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Westchester County Legislator
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Westchester County Board of Legislators NEWS

Voice of the People of Westchester County for over 300 years

Summer 2025 Newsletter



Chairman Vedat Gashi

Legislator, District 4 ~ *New Castle, Ossining, Somers, Yorktown*



Dear District 4 Friends and Neighbors,

In the past year and a half, we've felt the weight of economic pressure marked by rising costs and growing challenges for our working families. I've been honored to continue to serve as Chair of the Board of Legislators, having earned the trust of my fellow legislators as we help residents navigate turbulent times.

Since the start of this year, we have passed meaningful legislation, advanced new projects across Westchester, and worked to ease costs while delivering vital services to our constituents.

I am proud of what we've accomplished as we focus on the people's work. We continue putting Westchester families first and making our County more affordable. We budgeted \$79 million for FY 2025 to support working families through childcare subsidies, with \$3.3 million dedicated specifically to childcare scholarships that help working parents stay in the workforce.

As always, I welcome hearing from residents of Yorktown, Somers, New Castle, and Ossining, as well as the entire County. Please continue reaching out to let me know how I can better serve you.

Sincerely,

This Year's Success Builds on Accomplishments from 2024, Which Included:

LAUNCHING THE GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION TASK FORCE

Westchester launched a Countywide task force to address the surge in gun violence and protect youth, which works with organizations that are currently making strides in rooting out gun violence. It aims to identify and implement best practices to prevent and ultimately eliminate gun violence from Westchester County.

CREATING THE PUBLIC SAFETY ANSWERING POINTS SYSTEM BOND ACT

The County invested \$1.3 million to modernize 911 Call Centers that handle emergency calls and coordinate responses.

STRENGTHENING SAFETY MEASURES FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

In a continuing effort to address and reduce domestic violence in Westchester County, the Board passed legislation providing free locks and security cameras for survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, because everyone deserves to feel safe in their own home.



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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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Addressing Hate in all Forms

As elected leaders, the Westchester County Board of Legislators remains steadfast in fostering a safe environment where all residents can live without fear of violence or discrimination because hate has no place in Westchester County. We continue highlighting the rich cultural and economic contributions of various groups through Heritage Celebrations, including Women's History, African American Heritage, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage, LGBTQ+/Pride and Hispanic American Heritage.



As the first Muslim Board of Legislators Chair in Westchester history, I was

honored to host an Iftar dinner at the Upper Westchester Muslim Society in March for fellow legislators of all faiths and political affiliations, honored guests, members of the Upper Westchester Muslim Society and friends. At a time of divisiveness, this was a positive message and opportunity to come together.



I have been privileged to speak at several Holocaust Remembrance and Human Rights events. In January, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Board commemorated the six million Jewish men, women and children, along with countless others who lost their lives

to hatred and blind prejudice. I was also honored to stand with students of New Castle's E.N.O.U.G.H. organization as they brought Holocaust survivors to recount their stories of brutalities, suffering and endurance.



On April 30th, I joined a panel sponsored by the NYS Judicial Institute's Holocaust Remembrance Program: How Safe Are We in a Constitutional Democracy, focusing on the unimaginable consequences of destroying judicial independence during the Nazi regime through today.

Let us renew our commitment to calling out and rejecting anti-Semitism, racism, and all forms of hate.

2025 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

PROTECTING OUR SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

In a time of fast-moving challenges, both online and in our communities, the Board took bold steps to protect residents' safety and dignity. This year we advanced new protections against digital threats and introduced compassionate, practical programs that ensure our most vulnerable neighbors are seen, supported, and safe.

COMBATING AI-GENERATED DEEPFAKES

February 2025. Imagine an elderly neighbor answers a frantic call from their "grandchild" begging for emergency money. They send the funds immediately, only to discover later they'd been targeted by scammers using AI to perfectly mimic their grandchild's voice.

To better protect residents against this and other increasingly common fraud tactics, the Board passed an innovative local law prohibiting the distribution of digitally deceptive material with the intent to harm. The measure strengthens the County's ability to keep residents free from harassment, extortion, identity theft and sexual exploitation using content created with AI. Specifically, the use of images, audio and videos created with AI and without consent, including those mimicking a person's voice, are now considered a crime.

LAUNCHING BLUE ENVELOPE PROGRAM ACROSS THE COUNTY

April 2025. To promote safer interactions between law enforcement and drivers with

autism and other disabilities during traffic stops, the Board launched the Blue Envelope Program with County Executive Ken Jenkins in April. I was happy to initiate this effort which was brought to me by New Castle resident Duff Bailey. Participants are provided with a distinctive blue envelope to store their driver's license, registration, and insurance information. The envelope signals to officers that the driver may require communication accommodations, and it also includes tips for both drivers and officers to ensure clear, respectful, and calm interactions. Drivers are encouraged to keep their blue envelopes visible and easily accessible, such as in the glove compartment or visor.

ENHANCING OUR QUALITY OF LIFE

The Board has taken practical steps to improve residents' daily lives during difficult times. From easing public transit commutes to strengthening essential infrastructure, we are working to make life healthier and more manageable for people across Westchester.

