibility and apply, scan the QR code below.

A big thank you to State Senator Pete Harckham and Assembly-member Dana Levenberg for securing the state funding to make this vital health program possible for our residents! ■



Smart Investments in the Bee-Line Bus System

Earlier this year, I was thrilled to vote for funding to fully modernize Westchester's Bee-Line bus fleet. We're bringing on 116 new hybrid buses to replace aging vehicles! That's a huge win not just for our environment, but for the day-to-day safety and reliability our riders count on.

By Spring 2027, the last of our diesel buses will be retired for good, officially transitioning Westchester to an all-hybrid and electric fleet. Going hybrid will also save County taxpayers money in the long

run, as these vehicles are cheaper to operate and shield us from fluctuating oil prices.

A big thank you goes to our Department of Public Works and Transportation, who worked hard to secure more than \$100 million in federal grants to make this transition happen. If we're serious about tackling climate change, we have to make public transit a clean and dependable option. This investment puts Westchester on the map with one of the youngest, greenest fleets in the country! ■

Wait, Is This Real?

This past June, I was grateful to partner with the Croton Free Library to co-host an engaging Media Literacy Workshop, led by Media Literacy Educators Karissa O'Reilly and Dr. Cynthia Sandler. The conversation couldn't be more timely!

With misinformation constantly flooding our social media feeds, knowing how to spot bad information is the ultimate form of digital self-defense. False stories don't just spread online, they shape our worldview, influence our daily choices, and end up dividing our communities. Learning how to pause, check sources, and think critically helps ensure we're not trapped by misleading headlines or accidentally pass along fake news.



A huge thank you to Karissa, Dr. Sandler, and the Croton Free Library for helping us build a more media-savvy, informed community!

If you weren't able to join us, *scan the QR code to explore the presenters' resources on identifying online misinformation.* ■





Croton's own environmental justice changemaker Keiko Niccolini accepted an award at the Board's AAPI Heritage Month Celebration. Keiko was recognized for her environmental stewardship and gave a moving and inspiring speech.



Happy 130th anniversary to the Ossining Children's Center! Honorees Catherine Borgia, Debby Kittay, and Shawn Cribari joined Executive Director Howard Milbert at the annual Spring Gala to celebrate OCC's long-standing dedication to high-quality early childhood education.



Honoring Croton Pride cofounders Faith Rivers and Elisa Silverglade at the Board of Legislators Pride Month Celebration. Croton Pride builds a culture of safety, belonging, and celebration for our local LGBTQ+ community.



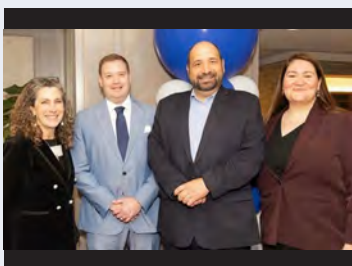
Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES hosted another successful Career & Technical Education Fair! Union representatives in carpentry, welding, HVAC, and more met with local youth to showcase hands-on trade careers that offer pathways to family-sustaining jobs without student debt.



We celebrated the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence with events all over the district, including a beautiful commemoration on the Verplanck waterfront organized by the Town of Cortlandt.



Celebrating the groundbreaking of Ossining's new Multi-Modal Transportation Hub, made possible by the NYS Downtown Revitalization Initiative, and marking a huge step forward for local infrastructure and growth.



School leaders and community members gathered to celebrate Hendrick Hudson High School's 100th Anniversary! Despite challenges following the Indian Point closure, the community continues to unite and invest in ensuring every Hen Hud student has the resources to thrive.



Congratulations to the Ossining Fire Department on the 2026 annual inspection! Major gratitude to the community members who voted yes for the Length of Service Award Program (LOSAP) to support our volunteer firefighters.



Joining Lynda Jones, Signe Bergstrom, and Croton friends as Lorraine Hansberry was posthumously honored with the Trailblazers Award during the County's Black History Month Celebration! Special thanks to the Lorraine Hansberry Coalition for keeping her memory, work, and values alive.



Supporting our region's NYSNA nurses fighting for safe staffing and fair contracts. We continue calling on hospital management to prioritize both patient care and worker safety.



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Expanding Opportunities with Apprenticeship Legislation

In April, the Board of Legislators voted unanimously to pass a new law that creates major opportunities for local youth in the skilled trades.

Moving forward, any County construction project worth \$250,000 or more must go to a contractor with an official NYS Department of Labor certified apprenticeship program. That means every dollar we invest in our infrastructure double-counts as an investment in our local workforce.

Every new bridge, repaved road, or renovated building will now serve as a launching pad for young people entering the construction industry. An apprenticeship in the trades is a golden ticket for youth in our region: a path to a well-paying, full-benefit career without a penny of student debt.

This new law also protects local jobs. It ensures that our taxpayer dollars go to contractors who hire local residents rather than bringing in labor from out of state. Those paychecks stay right here in



Westchester, helping support our neighborhoods, schools, and local businesses.

And let's be clear: these jobs are also AI-proof. AI won't be plumbing our buildings, paving our roads, or building our schools anytime soon.

Beyond job security, there is deep dignity in the building and construction trades. The trades are going to be on the

frontline of helping us confront our biggest challenges. Whether it's building for climate resiliency to protect our communities from flooding, helping us build our EV-charging infrastructure to pave the way for progress, or helping us build more housing to meet our housing goals, we will be working hand in hand with the building trades to meet the moment. ■