



NORWOOD NEWS

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COHEN: EXPAND RIGHT TO COUNSEL LAW

More renters facing eviction could be given representation in Housing Court



Photo by José A. Giralt

COUNCILMAN ANDREW COHEN (pictured) speaks at a town hall meeting organized by the Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA), Northwest Bronx Clergy and Coalition (NWBCCC), and Right to Counsel (RTCNYC) in the Mt. Eden section of the Bronx on Jan. 15. The event seeks to build support for bills Intro 1529 and Intro 1104 which expand the rights of tenants to receive free legal representation in eviction proceedings.

By **JOSÉ A. GIRALT**

Bronx residents in fear of landlords' common use of initiating eviction proceedings are waiting for two bills before the City Council to pass soon.

And while few New York

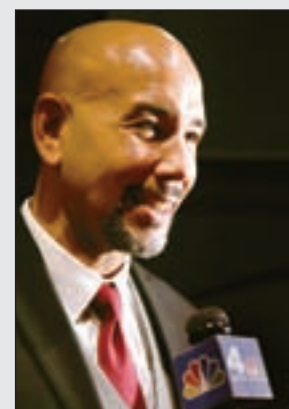
City Council members from the Bronx have committed to backing the bill, they have support from Norwood's Councilman Andrew Cohen.

The two bills—Intros 1529 and 1104—look to expand Right

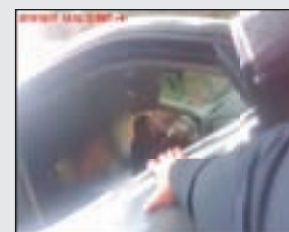
to Counsel not only geographically but also economically. The bills, signed into law in 2017, are collectively known as Right to Counsel (RTC). New York City was the first in the country to implement them.

On Jan. 15, local residents joined housing activists from Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA), Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC),

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BP Diaz Jr. Bows Out Of Mayor's Race
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IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

In Stunner, Bronx BP Ruben Diaz Jr. Withdraws From Mayor's Race

By DAVID CRUZ

The chances of the Bronx seeing one of its own run City Hall—and being the city's first Latino mayor—have come to an end.

Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. announced he is withdrawing his run for Mayor of New York City and not seeking any other elected title when his current tenure ends in 2021, an unexpected move as many believed his entire career was built for a mayoral run.

The news, first reported by *The New York Times*, sent shockwaves throughout the Bronx political landscape. Diaz Jr. cited his need for spending more time with his family as a key reason for bowing out of the mayor's race. Diaz Jr. has been married for more than 25 years and has two grown sons.

"I have decided to make this decision public well in advance of the 2021 election because I want to be fair to the people of this city. This decision is final, and no length of additional time will change that," said Diaz Jr. "Many New Yorkers have committed to support my future in numerous ways, and making this announcement now gives them enough time to make different plans. Additionally, once my campaign has finalized meeting its financial obligations, the remaining funds will be returned to all who generously stepped up to help."

The news also comes several weeks in advance of his annual State of the Borough address where he outlines a variety of projects for the borough.

Diaz Jr. has served as the borough president since 2009 after winning a special election race that was jump-started after Diaz Jr.'s predecessor, Adolfo Carrion, took a job with the



File photo by Adi Talwar

BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT Ruben Diaz Jr., seen here following the 2019 State of the City address, announced he will no longer run for mayor. He plans to retire from public life in 2021.

Obama Administration. His tenure has seen a transformative change in the Bronx, furthered by a lower crime rate and even lower unemployment rate. It's a turnaround of sorts for a borough that had once seen people move out of it.

Before his borough presidency, Diaz Jr. served as an Assemblyman representing the 85th Assembly District, a district that is now held by Assemblyman Marcos Crespo. Thoughts of a mayoral run began to swirl during Diaz Jr.'s Assembly days, extending to his time as the borough president given the borough's triumphs under his watch. Many believed Diaz Jr. was the clos-

est Latino-born official to secure the Democratic nomination for mayor next to former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer.

Throughout his run, Diaz Jr. had struggled to obtain the same financial footing as his rivals, including Speaker Corey Johnson, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, and Comptroller Scott Stringer, all top contenders in the race. Diaz Jr. told the *Times* he intends to return donations to his donors.

With his withdrawal now set, it leaves the legacy of the Diaz name to fall on his father, Ruben Diaz Sr., a councilman and social conservative Democratic candidate for the 15th Congressional District in the South Bronx. Many had considered Diaz Sr. problematic for his son, as his history of making inflammatory remarks had made him radioactive and a liability for the younger Diaz. With his father now the only remaining member of the Diaz dynasty, the implications of his comments would no longer extend to his son.

"Of all the politicians in the Bronx, Ruben seemed to come across as the most sincere and candid," said one Bronx political insider of the younger Diaz.

Norwood's Councilman, Andrew Cohen—who's floated the idea of running for the borough presidency—said on Twitter that Diaz Jr. "has always been a great colleague and Bronx Borough President. I wish him the best in his future endeavors [and] I am certain that he will be successful in whatever he chooses."

Diaz Jr. plans to retire from political life when he wraps up his term in 2021.

Public and Community Meetings

COMMUNITY BOARD 7 committee meetings are held on the following dates at 6:30 p.m. at the board's office, 229A E. 204th St., or unless otherwise noted: Environment & Sanitation Committee meets on Feb. 4; Public Relations Committee meets on Feb. 4; Education, Youth & Libraries Committee meets on Feb. 5; and Traffic & Transportation Committee meets on Feb. 6. For more information, call (718) 933-5650.

The **BEDFORD MOSHOLU COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION** meets on Feb. 5 at 400 E. Mosholu Pkwy. S., B#1, at 8 p.m. For more information, email bedfordmosh@verizon.net.

The next **BUILD THE BLOCK** meeting with the 52nd Precinct's Neighborhood Coordination Officers covering parts of Bedford Park, Fordham, and Kingsbridge Heights takes place Feb. 7 at 6:30 p.m. at Fordham Methodist Church, 2543 Marion Ave. For more information, call (718) 220-5824.

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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



After a recent 15-car pile-up on the Bronx River Parkway on Jan. 18 (see story on page 15), we asked readers about their driving experiences in the Bronx.



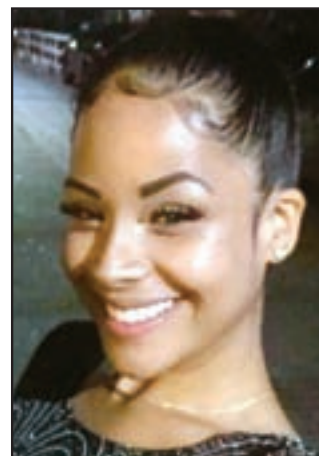
I'm new to the Bronx, but the few highways I've been on have potholes, signs that say construction, and where they are going to dig. I keep asking myself, 'why do they keep digging?' They dig, they resurface the roadway and then they dig again and that has an effect on the ground. The road sinks, because it's unsettled because of all the digging.
Patrick Sing
Belmont



The problem with the highways for me is I like to leave a car length of space and these drivers take advantage of that and cut you off, which is the reason why you have to drive a little faster. Because if you always leave that space, here in the City of New York, drivers have no respect. Another problem is debris, like a part of a tire or somebody's shock absorber. When they have an accident, they leave these things on the highway.
Japhet Lebron
Belmont



Where is all the taxpayer money going? I missed work recently due to a [tire] blowout on the highway. The pothole was so big, the truck in front of me swerved to avoid it, and of course I hit it! I thought it was the Grand Canyon.
Gerard Corbett
Throgs Neck



I've been driving from the Bronx to New Rochelle and I have been encountering difficulties when getting on the Hutchinson River Parkway from the Bruckner Expressway—I think it's Exit 54. I can sometimes sit at the light forever, because there are so many cars merging from everywhere. When you're running late, it's a horror.
Rosemarie Santana
Longwood



Personally, I don't drive but sometimes I take a taxi home from the city and on the Henry Hudson Parkway there are large stretches of road where there [are] no lights. How is that not a dangerous situation? And they never fix it.
Brenda Cruz
Melrose



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NEWS BRIEFS

By DAVID CRUZ

Bx. Zoo Exec Runs Bloomy Team

The presidential campaign for former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg has tapped John Calvelli, executive vice president of Public Affairs for the Wildlife Conservation Society, to run its campaign in New York state. More than 100 political operatives, field organizers, communications professionals, and thousands of volunteers will answer to Calvelli throughout the life of the campaign. In a statement, Calvelli said New Yorkers across the state will “get to know Mike Bloomberg and the powerful message he brings.” Jennifer Blatus, a former spokeswoman for Councilman Andrew Cohen, has also been hired to serve as the communications director.

