



# NORWOOD NEWS

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## "JASHAWN'S LAW" PASSED AFTER 18 YEARS

*Honors 8-Year-Old Tragically Killed in 2002 Fire*



Photo by José A. Giralt

**A 2002 FIRE** at 3569 DeKalb Avenue in Norwood took the life of Jashawn Parker, aged 8. The building had over 350 building code violations, and a housing court judge had ordered the owner to make the repairs, but they were never completed.

by **DAVID GREENE**

A pair of local, elected officials joined housing advocates and attorneys in taking a bow during a recent virtual discussion, following the passage of

"Jashawn's Law," that establishes deadlines for landlords to make court-ordered repairs to buildings.

State Sen. Robert Jackson joined Assemblyman Jeffrey

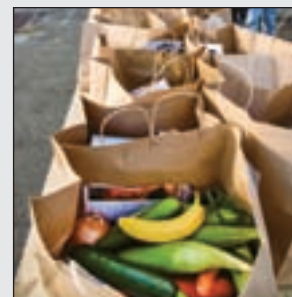
Dinowitz in a Zoom conference call on Monday, Nov. 16, along with officials from the Legal Aid Society and housing advocacy groups, Take Root Justice and the Fordham-Bedford Housing

Corporation.

The bill was put forward by Dinowitz in 2003 in response to the Aug. 6, 2002 blaze at 3569 DeKalb Avenue in Norwood that took the  
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# Elections 2021: Elisa Crespo on the Economy, Housing & Criminal Justice

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

In her campaign to replace incumbent councilman and congressman-elect, Ritchie Torres, on the City Council, Elisa Crespo wants to focus on the issues affecting the residents, more than on her candidacy. Among the most pressing issues, she finds, is the high rate of unemployment.

"We are at Great Depression level [un]employment rates in the Bronx," Crespo told the *Norwood News* in a phone interview. "In some parts of this council district, there's a 30 percent unemployment rate."

Together with her mom and siblings, Crespo, 30, experienced job and housing insecurity growing up in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. "What keeps me up at night, and what I always think about, is how are we going to put people who are unemployed in the Bronx back on a pathway to a middle-class job," she said.

Her solution is a program she describes as a municipal jobs guarantee. The initiative would bring together organized labor, the private sector, and government agencies to not only provide jobs but also the training necessary to fill a wide variety of positions. "We train people and give them vocational and labor skills," she said. "We provide them a pathway to city service jobs with job protection and benefits."

Whether at the federal or local level, Crespo sees the role of government services as a lifeline for many families. "I was raised by a working-class Latina who worked a lot of [low] wage jobs," Crespo said. Section 8 housing assistance, through the federal housing program, allowed her mother to leave an abusive relationship.

Crespo said she appreciates how government services can be a safety net for some people, especially when it comes to housing. "That [Section 8] really saved our lives," she said. "It started a new chapter of our lives."

That new chapter included new responsibilities for Crespo as she helped her mother around the house with paying bills and buying groceries. With two brothers in the household, one older and one younger, she real-



Photo by Miriam Quinones

**ELISA CRESPO IS** running for a seat in the 15th City Council District.

ized she needed to do more to help the family. "It was now just us, and I realized I had to grow up quicker and step up," she said.

While helping her family, Crespo also made higher education a priority in her life by attending John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science with a focus on human rights. Her academic training has led her to serve in her current position as education liaison for Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr. In this capacity, she specializes in helping special needs students who require special education services.

Other candidates in the 15th District race include Oswald Feliz, male state committee member in the 78th Assembly District, Ischia Bravo, district manager for Community Board 7, Latchmi Gopal, a community organizer, John Sanchez, district manager for Community Board 6, Julian Sepulveda, an official at the Department of Education, and Altagracia E. Soldevilla, a community organizer.

Crespo has already bagged a number of endorsements. She received the backing of several Democratic district leaders, along with City Council members, Helen Rosenthal from Manhattan, and Jimmy Van Bramer from Queens.

Along with Dan Padernacht, who is running in the 11th City Council race, she also received the endorsement of Northwest Bronx Democrats, a group which recently endorsed Republican candidate, Gene DeFrancis, in the latest 80th Assembly District race, which he lost.

As for campaign funding, Crespo trails front-runner, Bravo, by less than \$1,000. A Nov. 30 review of the New York City Campaign Fi-

nance Board filings show contributions to Crespo's campaign totaling \$16,707. Meanwhile, Bravo has raised \$17,546. It is too early to draw any meaningful conclusions regarding the June primary, but these figures could give Bravo and Crespo an advantage going into a likely special election sometime in February or March.

If she wins, Crespo will succeed Torres who served two terms representing the city's 15th district. Torres won New York's 15th congressional district race on Nov. 3, becoming the first, openly gay, Latino congressman to do so. His victory will trigger a special election to replace him on the City Council.