MAKING PUBLIC TRANSIT EASIER AND MORE CONVENIENT

May 2025. The Board took action to upgrade Westchester County's Bee-Line buses with both contactless payment technology and cash fareboxes. This dual system preserves free transfers between Bee-Line and MTA subways and busses, benefiting approximately 6 million annual passengers. With this approval, the Board consolidated old and new funding into a single \$16.25 million bond, representing an increase of \$12.75 million.

SAFEGUARDING CLEAN DRINKING WATER

January 2025. In one of many measures safeguarding County residents' access to clean drinking water, the Board voted to allow the New York City Department of Environmental Protection to build a new water tunnel beneath County property. The tunnel, to be built 100 feet below ground, will provide a back-up conveyance route between the Kensico Reservoir and a waste water disinfection facility in Mount Pleasant.

FIGHTING FOR A MORE AFFORDABLE WESTCHESTER

At a time of rising costs and housing shortages, the Board took decisive action to make Westchester more affordable for residents at every stage of life. The Board remains firmly committed to creating a county where children who grow up here can afford to build their futures—where family connections, community bonds, and multi-generational households continue to thrive despite economic pressures.



TAKING A STAND AGAINST CON EDISON RATE HIKES

March 2025. The Westchester County Board of Legislators took decisive action to oppose Con Edison's proposed double-digit rate hikes, partnering with County Executive Ken Jenkins to become a party in the rate case before the New York State Public Service Commission. The proposed increases would place a heavy burden on working families, seniors, and small businesses already struggling with exorbitant utility bills. Legislators made clear they will not allow Con Ed to pass excessive costs onto residents under the pretext of infrastructure upgrades. We will continue demanding greater accountability advo-

cacy at hearings and are hosting a series of Community Listening Sessions across the County throughout the summer and will be pursuing similar actions with NYSEG.

PUTTING \$4.7 MILLION IN WESTCHESTER RESIDENTS' POCKETS

A cooperative effort between the Westchester County Board of Legislators, the Westchester County Executive, and New York State Comptroller helped Westchester residents recover nearly \$5 million in unclaimed funds between August and December 2024.



The County sent letters to more than 60,000 Westchester households that the Comptroller confirmed had one or more individuals with unclaimed funds. These funds often result from dormant accounts associated with banks, corporations, insurance companies, and the courts. They might include uncashed paychecks, missed reimbursements, or other financial assets that have yet to reach their intended recipients. The letters, along with seven in-person workshops held from Yonkers to Somers, were instrumental in helping County residents successfully claim a collective \$4.67 million that was rightfully theirs. You can claim yours from the State at no cost. Search for whether you have unclaimed funds here: <https://ouf.osc.state.ny.us/ouf>.

PROTECTING AND SUPPORTING FIRST RESPONDERS

The Board passed strategic legislation addressing complex hazards emergency responders face from evolving technology and extreme weather events. These initiatives strengthen our volunteer service networks—the backbone of Westchester's emergency response infrastructure.



STRONGER OVERSIGHT OF BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS

April 2025. Reflecting our commitment to first responder safety, the Board passed a local law to strengthen oversight of non-residential Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The new law ensures emergency responders have timely access to essential facility information through mandatory notifications. When municipalities approve BESS installations or changes, they must notify County Emergency Services within 30 days with location, size, and emergency contact details. This will help protect responders during BESS emergencies.

EXPANDING TAX RELIEF FOR VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS AND AMBULANCE CORPS MEMBERS

April 2025. To better support our local heroes, the Board expanded property tax benefits for volunteer firefighters and emergency personnel. Now, all volunteers, regardless of where they serve in Westchester, receive a 10% County property tax break. Previously, only volunteers serving in their home communities benefited from this exemption.



HONORING VETERANS WITH FREE COUNTY PARK PASSES

January 2025. To honor the service and

sacrifice of U.S. military veterans, the Board of Legislators approved an Act providing free County park passes to all veterans living in Westchester. This initiative extends previous benefits that covered only active duty and disabled veterans, now reaching approximately 100,000 local veterans. The Act specifically aims to help senior veterans overcome financial barriers to enjoying natural spaces while promoting health, wellness, and community engagement.

GOOD GOVERNANCE: SOUND FISCAL MANAGEMENT

While facing challenging financial headwinds and difficult budget decisions, Westchester County has maintained exceptional fiscal health through disciplined management and strategic planning. The Board's consistent focus on responsible budgeting has earned recognition from all major rating agencies—an achievement that translates directly into lower borrowing costs, greater infrastructure investment capacity, and enhanced value for every tax dollar residents entrust to county government.

COUNTY EARNS HIGHEST POSSIBLE BOND RATINGS - AGAIN

January 2025. Westchester County once again earned the highest possible AAA credit rating from both S&P Global and Fitch Ratings, with Moody's upgrading the County's outlook to positive. As the only county in New York State with top ratings from all three agencies, this exceptional financial position reflects the Board of Legislators' strategic budget oversight.