Cultural Grant Recipients Named

The city Department of Cultural Affairs has announced the newest grant winners of the Mayor's Grant for Cultural Impact. Among them is Music and Multilingual Learners, chosen to run a pilot program geared towards the arts for English-learning students in School District 10. The residency is geared toward developing literacy and social emotional learning skills through theater and music. Lehman College students will also benefit from another grant winner in PEN American Center, which will run a tuition-free writing workshop for undocumented New Yorkers that's designed to give DREAMers the opportunity to use their voices to counter misinformation about immigrants.

E-Scooter Bill Announced

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today announced a safety bill that would legalize motorized e-bikes and scooters while granting local governments the right

MMCC Daycare Center Named for Nora Feury Opens to Fanfare and Adoration

By DAVID CRUZ

On her 75th birthday, Nora Feury, dubbed “the legend,” received quite the gift: the opening of a daycare center in her name, located in Crotona Park, courtesy of Mosholu Montefiore Community Center (MMCC).

“I never expected to get a present like this,” said Feury, who spoke to a small crowd just a few minutes before being given a pair of scissors to cut the ceremonial ribbon outside the center.

The eponymous center in Crotona Park is a kind of living tribute for Feury, who has consulted for MMCC on matters related to child care for years and whose entire life has been spent cultivating children's upbringing. At a Jan. 16 ceremony marking the official opening for the center—a Head Start program found at the first floor of a six-story residential building at 887 Crotona Park North—Feury was showered with a hugs and smiles as she passed a portrait of herself that can be seen hanging the moment visitors step foot into the center that caters to children age four and under.

It was a moment where Agnes Vendiola, MMCC's director for the child development center, couldn't hold back tears on Feury's impact. “She touches lives. She made a difference in our lives, and she's just an amazing woman who will push you to the edge,” said Vendiola.

Feury herself served as the executive director of Little Angels, a



Photo by David Cruz

NORA FEURY (3RD from right) is given the privilege of cutting the ceremonial ribbon for a center named in her honor on Jan. 16.

daycare provider falling under the Archdiocese of New York. The Bronx-bred Feury, who grew up in the South Bronx and had an affinity for Crotona Park during her early years, served at the center for 40 years before retiring. Feury has kept active since, serving on Community Board 7 in several capacities, including chair at one point.

“Nora has been in this industry forever. Actually, back in the 1960s when the Head Start program actually started, she was the first pioneer to open up the first Head Start program and since then she has not stopped helping us, meaning the community, educating our children to make them who they are today: teachers, doctors, lawyers, contractors, engineers, electricians,” said Rita Santelia, MMCC's executive director. “And Nora doesn't stop giving.”

The center is funded through a grant totaling \$2.1 million, which

also went towards the opening of another center at 934 E. Gun Hill Rd. that's named after MMCC's current chairwoman, Natly Esnard. Both centers were opened at its respective communities given its status as a “high needs” neighborhood for such a program. MMCC now has five centers devoted to childcare.

Coincidentally, the Crotona Park site was once a daycare center that had closed several years before. The new center, with fresh coats of beige paint, offices, and classrooms named after some of the borough's colleges, has 48 slots available to children age four or under. The service is free for families who meet certain income eligibility requirements.

“They said that Head Start is not going to last,” Feury recalled. “Well today, \$22 billion is awarded to Head Start programs all across the United States. I was hoping that a Congressman or two would come and see the site and know the next time the bill for Head Start comes up in Congress that they will be able to look at it and know it's for their community and that it just works.”

Though humbled by such an honor, Feury reminded guests that the building belongs to them.

“All the Head Start people: this is not my building, it's not Natly's building, it's your building,” said Feury. “They gave us the name, but it's really yours.”

to set additional regulatory standards. The news comes amid pressure by Cuomo to draft legislation that would largely benefit delivery drivers who currently face stiff fines if caught riding them. Cuomo said the e-bikes could help reduce pollution and decongest city streets. Some of the measures in this bill package include setting speed restrictions, prohibiting e-bikes from being used on sidewalks, and requiring helmets. Municipalities like New York City can impose even greater measures if the state bill passes.

Housing Discrimination Website

In a move intended to decrease housing discrimination, New York Attorney General Letitia James announced the launch of a new website to complain about instances of

housing discrimination based on source of income. The website follows a measure passed last year that prohibits landlords from denying someone housing based on any type of lawful income they receive, including Section 8. “Across New York State, landlords, rental agents, and brokers continue to post ads specifying that they will not accept vouchers or housing assistance – an act that is blatantly unlawful and discriminatory. “This new portal will allow New Yorkers to report these instances of discrimination and help my office hold bad actors accountable,” said James in a statement.

Shea Slams New Criminal Justice Reforms

NYPD Commissioner Dermot Shea is slamming the state's new criminal

justice laws that include bail reform and discovery. At a news conference on Jan. 24, Shea told reporters he met with State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins on the measure, and expressed concerns that the bail reform measure—which lets those accused of a low-level crime to walk out of a courtroom without having to post bail—takes away the discretion from a judge who can properly surmise whether a suspect is a danger to society. “If we can't trust judges then we're probably in bigger trouble,” said Shea. On discovery reform, where evidence used against a criminal, including the name and addresses of witnesses, can be immediately turned over the defense, Shea said that would create a “chilling effect” on witnesses coming forward to report a crime.

“Yo Bro! I’m Gonna (Bleep) Shoot You!”

Videos Reveal Moment That Lead to Fatal 52nd Pct. Shooting in October

By DAVID CRUZ

Three months after a sergeant from the 52nd Precinct fatally shot a Yonkers man following a traffic stop, the NYPD released body cam footage of the incident leading to the moments that went from jovial to chaotic in a matter of seconds.

The videos, released on Jan. 24 and posted onto YouTube, shows three angles recorded by the body cameras worn by the sergeant, identified as Sgt. Jonathan Rivera, and two officers, Edward Barrett and Michelle Almanzar,

on Oct. 17, 2019 just before 3 p.m. The three had pulled over Allen Feliz, who police say was driving his 2018 Volkswagen Atlas without a seatbelt.

It began as a friendly conversation, with Rivera outside the passenger side, and Barrett politely asking where Feliz was headed and why he was in Norwood. Feliz said his girlfriend lived in the area and was on his way to pick up his daughter from school.

After Barrett ran Feliz’s driver’s license that was issued in Ohio, he told Rivera that Feliz’s name “popped,” po-



Image courtesy NYPD

A VIDEO SCREENSHOT from 52nd Precinct Sgt. Jonathan Rivera’s body camera shows him reaching for the driver’s side of the vehicle belonging to Allen Feliz, spotted sitting in the driver’s seat.

lice slang for when a warrant is active. Police would later reveal that Feliz had three outstanding warrants for minor infractions.

“You’re not in trouble, but I just gotta talk you,” said Barrett, asking Feliz to step out of the car.

After a quick pat down, Feliz rushes back into his car with Barrett attempting to keep him from driving off. Video from Rivera’s body cam shows him tasing Feliz, who screams. After getting tased and into the car, Barrett and Almanzar try to force Feliz into putting the car in park from having been in drive.

Rivera eventually crawls into the car from the passenger side as a passenger can be seen with his arms raised telling the officer, “Look at my hands.” Rivera soon has his service weapon drawn telling Feliz, “Yo bro! I’m gonna (expletive) shoot you!”

As the struggle continues, with officers demanding Feliz get out the car, Barrett’s body camera falls to the ground facing the building on Bainbridge Avenue. It continues rolling, with sounds of Feliz’s vehicle revving up.

Video that surfaced the day of the shooting shows the vehicle moving forward and backward with Rivera still inside. Video from Rivera’s point of view, however, shows only the moments prior to the shooting, with Rivera punching Feliz before the video cuts to black.

A spokesperson offering the NYPD’s version of events, said that Rivera’s

camera was turned off shortly after the struggle and likely “caused by the physical contact with the camera’s record switch and does not capture the firearm discharge.”

Councilman Andrew Cohen, who represents Norwood where the shooting took place, told the *Norwood News* he has already seen the video on the shooting, and appears convinced that the shooting was justified.

“If you look at the moment where the sergeant pulled the trigger, to me it seems irrefutable that at that moment the police officers were in real serious danger,” said Cohen. “In my opinion, there was a failure of tactics here. I think this probably could have been averted. I don’t know what is the constitutionality of asking the driver for his keys. But when they stopped this guy and asked him for his license, registration, and keys he would be alive today because the only weapon he had was his vehicle and you would’ve disarmed him.”

But the videos don’t have footage of Rivera pulling the trigger. Cohen later clarified that the circumstances leading to the shooting led him to that conclusion. “I saw the video and this is my takeaway from it,” said Cohen.

Feliz’s family is now suing the NYPD. Their attorney, Robert Vilen-sky, declined to comment on the videos’ content. “At the present time the family has no comment other than that we believe justice will prevail for our fallen beloved son, brother, father, and friend Allen Feliz.”