The councilman previously made history in November 2013 when he became the first, openly gay candidate to win a prominent political race in the Bronx. Crespo, too, is poised to make history, if elected. She would be the first transgender woman elected as a lawmaker in the Bronx, and in the City Council.

Crespo knows the pain and loss suffered by her community and attributes this to a lack of understanding by others, particularly among law enforcement. Last year, she lost a friend who died inside a restrictive housing cell, more commonly known as solitary confinement, on Rikers Island.

Layleen Xtravaganza Cubilette-Polanco, a trans woman with epilepsy, suffered seizures during her detention which were not supervised regularly by correction officers.

Recently, New York City Public Advocate Jumaane Williams pushed for municipal legislation to improve training of medical professionals in caring for transgender and gender non-conforming patients. His action came in response to an increase in anti-trans violence nationwide, a situation he describes as a "state of crisis." He has also asked the City to officially recognize Nov. 20 as Transgender Day of Remembrance.

For her part, Crespo is clear about not wanting people to judge her on the historic aspect of her candidacy. "I want people to support me for my ideas and not my identity," she said. "In many ways, my story and my struggle is similar to theirs. It's time for regular people to step up and get involved in this [political] process," she said. "This is a new day in the Bronx."

# Noise Complaints Soar in Williamsbridge

By GABRIEL POBLETE

Amid the ongoing restrictions on bar opening hours, one Bronx district is experiencing skyrocketing, loud music complaints. Since moving to Williamsbridge in the upper Bronx, Venus Carey has had to endure unbearably loud music from neighbors' parties. She said it has gotten so bad, at times she and her roommate have resorted to booking a hotel to get some respite.

"It's affecting my productivity," said Carey, 38. "It's affecting my mood. It's affecting my sleep," she added. "If it happens on a weekend, even on a Saturday, I don't want to be awake at 2.30, 3 o'clock in the morning. I would like to be in bed. There's a party bumping next door. I can't do that."

Parties and loud music complaints are surging across the city in recent months, but no other area has seen more complaints than Bronx Community District 12 in the North Bronx. Police at the 47th precinct, which shares boundaries with the district, have seen an increase in loud music and party complaints amid the pandemic, including pop-up parties in people's homes.

The City's 311 service registered 340,607 loud music/party complaints from June through October, a 138 percent increase compared to the same period last year.

Bronx District 12 Manager, George Torres, said he's been getting tons more noise complaints lately, especially those linked to parties and loud music. "I would say that's like 90 percent of the phone calls these days," he said.

Bronx District 12, which includes Williamsbridge, Wakefield, Woodlawn, Baychester and Edenwald, had more than 57,944 complaints from June through October, more than any other district. During the same period last year, the district only had 2,333 complaints related to partying and loud music.

The district might have the most complaints, but it's no exception in the borough. The Bronx sees the lion's share of noise com-

plaints, with over 133,000 loud music/party complaints registered between June and October. Community Board 7, for example, had 11,357, more than double the complaints for the same period last year.

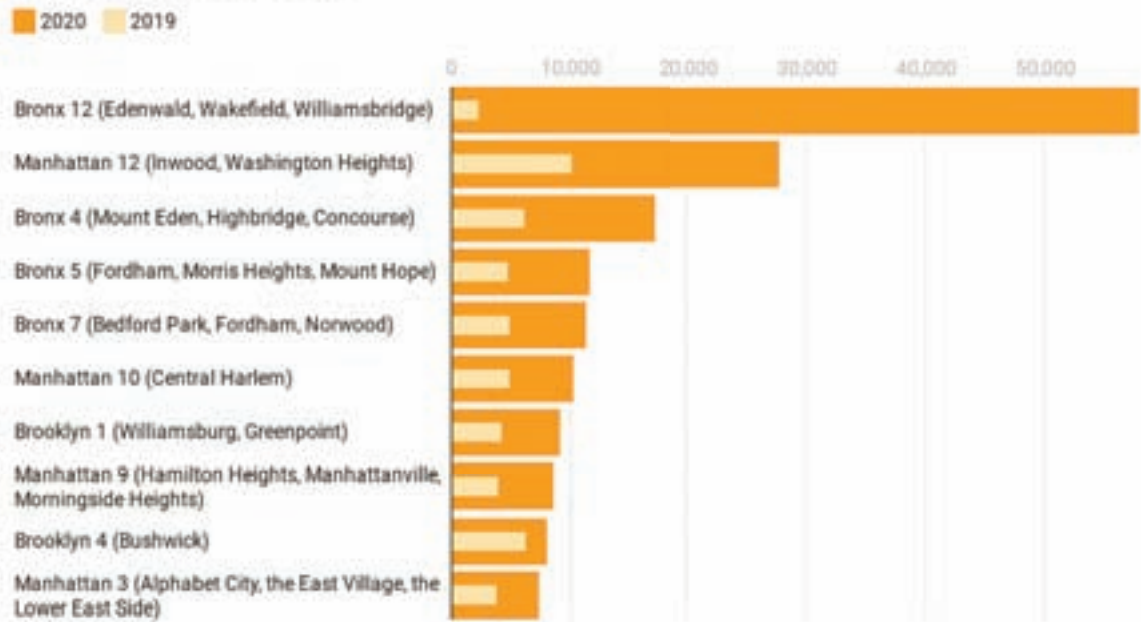
Torres said while noise complaints are common in the summer, now residents are complaining about cars blocking their driveways, double parking prohibiting traffic flow, and loitering because of winter house parties. He said he's heard of promoters reaching out to homeowners, some who might be financially struggling, and asking them to rent out their homes for parties.

He urges all residents experiencing unacceptable noise in the district to call 311, so that, at least, there will be a record of what's going on, which will eventually inform the district's needs statement. In fact, in six out of the top ten expense budget requests, the community board asks that the NYPD equip each patrol vehicle with a sound meter to better monitor noise complaints.

"They're calling 311 because they're frustrated," Torres said of the residents. "These are our

## Community boards with most loud music/party complaints

The 311 complaints are from June through October for both 2020 and 2019. The numbers have been obtained from the city's open data website.



Note: Not all neighborhoods within a community board have been listed

Chart: Gabriel Poblete • Created with Datawrapper



Photo courtesy of the NYPD

**SOUND EQUIPMENT CONFISCATED** from a Bronx house party.

stakeholders. We should be responding to the complaints."

Erik Hernandez, who recently transitioned from commanding officer of the 47th precinct to inspector, said there are significant issues related to parties in private homes which have only ramped up with the pandemic. "It is a legitimate issue where many private homes, whether it's the

summer or the winter, are turned into unauthorized social clubs," he said.

Hernandez said officers have seen people wearing shirts with the word "Security" on them, standing outside private properties frisking people. Because the district is more spread out, and has a significant number of pri-

(continued on next page 14)



# INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By DAVID GREENE



This week, we asked readers if they agree that presidential pardons should be given when a president leaves office. Is it right and just?



"That's a good question. I believe that if you have a lot of proof, proof like they have on this person, Michael Flynn, there's so much proof that this guy didn't do anything wrong, so yeah, I believe in the pardons, even if the president is leaving office. Hey, he still has the ability. He's still the president, yeah."

**Dawn Marie,**  
Indian Village



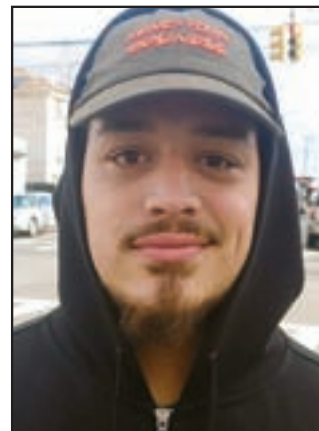
"That's a very interesting question. I don't know if it's just or right because the legal system has a whole bunch of laws that are not just or right, but I will say this. It's a (expletive) up situation. Sorry for the English. One side of me wants to say yes, he can pardon people as he's leaving, but part of me feels like maybe that's my ego saying that. He earned that spot so he can do whatever at the last moment but part of me feels no, that's wrong for the greater good of everybody because he's going to pardon people that might not deserve a pardon, and that might mess things up. Setting up a commission sounds like a nice idea."

**Nicholas Alexander,**  
Norwood



"I don't think [President Donald] Trump should be giving all these pardons that he's been doing. For Michael Flynn, for example, it's totally criminal. He may try to pardon himself or family members, but I believe many of his efforts will be stopped. Besides, he's going to face some legal troubles here in New York City as well. He is not, by any means, invincible."

**Bryan Briggs,**  
Wakefield



"I believe in [President Donald] Trump. I believe that if he felt that the man [Michael Flynn] needed to be pardoned, then there's obviously a reason for it. Granted, there could be a friendship there, but we don't know exactly what went on or what was said. Yes, we know what the FBI says, but can you trust our government officials? Plus, if someone like Trump who is upfront and tells you how it is, and if he felt it was the right thing to do, then it was the right thing to do."

**Jason Rivera,**  
Parkchester



"I believe the president should be able to pardon people, but I don't think he should be allowed to pardon members of his own family. I don't know; maybe a commission could vote on a president's selections for pardons in the future, in order to avoid such controversy."

**Doreen Joseph,**  
Van Nest



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# NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

## Mosholu Tree

### Lighting Event Cancelled

There will be no official, holiday, tree-lighting event in Mosholu Parkway this year, to reduce the risk of COVID-19. The tree lighting company will simply install the lights some time before Dec. 12 at the usual location by the big blue spruce tree on Bainbridge Avenue and Mosholu Parkway. A holiday display, sponsored by Bronx Community Board 7, will also be set up opposite the tree at the Friends of Mosholu Parkland Welcome Garden.