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Preaching at the Park



Photo by David Cruz

(L-R) **JENNY VALDEZ**, Brunida Martinez, and Rosa Garcia, members of Norwood's Decima Iglesia Pentecostal at Putnam Place, were spotted at Oval Park proselytizing on Jan. 23. It certainly caught the *Norwood News*' attention given all the singing and preaching by the trio, which used a loudspeaker to spread their message.

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MTA Subway Chief Calls it Quits After Sparing Bronx Express Bus Service



Image courtesy MTA

ANDY BYFORD, SUBWAY chief (third from right, front), receives a round of applause from members of the MTA board at their last meeting for helping to turn the subway system around.

By **DAVID CRUZ**

Andy Byford, the New York City Transit Authority chief credited for helping to turn around the subway system while overseeing a plan to revamp the Bronx bus network, has resigned on Jan. 23. His resignation comes two years after he signed on.

At the last MTA Board meeting on Jan. 23, Byford—whose departure was first reported by *Politico*—said a few words of thanks. “I’d like to say a big thank you to Governor [Andrew] Cuomo for

giving me this opportunity, but also Governor Cuomo and the legislature for having the courage to pass congestion pricing, but also get the funds that I know will deliver the capital plans. It’s unprecedented,” said Byford, who also thanked the millions of riders for “putting up with me.”

Byford’s last day with the state-run transit authority is Feb. 21.

The announcement comes nearly a week after Byford announced the MTA would keep the express bus system the

same as it proceeds to revamp the regular bus route system, a plan that’s still in the works. It also comes a few weeks after Byford announced that the number 4 subway line would receive more elevators arriving to some of its stations in the Bronx. Before his resignation, Byford told elected officials that the agency will not institute any changes to express bus routes, but continue monitoring ridership as it implements changes to the Bronx. It’s not quite an about-face, though elected of-

ficials are interpreting this as a win.

“Hard work and community organizing pays off. It is wonderful news to hear that the MTA has postponed their plans to cut express bus service,” said Norwood Assemblyman Jeff Dinowitz, whose office organized a town hall discussion on express bus service in the Bronx. “Our community is disproportionately reliant on express buses to access Manhattan – especially those along the northern and western borders of the Bronx who do not have nearby subways. I am glad that President Byford and the MTA listened to riders’ concerns, and I look forward to a continued dialogue on how we can efficiently continue to provide essential mass transit service for the people of the Bronx.”

Councilman Andrew Cohen, who also represents Norwood, called the news “a reprieve.” “Bronx commuters throughout the district have expressed their frustration and dissatisfaction with the proposed service cuts and there is no doubt that the MTA and President Andy Byford have heard our voices,” said Cohen. “I’m proud of the hard work from the community and Assemblyman Dinowitz’s lead-

ership in combatting these changes. I look forward to working with the MTA to put forward a plan that meets the needs of Bronx commuters and ensures access to reliable and efficient transportation.” Had the changes gone through, it would have seen some major revisions for the BxM4, which runs through Norwood via Bainbridge Avenue. Had the plan gone through, riders would have not gotten service between Katonah Avenue and East 237th Street in Woodlawn and the Grand Concourse and East 158th Street in Melrose. The bus would no longer have run through the Grand Concourse, redirected instead to the Major Deegan Expressway. In total, the line would have 30 of its 43 stops discontinued, with two of them being officially removed.

In the meantime, residents can still sound off on proposed changes to the borough’s bus routes, which impacts the Bx28, Bx30 and Bx34 buses at a Feb. 1 and Feb. 20 meeting.

Editor’s Note: *The Feb. 1 meeting will take place at Monroe College at Mintz Auditorium, 2501 Jerome Ave., from 1 to 3 p.m. while the Feb. 20 event takes place at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, from 6 to 8 p.m.*

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New West Bronx Housing Executive Director Looks To Build Legacy Started by Predecessor

By DAVID CRUZ

As Sally Dunford was preparing for retirement as executive director of West Bronx Housing, a job she's held on to for 28 years, there was already someone she had in mind to succeed her.

It didn't require any sifting of resumes or recommendations, but an understanding of who already demonstrated the capability in doing the work. It came from Joshua Stephenson, the former constituent services director for Councilman Andrew Cohen, who had worked with Dunford over the last two years to settle housing grievances for tenants living within Cohen's 11th Council District.

The work was already familiar to him, and Dunford immediately saw a replacement. On Jan. 9, Stephenson became the newest executive director to lead West Bronx Housing, an advocacy group falling under the Bronx Jewish Community Council. Dunford highly recommended Stephenson to the job (he still needed to formally apply), previously referring to him as a young "dynamo."

Stephenson, 35, steadily transitioned to the role, working alongside Dunford for three months before she officially left the position. Ahead of his ascension to the role, Stephenson was reminded of Dunford's reputation for housing work that contributed to West Bronx Housing's own reputation it's built over the years. And he intends to continue that work.

"It's been a humbling experience to have somebody entrust something that they've been building for 20 years to you, and will [I] give it everything I have," said Stephenson, speaking to the *Norwood News* from his boxy office at 220 E. 204th St.

Stephenson's path to the Bronx came with some stops around the country. He was born in Omaha, Nebraska, before living several years in Miami, FL, where he picked up how to speak Spanish at a young age. He eventually moved to Southern California, after living in Sacramento, CA and Syracuse, NY. He later enrolled at UC

"It's been a humbling experience to have somebody entrust something that they've been building for 20 years to you, and [I] will give it everything I have."

—Joshua Stephenson,
West Bronx Housing
executive director.

Berkeley, graduating with a degree in political science with a focus in international relations. But the jobs in that arena were few and far between, which Stephenson blamed on the Great Recession that had roiled the country then, and Stephenson found himself preparing pizzas for three years.

"I got tired of cooking pizza," said Stephenson, laughing. "You can only cook so many pizzas before you get tired of the smell."

Stephenson eventually moved to Brooklyn and found an internship with Manhattan Assemblywoman Rebecca Seawright before interning at Cohen's office in Kingsbridge. There, he fell in love with constituent work that laid the groundwork for his current role. He soon went from intern to constituent services director, enjoying the work that comes with haranguing landlords and city agencies to resolve tenant-landlord disputes. While working for Cohen, Stephenson was doubling as a waiter.

On top of helping residents settle any differences with their landlord, West Bronx Housing also helps residents apply for rent freezes, handle



Photo by David Cruz

JOSHUA STEPHENSON IS the new executive director for West Bronx Housing, succeeding Sally Dunford.

immigration issues, and social work. In some cases, Stephenson will accompany clients to Bronx Housing Court on the Grand Concourse, lending his thoughts on individual cases.

That kind of outreach is happening in other parts of the nonprofit's work, including a plan for several know-your-rights workshops he has in mind. Such workshops haven't been so well received within West Bronx Housing's immediate area of Bedford Park as Community Board 7, whose office is directly across the street, led a housing workshop that was poorly attended despite publicity surrounding it.

Stephenson looks to try a different tact, relying heavily on its email list with names, somewhere in the thousands, that have accrued over the last few years. "We can hold events basically anywhere—[Community Boards] 5, 7, 8, and 12," said Stephenson. "We have huge lists of clients, and huge lists of locations where we can hold events."

It's Stephenson's hope that tenants will be well-versed in tenant matters, especially now since the

state enacted stronger rent laws last year, adding greater protections to renters. He anticipates landlords, with some already suing the state because of the rent laws, will skirt some of the measures that include eliminating vacancy bonuses and reducing the monetary impact of Major Capital Improvements. Stephenson is now wary that landlords will begin targeting the New York City Rent Guidelines Board for some monetary relief.

"The Rent Guidelines Board increases are going to be substantially larger moving forward because landlords are going to put a lot of pressure on the Rent Guidelines Board and the mayor to give them larger increases," said Stephenson. "There's nowhere else for landlords to go."

As Stephenson braces for a fight with landlords, West Bronx Housing's mantra remains: treat renters fairly.

"Housing impacts everybody on a personal level," said Stephenson. "I fundamentally believe that housing is a right for everyone ... [residents] deserve to live in dignity."

Oval Park Sees 42 Fresh Trees on Landscape

By DAVID CRUZ

The city Parks Department is planting seeds for a leafier Oval Park after construction-hatted crews decked in neon vests were spotted planting close to four-dozen trees around the perimeter of the Norwood greenscape.

A Caterpillar crawler also joined the crews the week of Jan. 20, digging out soil as crews shimmied an unprecedented 43 saplings ranging from oaks, Japanese katsura trees, and London planes, into their new home. The new trees are scattered about the park though many can be found on the upper promenade. It can take decades to see these trees grow to maturity, with the katsura tree taking upwards of 50 years.