## Senior's Driveway Blocked by Works

Eleanor Ebanks, 80, a senior resident in her 80s who lives with her daughter, Nicolette Ebanks, at Reservoir Place in Norwood is concerned by ongoing works on the street outside her home. She said nobody pre-advised the residents about the works which, it seems, are there to install underground fiber optic cables, and no signs were erected when they first began.

Her driveway has sometimes been blocked by the workers' truck, and she is concerned she may not be able to exit her home, in case of emergency. Another resident on the street, José Diaz, said the works have also generated a lot of dust in the area. *Norwood News* spoke to JEK Communications Inc., the contractors, who said they will move their trucks to let residents out, if asked, and should be finished on Dec. 4.

## CCRB Revising Its Rules

During the November Bronx Community Board 7 Public Safety committee meeting, representatives from the Civilian Complaints Review Board (CCRB) gave a presentation on how the Board manages complaints received from the public following interactions with the NYPD, and encouraged young residents to join its Youth Advisory Council. CCRB is revising its rules in line with changes to the New York City Charter, and recent court decisions, to create rules that will accelerate investigations, make them more transparent, and codify previously-

# Montefiore, Lehman College Address Food Insecurity

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

In the lead up to Thanksgiving, on Nov. 19, Lehman College partnered with the Foodbank of New York and Montefiore Health System for an annual food produce distribution event. About a dozen folding tables were set up inside the students' parking lot at Lehman College, where volunteers filled up paper grocery bags with several thousand pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables, including apples, bananas, corn, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, onions, carrots, and zucchinis.

The produce was delivered directly from the Hunts Point Market that same morning and the bountiful grocery bags were later delivered to 20 different community groups in the Bronx, such as Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice, and Catholic Charities. Others were destined for onward distribution by local elected officials including Councilman and soon-to-be Congressman, Ritchie Torres, State Sen. Jamaal T. Bailey, and Congressman Adriano Espaillat, among others.

One unique aspect of the food distribution event was that there wasn't a turkey in sight. This wasn't an oversight on the organizers' part, however. Instead, it was a concerted effort to promote healthy food choices.

"Montefiore Einstein has a tradition of providing fresh fruit, vegetables, all fresh produce for the Thanksgiving holiday," said Melissa Cebollero, senior director at the office of Community Affairs at Montefiore Health System. "We want to compliment all of the free Thanksgiving turkey giveaways and

give families an opportunity to make healthier side dishes."

A half block south, on Goulden Avenue, students from Lehman College stopped by Gate 5 where they were able to avail of 50 bags of fresh produce combined with non-perishable packaged foods like pasta, oatmeal, and bran flakes.

In 2017, the Herbert H. Lehman Food Bank was formed in response to the growing number of students experiencing food insecurity at the college, and to help them meet their nutritional needs. The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses the term "food security," to describe the status of a household that has "access, by all people, at all times, to enough food for an active, healthy life." A family experiencing difficulties providing this basic amount of food is considered to be experiencing food *insecurity*.

"Nearly 50 percent of Lehman College students experienced some form of food insecurity even before the pandemic," according to a statement from Lehman College. To date, the college food bank has distributed more than 6,800 meals to affected students.

When the coronavirus pandemic hit in March, student requests for food services from the food bank increased by 300 percent. Mary Morfe, 49, has been studying at Lehman for a year, and knows firsthand one of the consequences of living with food insecurity. "I [developed] anemia [during] one of my semesters," Morfe told the *Norwood News*.

Food distribution events like this

one allow Morfe to let her fellow students see the link between healthy eating and doing well academically. "Every student can be more productive if they eat on time, and have the food they need at home," she said. "It's very important."

A survey conducted in March by the student food bank unit found that 86 percent of the college's students "worry about running out of money to buy food" and "44 percent skipped a meal because they could not afford it."

While the number of students facing food insecurity at Lehman may seem stark, there is optimism that their needs can be met through collaborative efforts. Colleen Lutolf is director of media relations at Lehman College, and has praised the various groups which have joined forces to combat student hunger. She referenced the produce bags from Montefiore, along with the food donations from the Food Bank of New York.

In addition, she said, "The SGA [Student Government Association] at Lehman College has been generous enough to donate a \$15 gift card to students so they'll have a complete Thanksgiving meal." It was hoped students could use the gift-card to buy a ham or turkey.

Meanwhile, beyond the Thanksgiving holiday, students like Morfe want to spread the good news, and make sure other classmates know about the general availability of food at the college, through the campus food bank. "I also use the service," Morfe said. "Because this has helped me, I would like to help others."

adopted Board resolutions into law. A public virtual hearing will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020 at 4 p.m. on the proposed new rules. The CCRB was set up by former Mayor of New York City, David Dinkins, who died on Nov. 23.

## CB7 Economic Development Study Produced by NWBCCC

On Tuesday, Nov. 10, the Northwest Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) presented the findings of an economic development study for Community Board 7. Among the outcomes, they found that doctors' offices and restaurants are the most common businesses in the district, that 90 percent of workers in the district do not live in it, that 61 percent of workers are women, compared to 52 percent of

residents who are women, that 27 percent of workers have a bachelor's degree, compared with 17 percent of residents over the age of 25 who have a degree, and that 50 percent of jobs are in the healthcare and social assistance industries.