The Parks Department said the project is part of the city's years-long effort to replant trees wiped out during Superstorm Sandy when wind gusts reached 71 mph during the height of the historic storm. It's estimated that some 20,000 trees were destroyed when Sandy arrived to the New York City. The Bronx fared better than most parts of the city when it



Photo by David Cruz

CREWS WITH THE New York City Parks Department plant this tree on the northern end of the Oval Park as part of a project that saw 42 trees planted throughout the park.

came to lost trees, though Williamsbridge, Allerton, and Pelham Gardens in the north central part of the borough suffered heavy losses with 128 complaints of damaged tree reported to 311.

The Parks Department puts the cost of the project—when factoring

in Manhattan and Queens, which also received new trees—at \$2.7 million.

The news adds to the ongoing investment for the treasured park, which recently saw the opening of a skateboard area on the eastern side of the park after years of delays and set-

backs. Since the early 2000s, following the deal to see the construction of the Croton Water Filtration Plant in the Bronx, resulting in a \$200-million reserve for park projects, Oval Park has seen other improvements that include a top-down renovation for the recreation center, staircase on the northern end of the park, and a revamped track and field.

The plantings come ahead of a massive tree planting effort by the Parks Department, which is slated to put new trees along several parts of Norwood starting May 31. Areas expected to see new trees include 340 E. 204th St., 355 E. 204th St., 292 E. 205th St., 268 E. 207th St., 277 E. 207th St., 3252 Decatur Ave., 3254 Decatur Ave., 3307 Hull Ave., 3343 Decatur Ave., 82 E. 208th St., 81 E. 208th St., 15 E. 208th St., 3450 Jerome Ave., 245 E. Gun Hill Rd., 3508 Kings College Pl., 280 E. 211th St., 3547 Webster Ave., and 3551 Webster Ave.

Editor's Note: To track where and when the New York City Parks Department is planting a tree near your home, go to <https://www.nycgovparks.org/trees/street-tree-planting/locations>.

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Lt. Governor Outlines State's Vision for 2020 at Montefiore

By DAVID CRUZ

Days before Governor Andrew Cuomo's preliminary budget announcement, his second-in-command paid a special visit to Montefiore Health System on Jan. 16, reiterating Cuomo's State of the State address, which includes the promise of seeing four Metro-North stations built in the East Bronx.

Mixing policy with shtick, Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul—introduced by newly appointed President and CEO for Montefiore Health System, Dr. Philip O. Ozuah—broke down a bevy of initiatives spearheaded by Cuomo that have statewide interest. That includes combating domestic violence, ferreting out hate crimes, adding greater

protections for gig workers, reducing taxes, reducing the unemployment rate in the Bronx, and keeping health-care costs low notwithstanding Cuomo's plan to cut Medicaid further. The topic on health includes a discussion on whether prescription drugs can be purchased outside the country. "Why can't we get our drugs in Canada?" said Hochul. "I'm sorry, I trust the quality controls up there. We need to do some double checking. We'll be fine."

She also offered praise to the borough's many leaps in recent years, mainly news that the population for the borough has risen steadily, a sign of an improved quality of life for a borough that was saw residents flee by the thousands decades before. "The fact



Photo by David Cruz

LT. GOVERNOR KATHY HOCHUL (at podium) delivers a summarized State of the State address that was presented by Governor Andrew Cuomo on Jan. 8.

that this is the fastest-growing borough, population of five percent in just the last decade," said Hochul. "That's another extraordinary indicator of the great health and future of this community."

Building out the infrastructure continues to be on Cuomo's agenda, specifically the plan to bring the four Metro-North stations to the Bronx as part of the Penn Station Access plan that was funded by Cuomo in 2018. "It's going to be a life-changing experience for our citizens," said Hochul, adding this would be a benefit to Montefiore's medical center in Morris Park, one of four neighborhoods that will see a station built.

Adding to rail projects, Hochul stressed Cuomo's plan to build a high-speed rail system that would push trains beyond the current maximum of 51 mph.

She also spoke on the Bronx's environmental health, pointing to the dramatic changes to the Bronx River Parkway. "This is an amazing place," said Hochul, adding that greater environmental policies include the impending ban on plastic bags and expanding charging stations for electric powered vehicles across the state. On healthcare matters, Hochul also reemphasized Cuomo's plan to ban vaping products that appear to target children, an assertion Hochul believes. "We're gonna stop it; it's not happening here," said Hochul. The state's first

vaping death happened in the Bronx last year.

On political matters, Hochul also re-emphasized Cuomo's push to have elected officials disclosing their tax returns if their yearly incomes surpass \$100,000. "I've been doing it for the last 25 years as an elected official and I encourage everyone else to follow this," she said.

Adding some levity to her address, Hochul also threw in Cuomo's call to do away with so-called robocalls by mandating phone companies institute technology to curb the practice. Stiff fines would be imposed if companies don't comply.

"This is why I know it's going on in the state: I know it bothers people, because I come out here and I just throw a couple of words—like, I do my own testing. I don't care if you're in Auburn, NY, or in Watertown or the end of Long Island, or you're sitting here in the Bronx, everybody groans over robocalls. So I'll say universally New Yorkers want us to get involved in stopping the increase in robocalls and we'll do that," said Hochul.

Cuomo is now slated to present his preliminary budget proposal that will answer how his initiatives would be paid at a news conference today. The state is now faced with a \$6 billion budget gap that could seriously impact New York City. That debt is being blamed on the state's soaring Medicaid bill, which it has covered for the last 10 years.



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Despite National Concern Over Psych Drugs for Foster Youth, NYC Says It Lacks Key Data

By ERICKA FRANCOIS,
The Chronicle of Social Change

Pedro Maldonado's story of diagnosis and prescription for Concerta and Seroquel—typically prescribed for ADHD and mood disorders like schizophrenia—started when he was in foster care at age six.

"When I was younger I never really thought about it, I just took it. As I got older, I started speaking up for myself," said Maldonado, who spent his early years in Fordham before heading to Mt. Vernon's foster care system. "As I got older, it started to make me feel like [a] zombie and I guessed they upped the dosage."

Ariel, another teen in New York City's foster care system whose last name is being withheld, says that he was first prescribed Abilify, a powerful antipsychotic at age 13, for his ADHD diagnosis. The drug made him feel so drowsy that he would fall asleep in class. So he wanted to get off it. But his foster mom had other ideas.

"She told me, 'If you're not on the medication you can't live with me,'" Ariel said. "I wanted to stay, so I took it and I knew my other options were worse."

The dosage kept getting increased without his consent, he said, and he started to have suicidal thoughts that "came out of nowhere."

Interviews with dozens of current and former foster youth and children's lawyers confirm that Ariel isn't alone in being prescribed powerful, mood-altering drugs. But New York City's foster care system says it has no data on youth prescription rates, despite federal guidelines that state they should have them.

The haphazard prescribing of psychotropic medications to foster children—some very young, and often medicated without appropriate talk therapy—has long been a hidden problem. But despite grabbing newspaper headlines nationwide, foster children—some as young as five—are still routinely prescribed potent cocktails of psychotropics leaving them listless, obese, or suicidal, all while doing little to improve the perceived mental health problems that the drugs aim to alleviate.

And after months of requests for information from both *The Chronicle of Social Change* and from New York

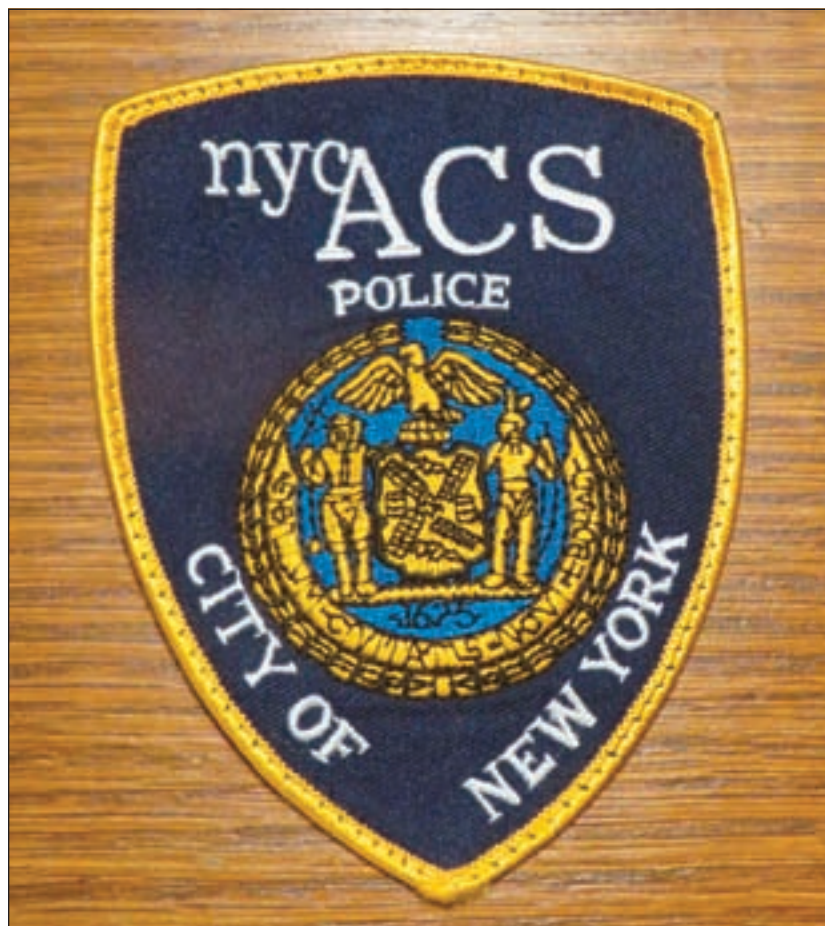


Photo courtesy Administration for Children's Services

THE ADMINISTRATION FOR Children's Services (ACS) is attempting to get state data determining how many children in the foster care system have been prescribed psychotropic drugs.

City Council, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) repeatedly declined to share even basic facts about the percentage of kids who have been prescribed powerful drugs.

"[ACS] does not have access to data about the use of psychiatric medications in our foster care system, but we have been taking steps to try to access this information," a spokesperson for ACS said. A source at the agency also explained that the agency does not track data specific to "medication overrides"—instances where ACS allowed its foster care nonprofits to move ahead with a psychotropic prescription despite a parent declining to provide consent.

Monica Mahaffey, spokesperson for the state Office of Children and Families (OCFS), which regulates foster care agencies statewide, said via email the agency would need to look into "whether this is something we can get" when asked for the number of children under the age of six in New York

City and the state prescribed a psychotropic. Both Mahaffey and the state Department of Health, which manages the Medicaid program, asked the *Chronicle* to submit a list of specific drugs, claiming they may be able to provide separate counts of prescriptions for each drug.

Children's advocates are supporting a City Council bill proposed by General Welfare Committee chair Stephen Levin that would require more systemic monitoring by ACS. "By collecting this data, ACS and City Council will be able to observe prescribing trends for each foster care agency, with the data disaggregated to show trends by gender and ethnicity," read a statement by the Legal Aid Society, which represents most New York City foster youth in family court. "The data collected would allow ACS to track problematic prescribing practices on a systemic level and report on any corrective action taken to ameliorate these dangerous practices."

Other states and cities make this data available publicly. Los Angeles

County, for example, releases a quarterly report that details prescription rates. The last such report, from late October 2019, revealed that 1,363 children, or 7.3 percent of all foster children, were receiving psychotropic medications. Almost half of them were receiving more than one of these powerful drugs, and almost a quarter were receiving anti-psychotics.

For Rosie Williams, who grew up in Brooklyn's foster care system, the stream of psychotropic drugs began at 12 years old. "I was on at least three meds at a time—Seroquel, Wellbutrin and Zoloft—but those are the only ones I can pronounce," Williams said.

Nigel, who asked his last name not be published, entered New York City's foster care system at age 12 and was prescribed medication. He is now 25 and said he's still unclear what he was diagnosed with that required the drugs. He was first prescribed an antipsychotic at age 14.

"They never really told me what I was diagnosed with but they put me on Seroquel," he said. "I didn't like how it made me feel, I was unresponsive, felt outside of myself. I felt like I was in a dream whenever I took it, it was sedation."

Meanwhile, some members of the New York City Council would like to see more transparency from the agency on psychiatric medications. Earlier this year, four councilmembers led by Levin introduced a bill that would require ACS to provide quarterly reports on the number and percentage of children prescribed three or more psychiatric medications, along with seven other related data points.

As youth who are drugged while in care age into adulthood, many say they are quick to leave the medications behind. Maldonado—the former foster youth from the Bronx, now 22—said he stopped taking his prescriptions at 16.

Ariel, now 18, said he stopped taking the antipsychotic Abilify once he became an adult. "I don't know who I am ultimately yet but I entered a stage of growth," said Ariel. "I knew about how they treated foster care kids and I wasn't going to be their lab rat."

This story was co-published by the child welfare news website The Chronicle of Social Change, which focuses on stories impacting the foster care system.

8 Injured as Weekend Storm Causes Multi-Car Pileup on Bronx River Parkway

By DAVID GREENE

Slippery roads and poor visibility caused by a winter storm over the weekend appear to be responsible for a multi-car pile-up on the Bronx River Parkway by the Woodlawn/Norwood border that injured eight people, including one seriously. The afternoon incident ranks as the most injury-related car accident than at any point in 2019.

Police say that at just after 1:30 p.m. on Jan. 18, police were flooded with calls of a crash in the southbound side of the Bronx River Parkway, between East 233rd Street and East Gun Hill Road. The NYPD reported 15 cars were involved, but one local news crew had video of their count, that they put at 20. The parkway was back open by 7 p.m. EMS reported eight people were transported to area hospitals, including one victim reported in serious condition.

Police, fire, and paramedics identified, treated and removed those aided as people kept warm in their cars or walked around the closed highway as they waited hours for tow trucks to remove them.

Two victims of the crash were seen



Photo by David Greene

THREE CRASH VICTIMS (not injured) look at their vehicle after being stuck for hours on the Bronx River Parkway following a multi-vehicle crash on Jan. 18 that resulted in eight people injured.

coming together and hugging in the middle of the shutdown southbound lane, before apparently walking over to their mangled car, with the bumper hanging off the vehicle.

City records show the Bronx side of the Bronx River Parkway, which also stretches into Westchester



Photo by David Greene

County, was the scene of 97 car accidents in 2019, including an accident that resulted in six injuries on Aug.

14, 2019, the most injuries for any car accident on the parkway that year. Speed was to blame for that incident.

According to the National Weather Service, only one inch of snow fell in the Bronx, but visibility at the time of the crash was reduced to 1/4 mile.

Brandon DeShields, a driver, told WCBS-TV, "I switched lanes, someone behind me ran into the back of my car and it caused me to slide and hit another car."

Additional reporting by David Cruz.

DRIVERS ON THE northbound Bronx River Parkway are at a standstill headed into Westchester County.

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Could Cabrera Be Leveraging Legislative Commitment With Congressional Campaigning?

By DAVID CRUZ

It's something of an open secret: political incumbency serving as an entry-way for incumbents to poke into matters happening within the district they seek to represent in the near future.

And it's a controversial tact that Councilman Fernando Cabrera, the 14th Council District representative, appears to have adopted, with one questionable trickin his employ.

Cabrera is now seeking the 14th Congressional District seat occupied by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who, given her massive campaign war chest and national popularity with uber-left Democrats (Ocasio-Cortez is now in Iowa to campaign with Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders), gives her a well-defined competitive advantage over Cabrera. Geographically, the two districts don't overlap, offering little cover for Cabrera to peg himself as a lawmaker concerned with matters touching his district.

Even so, in recent weeks, Cabrera has inserted himself into issues that have a direct impact on both sides of Ocasio-



Photo courtesy Emil Cohen/New York City Council

COUNCILMAN FERNANDO CABRERA (pictured) presiding over the Committee on Government Operations in February 2019, is now a candidate for the 14th Congressional District seat, currently occupied by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Cortez's district. That includes championing opposition toward the beleaguered expansion of the LaGuardia AirTrain, which would be extended to the existing #7 subway line at the Mets-Willets Point station to the tune of \$2 billion.

Cabrera called the process to see the expanded service, which falls under federal oversight, opaque and "absolutely unacceptable."

"As chairperson of the City Council committee that oversees and supports our community boards, I am shocked and outraged by the failure to engage the local community board in this important discussion," said Cabrera in a statement released shortly after his participation in a rally against the project on Jan. 13 in Queens. "There are too many unanswered questions. Yesterday, I called for the Air Train project to be subject to the scrutiny of New York City's ULURP process. There is no transparency here. No public comment, no community input, no environmental impact study, no alternatives analysis. No Air Train."

Cabrera's involvement on the LaGuardia AirTrain project is running concur-

rently with safety issues he's addressing off the coast of City Island, the easternmost neighborhood of the Bronx. Luana Malavolta, a member of the City Island Civic Association's Water Committee, wrote in an email to members that the association is directly "getting legislation written for every borough to have a permanent Harbor Patrol." Despite City Island having its own representative in Councilman Mark Gjonaj—who was long in the midst of brainstorming legislation on the harbor unit, calling the lack of patrols "an injustice to waterfront communities"—it was Cabrera's chief of staff who communicated the prospect of Cabrera introducing legislation for a harbor patrol provided no similar bill was introduced before.