They also found that 100 percent of all small businesses interviewed needed grants and low-interest loans, 100 percent requested technical assistance, only 6 percent applied for federal PPP loans, 75 percent needed support navigating COVID-19 guidelines, and 60 percent lacked long-term leases.

Among other proposals, the group called for the prioritization of local procurement to grow local business, the passage of commercial rent stabilization and commercial vacancy tax, and the transfer of two publicly

owned lots at Old Fordham Library and Oliver Place to a Bronx Community Land Trust.

## Flooding on Mosholu Parkway

Heavy rainfall along a section of Mosholu Parkway on Monday, Nov. 30 caused about 2 feet of flooding in the area and impacting traffic flow for about four hours. Representatives from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) arrived at the scene to investigate the reason for the flooding.

They found it was due to a combination of factors, including slopes on either side of the parkway, underground materials unsuited to withstand climate change, and a build-up of trash and leaves, preventing the water from draining the area.

## Bronx A.D.A. Honored for Service

Assistant D.A. Christine Scaccia, a Fordham University and St. John's University graduate, was a recipient of the Thomas E. Dewey Medal from the New York City Bar Association during a virtual event on Dec. 1. She has served at the D.A.'s office for nearly three decades, leading numerous long-term investigations to dismantle gangs, drug trafficking and other criminal networks, and bringing justice to many families of homicide victims. Bronx D.A. Darcel Clark said, "Even through the COVID-19 pandemic, as the number of shootings soared, Scaccia's devotion, compassion and exceptional work for the people of the Bronx never faltered."





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# Northwest Bronx Small Businesses: Apply Before Dec. 15 for PPE Micro Grants

By **ARIANA CIPRIANI**

Mosholu Preservation Corporation (MPC) is inviting Bronx small business owners to apply for PPE Micro Grants. The PPE Micro Grant program, made possible by The Robin Hood Foundation, provides direct relief to Bronx small business owners to ensure that their businesses remain compliant and safe for employees and customers.

Fifty grantees will receive \$1,000 in funding to cover the costs of COVID-19-related, personal, protective equipment expenses. Eligible expenses include masks, hand sanitizer, face shields, cleaning equipment, barriers, gloves, signage, and more.

To be eligible for grant funding, businesses must be located in the Northwest Bronx, have a valid business EIN, and have less than 50 employees. Applications are open from now until Dec. 15, 2020 at midnight, and funding will be awarded on a rolling basis until the funds are exhausted.

Please apply online using



Photo by SÍLE MOLONEY

**SMALL BUSINESSES CAN** now apply for PPE Micro Grants made possible by The Robin Hood Foundation.

your phone, computer, or tablet through this link: [rebrand.ly/mpcpe](https://rebrand.ly/mpcpe). Grantees will be notified of funding awards via email by Dec. 30, 2020.

*This opportunity is made possible by Robin Hood, New York City's largest poverty fighting organization.*

*Ariana Cipriani is Program Man-*

*ager at the Jerome Gun Hill BID. For more information about the BID, please follow @jeromegunhillbid on Instagram or head to our website, [www.jeromegunhillbid.org](http://www.jeromegunhillbid.org).*



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## CRIME FILE

By SÍLE MOLONEY


**University Heights  
Machete Robbery**

The NYPD is asking for the public's assistance identifying a man wanted in connection with a robbery that occurred in the 52nd precinct. On Thursday, Oct. 1, at 7:51 a.m., in front of 2359 Jerome Avenue, a 26-year-old male victim was involved in a minor vehicle accident with the suspect. The suspect demanded \$200 from the victim, before displaying a machete, and removing the victim's wallet and cellphone. He then fled southbound on Jerome Avenue. Photos are available at the NYPD.

2020, at around 3 p.m. He is described as male, Asian, approximately 5 feet, 8 inches tall, weighs 160 pounds, has a thin build, has brown eyes, black hair and was last seen wearing a brown coat, black T-shirt, black jeans and red sneakers. A photo of Yaaqob is available at the NYPD.

**Fordham Manor:  
Missing 31-Year-Old**

The NYPD is asking for the public's assistance locating Christopher McKnight, 31, who was reported missing on Thursday, Nov. 19, in the 52nd precinct. McKnight was last seen at his home, at 357 East 193rd Street in the Fordham Manor section of the Bronx, on Sunday, Nov. 1, 2020 at around 1 p.m. He is described as a male, Black, approximately 6 feet, 5 inches tall, weighs 165 pounds, has a thin build, medium complexion, brown eyes, black hair and was last seen wearing eyeglasses. No clothing description was available at the time of his disappearance. A photo of McKnight is

available at the NYPD.

**Fordham Manor:**
**Woman Slashed in Face**

The NYPD is asking for the public's assistance identifying two men wanted for questioning in connection to a robbery that occurred in the 52nd precinct. On Friday, Oct. 30, at around 2 p.m. inside 301 East Kingsbridge Road (Envy Nail Salon), two men approached a 36-year-old woman as she was exiting the store. They proceeded to slash her with a box cutter and remove her purse which contained \$700. They fled on foot northbound on East Kingsbridge Road toward Briggs Avenue. The victim sustained a laceration to her face and was taken to St. Barnabas Hospital in stable condition.

The first man is described as a light-skinned adult, 20 to 30 years of age, is 6 feet tall, weighs 150 pounds, and was last seen wearing a black jacket, a black T-shirt, black jeans,

black sneakers and a black mask. A surveillance photo of the man is available at the NYPD. The second man is described as a dark-skinned adult, 20 to 30 years of age, is 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighs 175 pounds, and was last seen wearing a black sweatshirt, black jeans, brown boots and a black mask.

**Bedford Park Fire**

The FDNY responded to a call received on Sunday, Nov. 22 at 9:59 p.m. regarding a fire which broke out at 2928 Jerome Avenue in the Bedford Park section of the Bronx. All hands i.e. 12 units comprising 60 firefighters responded to the incident. The FDNY confirmed that the fire started in the kitchen of an apartment dwelling located in the six-story building (60 x 80 feet). No hospital transfers were required, there were no injuries arising from the incident, and the fire was brought under control at 10:22 p.m.

**Body Recovered from  
East River**

A pair of NYPD divers recovered the body of a man who was discovered floating in the East River in University Heights on Monday, Nov. 23, at 11:20 a.m. Police responded to a 911 call regarding a human body seen floating in the river at 320 West Fordham Road at Exterior Street, a few hundred yards north of the University Heights Bridge. Officers from the 52nd precinct discovered an unconscious and unresponsive man, approximately 40 to 50 years in age, fully clothed, floating in the waterway at the location.

Police, fire and paramedics raced to the scene believing the victim may have been a jumper from the bridge. Sadly, the incident was quickly determined to be a recovery operation rather than a rescue mission. EMS pronounced the victim deceased at the scene. No visible trauma or no criminality is suspected.

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# Elections 2021: Mino Lora on Justice, Immigration & Meeting the Moment

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

The race to replace Councilman Andrew Cohen in the 11<sup>th</sup> City Council District has widened in recent months with Mino Lora making her announcement to run on Oct. 9.

Lora said her platform is focused on justice for all: racial justice, justice for immigrants, health, economic, housing, education and cultural justice, as well as criminal justice reform.

Announcing her candidacy via a press release, Lora said in October, “We are a community of dreamers and doers who make the Bronx home, and we keep this city running.” She added, “This campaign is fueled by our joy, our pain, and our passion.”

After a month of campaigning, she followed up with a 48-second video message on Nov. 3, in which she spoke to the harsh impact of COVID-19 on the community. “This pandemic continues to make clear who actually rises to the occasion in times of crisis - it’s us, the people,” she said. “We are a community of dreamers and doers, and we keep this city running.”

She continued, “I’m a Latina immigrant. This is not a unique experience in District 11, and it’s precisely why we need our voices heard. This campaign is fueled by our joy, our pain, and our passion. With me, as your councilwoman, this is the fire we’ll bring to City Hall.”

In an interview with the *Norwood News*, Lora, 39, appeared enthusiastic and upbeat about her candidacy. “It’s the first time [I’m] running for office but not the first time fighting for my community,” she said.

Indeed, at the age of 15, Lora lived through Hurricane George when it hit the Dominican Republic in 1998. She said hundreds died and thousands more lost their livelihoods. Speaking at a recent campaign event, she said the experience taught her something fundamental about herself.

“In moments of crisis, I take action,” she said, adding that at that time she organized a food and clothing drive for as many families as she could, and wrote op-eds for the national paper to raise awareness about the hurricane’s impact.

Years later, when COVID hit New York, Lora saw similarities with her previous experience. Speaking at a recent campaign event, she said she organized fund raisers, hand-delivered cash to families in need, and connected undocumented families with her, by then, well-established support network for additional support.

At 19, Lora migrated to the U.S. to study at Manhattanville College in upstate New York. After receiving an undergraduate degree in English Literature & Theatre, she went on to earn a master’s degree in Peace Studies & Conflict Transformation from The Graduate Institute in Connecticut.

Much of the fighting for her community that Lora referenced has been through her work as a theater educator. Based on her belief that theatre-making is an act of joyful resistance, in 2009, with just \$400, she founded the People’s Theatre Project (PTP), a social justice arts organization. Today, the nonprofit operates with a \$1 million budget and employs a staff of 30.

During a recent campaign event, Lora said the idea for the project started during the 2008 recession, and the \$400 she used to launch it, she had saved from waiting tables. She said the project now serves more than 1,000 young people a year.