Cabrera's spokeswoman, Claire McLeveighn, noted that Cabrera and Gjonaj are working jointly to draft the bill, saying it's a borough-wide issue that impacts his district that touches the waterfront. In his 11 years in office, Cabrera never expressed concern for the waterfront. McLeveighn mentioned that

(continued on page 22)

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HEALTH
CHECK

Building Healthy Habits For a Healthy New Year

By COURTNEY ROMANS

A New Year and the new decade is a great time to make health a priority. Consider adding these healthy habits to your daily routine and gain benefits this year, this decade and beyond.

Eat Healthy: Start the new year eating right. Small changes can make a big difference in reducing the risk of long-term health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer. A few simple ways to make healthier choices include:

- Add more fruits and vegetables to daily meals.
- Choose whole grains like brown rice and whole wheat bread instead of white bread and pasta.
- Drink water instead of sugary beverages.
- Limit salt/sodium intake to 1,500 mg per day.

Move More: According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), physical activity can lead to better sleep, stronger muscles and bones, better weight management, and a reduced risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Start by adding physical activity to the daily commute with more walking, biking, or opting for the stairs instead of the elevator. Adding hobbies like gardening, dancing, and swimming can also make the usual weekend routine more fun and physical.

Manage Stress: Too much stress can affect physical, mental, and emotional health. Common symptoms of stress include headaches, chest pain, sleep problems, irritability, feeling overwhelmed and a loss of focus or motivation. High amounts of stress can also lead to high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Following these tips for managing stress can help:

- Practice relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, or yoga.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Spend more time with friends and family.
- Schedule time for relaxing hobbies such as reading, creating art, or listening to music.

Get Enough Zzzzzz's: According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), one out of every three adults does not get enough sleep each night. Lack of sleep has been closely linked to type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and depression. The average adult needs at least 7 hours of sleep every night to maintain a healthy life. But how can people get more sleep? Try these helpful hints to get more and better sleep:

- Keep a sleep schedule - go to bed and wake up at the same time each day.
- Keep the bedroom dark, quiet, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Remove electronics from the bedroom or turn them off an hour before sleep.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine and alcohol before bed.
- Be more physically active during the day - that can help reduce the time it takes to fall asleep.

Building healthy habits can take time, but using these tips can help you plan ahead and make 2020 and beyond happy and healthy!

Courtney Romans is a social work graduate student and the Administrative Intern for Montefiore Health System's Office of Community & Population Health.

Police Get Ahead of Themselves in Pregnant Woman's Attack at Tracey Towers

By DAVID GREENE

An apparent human error is to blame for a Twitter post on the NYPD's 52nd Precinct account, that stated a suspect in a recent robbery and assault of a pregnant woman inside an elevator at Tracey Towers was now in custody.

The *Norwood News* learned about the goof after trying to obtain information on the Dec. 23 attack of the 40-year-old woman who was eight months pregnant.

On Jan. 8, the 52nd Precinct tweeted a previously released photo of the suspect wanted for attacking and robbing the victim, with red letters across the photo stating "Apprehended." Surveillance video shows the woman attacked and robbed inside the elevator.

"This individual wanted for ROBBERY has been apprehended. Thanks to all involved," the tweet stated. But after repeated inquiries, an unnamed official at Police Headquarters emailed a reply on Jan. 27, stating, "The tweet was posted in error. There are no arrests in connection to the robbery described and the investigation in ongoing."



Photo by David Greene

POLICE MONITORING AND posting news of an alleged assault and robbery suspect at Tracey Towers on Dec. 23 with the words erroneously reported as "Apprehended" was shortly taken down following inquiries from the *Norwood News* seeking an update on the case.

The police said following the release of the case that the "victim entered an elevator with an unknown female individual. The victim and female got into a verbal dispute, which escalated into a physical confrontation. The individual began to punch

the victim about the face, head and torso" before fleeing with the woman's pocketbook with her cash and identification, worth an estimated \$400. The woman refused medical attention.

Police tweeted a photo of the sus-

pect shortly after the incident, describing her as black, 25 to 35 years of age, wearing a red coat and dark pants. The wanted flier in the lobby of Tower 1 has since been torn down.

One resident of the building, who declined to be identified, claimed that there have been several home invasions in the building over the last couple of years. The resident asked, "Why do we have security?" There have been two reported burglaries that occurred in Tracey Towers in 2019, according to the NYPD's digital Crime Map.

Anyone with information in regard to this incident is asked to call CrimeStoppers at (800) 577-TIPS. All calls remain confidential. A \$2500 reward is being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the individual.

In another recent post from the NYPD's 52nd Precinct Twitter feed on Jan. 1, a photo of a suspect wanted for the Oct. 26 knife-point robbery of the Jerome Variety Shop at 3404 Jerome Ave. appeared. The post failed to mention that the suspect had returned on the morning of New Year's to allegedly rob the store a second time.

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Photo courtesy Jerome Gun Hill BID

(L-R) **KLAJD GAZULLI**, owner of Main Street Group Holdings LLC with his colleague, Orville McLaughlin. Gazulli's business can be found at 254 E. Gun Hill Rd. within the Jerome Gun Hill Business Improvement District.

Multi-Service Group at the JGHBID Offers Tax Prep and Insurance to Fit Your Needs

By JEROME GUN HILL BID

Klajd Gazulli opened Main Street Group Holdings LLC at 254 E. Gun Hill Rd. in January 2015. Originally from Albania, Gazulli came to New York in 1993 and settled in Queens. He has been in business in the Bronx for the past few years and just recently expanded to East Hanover, NJ. With a background in retail banking, Gazulli transitioned into the insurance business in 2006 and started tax preparation services in 2015.

Main Street Group Holdings LLC offers a variety of services to local residents and business owners at affordable prices. "We offer the whole tax suite and the whole insurance suite. When it comes to tax and insurance, we have everything," said Gazulli. Main Street Group Holdings LLC is one of the few businesses in the BID that can meet tax and insurance needs for both individuals and corporations. Gazulli and staff offer tax preparation

for individuals and businesses, payroll services, personal and business accounting, as well as personal and business insurance. He and his team, which includes his sister Monika, father Philip, and longtime colleague Orville McLaughlin, take pride in their ability to work with clients to find a solution that fits their budget and their unique needs.

After five years in business in the BID, Gazulli has made himself at home in the community. "I love working with people, I love talking and chatting with different people from different backgrounds. I find that this section is very busy and being located here gives me an opportunity to listen to people's needs and address those needs," said Gazulli.

As a business owner, Gazulli is acutely aware of the importance of having business insurance. His goal for this year is to make more connections in the BID with fellow business

owners to ensure that they have the proper coverage. "Insurance is everything for small business owners. You need to protect yourself, your employees and customers. You need to have the proper insurance in place to protect your business assets," said Gazulli. "It takes you 30 years to build business, but just one accident to ruin it," he said. While he says that "protection comes at a price," Gazulli wants business owners to understand the value of insurance.

"We can always tweak coverages to fit within their budget. We can add and subtract components to make the policy work for you," said Gazulli, who wants to act as a resource for local business owners and encourages his neighbors in the BID to stop by the Main Street Group Holdings LLC office to meet with him.

Main Street Group Holdings LLC is gearing up for tax season and they welcome returning clients and new

clients to file their returns with them this year. Please see current discounts and incentives below:

- No cost up front! Get your taxes done today for zero dollars, the cost of tax preparation will come out of your refund.
- First-time filers at Main Street Group Holdings LLC will receive up to \$100 off tax preparation.
- \$50 for each referral that comes in and files their taxes.
- More details and exclusions apply. Please contact Main Street Group Holdings at (718) 880-7869 for more information.

Editor's Note: As part of its small business support work, the Jerome Gun Hill BID will be running a Merchant Spotlight in the Norwood News once a month to shine a light on the small businesses in our corridor that help make our community special. For more information, find us at jeromegunhillbid.org or on Instagram @jeromegunhillbid.

Beginning 3/1/20: Single Use Plastic Bags are banned in New York State!

Shoppers:

- Remember to always bring reusable bags with you!
- If you forget a reusable bag businesses covered by the ban will charge a 5 cent paper bag fee (this fee will not apply to SNAP or WIC recipients)

Business Owners:

- Civil penalties will be imposed for violations
- Prepare for the ban by switching from plastic to paper bags sooner rather than later and make reusable bags available for purchase at your stores
- To learn more about the New York state Plastic Bag Ban please go online to: on.ny.gov/byobagny
- Please feel free to call our office with any questions:
718-324-4461



Could Cabrera Be Leveraging Legislative Commitment With Congressional Campaigning?

(continued from page 16)

the impending Fordham Landing project in his district prompted such concern.

The prospect of legislation created for the unit—which involves adding a line item to the NYPD budget—was praised by Malavolta.