Its touring company, comprised entirely of immigrant artists of color, creates multidisciplinary, ensemble-based theatre to amplify and humanize the immigrant experience in the United States.

The project also provides English literacy programs, among other initiatives, and in addition to teaching in New York City, Lora said her work has also brought her to South



Photo courtesy of Mino Lora  
**MINO LORA IS** running for City Council in the 11<sup>th</sup> District.

Africa, and to the Dominican Republic with the Obama State Department.

Despite the economic downturn, she said she committed to keeping her staff employed, and got to work telling the community’s stories of hope and resistance through the pandemic.

In her capacity as PTP executive director, she serves on leadership councils at the New York Immigrant Coalition and at the Northern Manhattan Agenda, where she said she advocates for immigrant and student rights at a local, state and federal level.

Her prior experience with fundraising in the arts has helped her launch her candidacy for City Council. She now has the support of 200 donors, and more than \$17,000 in contributions. With city matching funds, she expects to exceed \$100,000 in initial campaign fundraising. She is not accepting any contributions from corporate PACs, the fossil fuel industry, law enforcement unions or real estate developers.

Lora was joined in the race, in early November, by the latest candidate to declare a run, retired NYPD detective, Carlton Berkley. Also running are Eric Dinowitz, a teacher and Bronx Democratic district leader whose father is State Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinow-

itz, environmentalist and tech entrepreneur, Jessica Haller, adjunct professor and social worker, Abigail Martin, lawyer and Bronx Community Board 8 committee chair, Daniel Padernacht and Bronx Democratic district leader and former CB7 member, Marcos Sierra. Dionel Then dropped out of the race in August, endorsing Padernacht as he did so.

Like all City Council members, Cohen is term-limited, and his final term was due to end next June. In August, he was nominated by the Bronx Democratic Party for a Bronx Supreme Court judgeship. He won the seat in the November general election and is scheduled to be sworn in next January.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has yet to announce a date for an 11<sup>th</sup> District special election to replace Cohen, but it is expected to be in February or March 2021. The winner would serve the remaining months of Cohen’s term before running as the incumbent in the Democratic primary next June.

Some Democrats have been critical of Eric Dinowitz’s candidacy, the inference being he may receive preferential treatment from the powerful Bronx Democratic Party, in part because of his father’s influence as a long-time assemblyman, and because the early special election, triggered by Cohen’s judgeship nomination, will likely favor candidates with name recognition.

For his part, Assemblyman Dinowitz told the *Norwood News* in August that neither he, Cohen nor Eric Dinowitz voted on Cohen’s nomination.

Through the first half of 2020, Eric Dinowitz has raised \$73,550 from 311 individual donors and is considered by some as the front-runner, based on successful campaign funding, and given both he and Padernacht have been campaigning since 2018.

For her part, Lora appears undaunted by her opponents’ head starts. She cites imagination and creativity as im-

portant qualities in an elected official. “Imagination is an activist tool,” she said. “It’s ‘super-poderoso,’ (powerful) to imagine something new.”

Lora sees District 11 as rich in religion, race, and class. By emphasizing equity in education, she hopes the Northwest Bronx can set an example. “We have an opportunity in District 11 to model what community building can look like,” Lora said. “We can be a model for the rest of the city, [the] rest of the state.”

Speaking at a recent campaign event, Lora said she lives in the district with her husband and her two kids. “Running for office was not part of my plan but I come to everything in life by asking, ‘Where am I needed?’” she said.

The killing of George Floyd, an African American, by a white policeman in Minneapolis last May proved to be a crucial event for Lora, spurring her decision to run for elected office. “The pain of that moment, seeing the pain of my students was a defining moment for me,” she said, recalling the fervor that resonated around the world in the aftermath of Floyd’s death.

In a later press release, Lora said because systemic oppression and racism are built into every layer of society, that is why the community “needs to elect bold leaders, unafraid to take them [oppression and racism] out at the root.”

Following the victory of President-Elect, Joe Biden, she said, “When we put people first, we win,” adding that the celebration and hope seen in the streets after the win was exactly what people needed.

She said the community deserves to live with dignity and joy. “It’s the same energy we’ll use to name and take on the challenges ahead of us here in the Bronx and New York City, especially when it comes to rebuilding after this pandemic.”

*Sile Moloney provided additional reporting.*



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# Out & About

Compiled by AURÉOLE RIBES

## Events

The first annual **Holiday Display** at the newly reopened Kossuth Playground will take place between Dec. 5 and Jan. 3, and will include a festive tree, polar bear, penguin, snow bear, lights, garland, and snowflake decorations.

A **Veterans' Drive** is being held on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. from Nov. 11 to Dec. 5, or is accepting non-perishable items, brand new clothes, hygiene products, PPE, games, and activities. Call or email for more information: 718-409-0109 or [district80@nyassembly.gov](mailto:district80@nyassembly.gov).