“Our meeting with Councilman Cabrera was fruitful in soliciting the Bronx Caucus to vote in our favor when the time comes. Since three approached council members in our Bronx Caucus are in favor, Cabrera has reached out to the Speaker of the Council who has agreed to meet with the City Island Civic Association,” wrote Malavolta.

Malavolta’s reference of Johnson’s interest in meeting with the association was initially relayed to her from an email she received from a Gmail address belonging to Cabrera on Dec. 14. “I have good news. The Speaker has agreed to go and meet with the City Island Civic Association. His office will let us know which date works for him,” wrote Cabrera.

The email came the day after Cabrera’s legislative director alerted Malavolta of Cabrera’s intent on drafting legislation.

Cabrera’s method of ingratiation is nothing new. In recent months, Assemblyman Michael Blake and Council Members Ritchie Torres and Ydanis Rodriguez, candidates for the hotly contested 15th Congressional District, have picked up on causes that have no direct impact on the districts they represent but rather the congressional district seat they look to occupy.

“I think that when you’re running for office and you don’t have the resources to do polling, which is very costly ... you’re gonna have to go with your gut and choose hot-button issues. The question is why your sudden concern for this issue which is what you should ask and is it really ambition that drives your concern and that’s what constituents will ask,” said George Artz, a Democratic strategist. “Other times if you’re running for a geographic area that’s much greater

than your current position, you’re going to go into the area trying to get a handle on the issues in the area and put something out that touches on your new district, your potential new district.”

And while the practice of using private emails to communicate city matters is not illegal, it does raise issues with good government that have blasted the use, arguing it does little to maintain a level of transparency government officials should espouse.

“That is a real problem and a real issue,” said Alex Camarda of Reinvent Albany, adding such a practice is complicated when seeking to obtain those emails through a request via the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). “If a government official or an elected official is doing government work, that private email account is subject to FOIL. At the same time, the FOIL Records Officer for the City Council who can access and search government emails...is going to be much harder for them to locate records that are re-

quested on a private account because they don’t know what’s there.”

The method of using private emails on matters related to a legislator’s official public duties has been increasingly adopted in recent years from all levels of government, most notoriously by Mayor Bill de Blasio, who exchanged emails about city business with non-government officials using a private account. “It’s a growing and emerging issue and we don’t believe any elected official should be using a non-governmental device of any kind or account when communicating on government matters,” said Camarda.

McLeveigh said in a statement that the issues Cabrera’s has taken on—the harbor unit and LaGuardia AirTrain project—have an interest in the 14th Council District.

“All Council members are trustees of New York City. Council Member Cabrera is exercising the responsibilities of trusteeship, as is his, and other Council members’ responsibility,” said McLeveigh.

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Blake Gets Backing From 1199SEIU and 32BJ, Mark-Viverito Endorsed by Former Employer

By DAVID CRUZ

In his quest for the 15th Congressional District race, Assemblyman Michael Blake picked up the endorsement of the city's biggest labor unions. Meantime, his rival, former Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito received the endorsement from the Latino Victory Fund (LVF), a progressive political action committee where she once served as interim president.

The two unions, 1199SEIU and 32BJ, endorsed Blake for the South Bronx seat, with 1199SEIU president George Gresham telling the *New York Daily News* that Blake is an "advocate for healthcare, jobs, wages, social justice, and equity for Bronxites."

The union has heavy influence in New York City politics as it has 19,000 members in the district Blake looks to represent on the federal level.

Kyle Bragg, president of 32BJ, also told the *Daily News* that Blake "understands New York City needs to be a place where doormen, cleaners, security officers and all working New Yorkers can live, work and thrive."

Some 9,300 32BJ members live within the district.

"I am deeply honored to earn the endorsement of 1199SEIU and 32BJ SEIU



Images courtesy Facebook campaign/New York City Council Flickr account

ASSEMBLYMAN AND 15TH Congressional District candidate Michael Blake (l) received a boost to his campaign as he was endorsed by 1199SEIU and 32BJ unions. Meantime, former Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito (r) received backing from the Latino Victory Fund.

in my bid to represent New York's 15th Congressional District. We are excited for the sea of purple from SEIU to help us secure victory on June 23 in the South Bronx," said Blake. The endorsement comes as other candidates have

been trumping some endorsements.

"Since 2014, the Latino Victory Fund has fought to increase the representation of Latinos in our political system. As the first Latina to serve as Speaker of the New York City Council,

I understand the importance of having Latino representation at all levels of government, especially in majority Latino districts," said Mark-Viverito. "Today, as I run in a congressional district that has again never been represented by a woman or Latina, I couldn't be more proud to receive the support of an organization like LVF that has worked to break down so many barriers for Latinos in the past.

The group's executive director, Mayra Macias, said Mark-Viverito "has spent her whole career fighting for New York families, first as a grassroots community organizer and then as the New York City Council speaker in one of the highest echelons of public service. Now, she is at the brink of breaking another glass ceiling as she could become the first Latina to represent New York's 15th Congressional District, a district that is over 60 percent Latino. Latino Victory Fund is proud to endorse Melissa Mark-Viverito in this historic campaign for Congress."

The heavily crowded race also includes candidates Councilman Ritchie Torres, Councilman Ruben Diaz Sr., democratic socialist and community organizer Samelys Lopez, and financial counselor Jonathan Ortiz.

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Mosholu-Montefiore Community Center, Inc. is seeking sealed bids for sales and installation of security-related enhancement. Project includes, installation of electronic security system (CCTV) and blast-resistant film or exterior glazing. The community center is located at 3450 De Kalb Ave., Bronx, NY, 10467, to provide materials and labor. Selection criteria will be based on knowledge and experience, references, adherence to work schedule, and cost. All interested firms are required to sign for proposal documents and provides primary contact, telephone, fax, and email address. Specifications and bid requirements can be obtained by contacting Lenorasealey@gmail.com. Bids will be accepted until February 7, 2020 and work will commence by February 14, 2020; to be completed by March 1, 2020.

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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

Social Security Expanded Office Hrs.

Social Security offices in the Bronx will remain open to the public until 4 p.m. on Wednesdays. The nearest Social Security offices from Norwood is located at 2501 Grand Concourse. For more information, call (800) 772-1213.

Recreational Volleyball

Join members of the NYPD, FDNY/EMS, and Community Board 6 every Saturday through April 4 from 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at Aquinas High School, 685 E. 182nd St. (corner of Cambreleng Avenue and Grote Street). For more information or to register, call Rosie at (917) 569-7034, Victor at (917) 603-5600, or email mattersofsports@gmail.com.

Comment on Bus Reroute Plan

The MTA is currently accepting comments for its plan to update the Bronx's bus route network, which is expected to take effect later this year. Comments on the MTA's plan can be submitted online by going to <https://bit.ly/2Zz86E3>.

Heating Assistance

Applications for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) for older adults and low- and middle-income New Yorkers will be accepted by local departments of social services. Eligibility is based on income, household size, and how the home is heated. Residents can apply online at <https://on.ny.gov/2Fn062M> and mail it to NYC DSS/HRA/HEAP, P.O. Box 1401, Church Street Station, New York, NY 10008. For more information, call (212) 331-3126.

Fridays With Fernandez

Assemblywoman Nathalia Fernandez is available for one-on-one meetings each Friday at her district office at 2018 Williamsbridge Rd. Friday dates and times vary. To check times and make an appointment, call (718) 409-0109.

LGBT Scholarship

College scholarships totaling \$10,000 will be awarded to students who are members or

allies of the LGBTQ+ community. Applicants must write two 500-word essays that discuss a challenge they have faced in life, and the historical significance of the Stonewall Inn within the context of the gay rights movement. The deadline is March 1, 2020. Applications can be filled online at <https://bit.ly/2PugZdH>. For questions, contact Eric Vaughan at LGBTQ@schools.nyc.gov.

Naloxone Training

Free trainings on the administration of naloxone, the drug used to reverse opioid overdoses, is available through the Bronx Community Health Network on Mondays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and Wednesdays from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. at 1 Fordham Plaza (excluding holidays). For more information, contact Matthew Carrion, community health worker, at (929) 220-8176 or naloxone@bchnhealth.org.

Financial Literacy Workshops

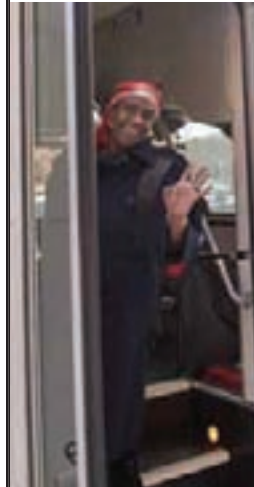
The Pinero Foundation will offer free financial literacy workshops to low income residents via two virtual workshops on Feb. 17 at the following times: money and consequences workshop to build a strong financial foundation at 11 a.m.; a workshop that lets you decide whether college, trade school, or work is a right fit for you. For more information and to register, call (917) 831-4100 or email pinero-foundation@mail.com.

Housing Discrimination

Renters who've been denied a home because of income discrimination can file a complaint online through the Office of the New York Attorney General by visiting <https://ag.ny.gov/source-income-discrimination>. Examples of income discrimination include paying rent through Section 8 vouchers, alimony, child support, foster care subsidies, Supplement Security Income (SSI), or any other type of government assistance. For more information, call the attorney general's New York City office at (800) 771-7755.

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Out & About

Compiled by JUDY NOY

EDITOR'S PICK

Juggling at Jerome Park Library

Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Pl. (near Kingsbridge Road), offers for teens/young adults: Juggling 101: Watch jugglers followed by participant juggling and a juggling ball making workshop, Feb. 13 at 4 p.m. Info: (718) 549-5200.

Onstage

Bronx River Art Center (BRAC), 1087 E. Tremont Ave., presents **Edsel Gomez's Triumvirate**, performing Latin jazz, Jan. 30 at 7 p.m. Suggested donation: \$10/adults; \$5/seniors/students. Info: (718) 589-5819.

Events

Wave Hill, a Bronx oasis at 675 W. 252nd St. in Riverdale, offers **Family Art Projects**: Sleepy Seeds, and Winter Dormancy, to create a variety of masks, Feb. 1 and 2; and Love for Woodland Friends, to create woodland creature sock puppets, Feb. 8 and 9, both in the WH House 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Also scheduled is **Concert: Queen Esther**, featuring a variety of music, Feb. 9 at 2 p.m. (\$30/adults; \$14/ages 8 to 18; \$2 discount/advance purchase). Grounds admission is free until noon Tuesdays and Saturdays all year. Info and a schedule of events including tours and walks: (718) 549-3200.

Exhibits

The Museum of Bronx History, 3266 Bainbridge Ave. (208th Street), presents **A History of the Bronx Latino**, ongoing;

Saturdays 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sundays 1 to 5 p.m. For more information, call (718) 881-8900.

The Bronx Museum, 1040 Grand Concourse, presents **The Life and Times of Alvin Baltrop**, through Feb. 9. The exhibition features photographs of gay culture. Info: (718) 681-6000.

Bronx Council on the Arts presents **The Update**, free exhibition at the Hostos Community College Gallery room C-190, 450 Grand Concourse, Tuesdays through Fridays noon to 6 p.m., through Feb. 26. Info: (718) 518-6728.

Bronx River Art Center (BRAC), 1087 E. Tremont Ave., presents free **25 Years of Project 59: A Retrospective of Ukrainian-American Artist Irina Danilova**, through March 11, Mondays through Fridays noon to 6 p.m., Saturdays noon to 6 p.m. Info: (718) 589-5819.

Library Events

Bronx Library Center, 310 E. Kingsbridge Rd., presents for ages 5 to 12: **STEM Fridays at 4 p.m.**: Jan. 31 and Feb. 7. Adults can attend: **films**: "Loving," Feb. 1 at 2:30 p.m.



Photo courtesy Wave Hill

WAVE HILL HAS scheduled walks for those interested in touring the institution's gardeners growing areas, just one of many events scheduled for February in Wave Hill. See what else is lined up in our Events section.

Moshulu Library, 285 E. 205th St., offers for kids: **Crafty Fridays at 3 p.m.**: (ages 5 to 12): crafts, Jan. 31 and Feb. 7; **Toddler Storytime at 11 a.m.**: (ages 18 to 36 months): stories, songs, fingerplays and crafts, Feb. 3, 6, 10 and 13; and **STEM: Kids Science at 3 p.m.**: (ages 5 to 12): Feb. 4 and 11 (Astronomy).

Families can attend **film**: "The Public," Feb. 8 at 1:30 p.m. Adults can join: **Knitting**: Thursdays at 3 p.m. Info: (718) 882-8239.

NOTE: Items for consideration may be mailed to our office or sent to norwoodnews@norwoodnews.org, and should be received by Feb. 3 for the next publication date of Feb. 14.



Photo courtesy Bronx Historical Society

THE MUSEUM OF Bronx History continues its ongoing tour dubbed the Bronx Latino History Project, dedicated to Latinos who've helped shape the borough's culture. Pictured is Mayaguez Shoe Store, an early Latino-owned business in the Bronx on Brook Avenue that's now occupied by a row of small businesses (see Exhibits for more information).



Photo courtesy Edsel Gómez's Triumvirate

(L-R) ROBERT AMEEN, Edsel Gómez, Rubén Rodríguez make up Edsel Gómez's Triumvirate, which will perform at the Bronx River Art Center (check out Onstage for more information).

Cohen: Expand Right To Counsel Law

(continued from page 1)

and the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition (RTCNYC) at a rally and town hall meeting at the New Settlement Community Center on Jerome Avenue in Mt. Eden. Councilwoman Vanessa Gibson, whose council district she represents was the first to benefit from Right to Counsel, also supports expanding the measure. In 2018, much of Gibson's district experienced the largest rezoning for the Bronx, which sparked fears of displacement.

"Do you know why I'm the first one here?" Cohen asked at the town hall. "Because I support both bills already ... The reason I was so quick to sign on with Right to Counsel is because it works. Evictions are down all across the city."

Data from the city's Department of Investigation (DOI) supports the councilman's statement. Citywide, in FY 2013, only one percent of tenants had an attorney represent them in housing court. That number increased to 30 percent during the last Fiscal Year quarter of 2018, running from April 1 until June 30. The New York City Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) funded legal representation for almost 22,000 tenants during FY 2018 and reports that 84 percent of them won against eviction from landlords, according to an analysis by OCJ.

Intro 1529 mandates the city work with community groups to inform tenants of their right to free legal counsel. According to data published by RTC-NYC, 53 percent of tenants who had a right to free representation weren't aware of it before arriving in court.

The Universal Access to Legal Representation designated \$155 million over five years to fund the initiative. RTCNYC points out that the cost of the program is offset considerably by frivolous cases being thrown out because tenants can challenge the landlords with legal representation.

Intro 1104 will double the income requirement on people seeking legal help in their fight against eviction based on the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Currently the FPL for a single person is \$12,490. For a family of four it's \$25,750. Should the law pass, an individual making \$24,980 would qualify for the right to a free attorney. For a family of four the law would apply to families making less than \$51,500 annually. In addition, Bronxites have to live in one of the following zip codes: 10457, 10467, 10468, 10462, or 10453. Under the proposal, all Bronx residents would qualify for a free attorney should they meet the income eligibility standard.

According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS), 38.8 percent of the total households in the combined neighborhoods of Norwood, Bedford Park, and Fordham North make \$24,999 or less annually. For

those households making less than \$49,999 the percentage rises to 51.3 percent.

Cohen favors the bill that would expand RTC's income eligibility, which could mean that half of Norwood, Bedford Park, and Fordham residents would qualify for RTC.

It's so far worked for Floriberto Galindo, who's part of a group of tenants on a rent strike at 3425 Gates Pl. in Norwood. They are risking eviction for fighting against a landlord they describe as constantly raising the rent and "one of the worst evictors ever." They argue that the landlord keeps hiking up their rent-stabilized apartments through major capital improvement (MCI) filings that do not add up, a claim the management company, The Morgan Group, has consistently denied. MCIs allow landlords to raise the rent, in response to repairs and improvements, beyond the rates approved annually by the Rent Guidelines Board. Galindo, together with the 3425 Gates Place Tenants Association, refuse to be intimidated by threats of evictions for challenging the landlord.

At the town hall, Galindo, speaking in Spanish, expressed gratitude for access to free legal representation. "We have one of the worst landlords, displacers, ever with 59 buildings. [But] we are very happy to have these organizations (CASA, NWBCCC, and RTC-NYC) represent and support our cases," Galindo said.

The expansion of tenant rights is of special concern to senior citizens who are more likely to be low-income, rent-burdened, and on a fixed income. The city projects the population of those 65 years and older will grow by 40 percent by 2040. The Bronx is expected to experience a 56.6 percent growth in senior citizens during that same span.

The final price tag of the two new bills is uncertain. In a telephone interview with the *Norwood News*, Cohen expressed confidence that the bills will pass. "We'll [the City Council] have to work with the mayor's office to find the sweet spot where it'll work with his budget," Cohen said. "It's hard to argue with quantifiable results and hard empirical evidence and that's what we have with [RTC]."

Although the north Bronx is not usually associated with the problems of the poor, the councilman acknowledges that there are "pockets of extreme poverty in Norwood."

"For those without the advantage of legal representation, these laws can give them a tremendous advantage when they face eviction," said Cohen.

Still, the city does face a challenge when drafting this year's budget as funding issues with Medicare happening on the state level are having an impact on the city's budget, which takes effect on July 1.

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