The **Bronx Zoo Holiday Lights** event offers five, lantern-lit safaris to explore: Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America, and the

Ocean, until Jan. 10. Stilt walkers, a holiday tree, an ice carving, hot cocoa, wildlife theatre, and costumed characters also form part of the experience. Tickets for adults are \$34.95 and \$22.95 for kids. Learn more here: <https://bronxzoo.com/holidaylights>

**Family Affair: Winter Wonderland at Home** at the Bronx Museum is an afternoon of festive, wintry, art activities for kids 4 to 12, with parent/caregiver, on Dec. 12, from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Free, recommended art materials will be available for pick up during the museum's open hours, Saturday 12/5, Sunday 12/6, Wednesday 12/9, Thursday 12/10, and Friday 12/11. Visitors must reserve free tickets to attend and to pick up materials. Register here: [www.bronxmuseum.org/events/](http://www.bronxmuseum.org/events/).

A **Holiday Market** will take place on Saturday Dec. 5, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., at 5720 Mosholu Avenue, which will include baked goods, pottery, bath and body products, knitwear, candles, handmade ornaments, jewelry, and beauty products. Social distancing and masks required. Call (917) 952-5872 for more information.

SUNY North Bronx Career Counseling and Outreach Center offers daily **tuition-free services** including job assistance, college, financial aid, resume help, computer training, and job readiness training at 2901 White Plains Road. All classes are currently online, and during the day there are GED and computer literacy programs also. To find out more, call 718-547-1001.

New York Botanical Garden presents the **Holiday Train Show**, where model trains zoom through a gorgeous display of New York landmarks, made with natural materials like bark, acorns, and cinnamon sticks. There is a limited capacity for the show and only patrons, members, and Bronx community partners are eligible to attend.

## Movement

NYC Parks presents **Holiday Hike and Craft** at Van Cortlandt Nature Center (in Van Cortlandt Park) on Dec. 6 from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Join the rangers for a light hike and collect natural materials along the way to create your own crafts. Call (718) 548-0912 or go to <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events> for more information.

**Shape Up NYC** presents seven, weekly walks at Allerton Skatepark, Franz Sigel Park, Van Cortlandt Park, Macombs Dam Park, St Mary's Park, Williamsbridge Oval Park, and Patterson Playground. This free fitness program includes a warm-up and a walking workout in these beautiful Bronx parks. More info on the days and times can be found at: <https://www.nycgovparks.org/programs/recreation/shape-up-nyc>.

Every Monday night, the **Bronx Nomads** host an hour long run / walk for anyone interested in joining the group. The event starts at Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center at 6 p.m. More information can be found on the group's Instagram here: <https://www.instagram.com/bronxnomads/>.

## Noise Complaints Soar in Williamsbridge

(continued from page 3)

ivate, single-family homes, he said the precinct lends itself to more party activity.

The precinct has shared images on its Facebook page of items recovered from house parties. "Our officers confiscated sound equipment and alcohol fit for a nightclub from various locations throughout the 47th Precinct," the Facebook post read.

Other than the complaints, Hernandez said a bigger problem is that such parties have a propensity for violence. However, he added that there's little the department can do without a warrant or an emergency call. To stymie the parties, he said police have been tracking social media posts of upcoming planned private events and have had neighborhood coordination officers

reach out to the homeowners to let them know that such parties are not allowed.

For Carey, she said she's reached out to 311 dozens of times since she moved to Williamsbridge. She now submits complaints through the website because she said it yields more concrete records than any phone calls she makes. However, in general, she's not sure reaching out to 311 leads to much of anything.

"It's so fruitless to try to call 311" she said. "I've had operators on the phone. I've asked them if they can hear the music through the phone, if they can hear the parties through the phone, and a couple of them have said, 'yes,' and I said, 'So, what can I do? You hear this through a phone, so this is clearly a huge problem.' They're like, 'I can submit this claim for you.' It's like talking to a wall, calling 311," she said.



**THE 47TH PRECINCT** shared an image on its Facebook page of confiscated alcohol after one Bronx house party. "Responding to numerous complaints of large house parties, our officers confiscated sound equipment and alcohol fit for a nightclub from various locations throughout the 47th Precinct. Private homes, turned into private night clubs, where promoted parties illegally sell alcohol will not be tolerated," the post read. Photo from the 47th precinct's Facebook page.





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## Letters To The Editor

We reserve the right to edit letters for space, clarity, civility, and accuracy.

### Jules Rubenstein

Jules Rubenstein and I both grew up in the Amalgamated Houses, here in Kingsbridge Heights. He was a year older than me, and we attended different schools after Grade 6 but still, he remained a good friend all these years, and I already miss him. In recent years, Jules was home bound, and had a daytime aide. Sometimes, I would come over with Chinese food in the evening, and we'd talk about everything from politics to country music.

In fact, Jules played the guitar fairly well, and I remember singing the "Wabash Cannonball" with him the lyrics of which he knew as well.

Jules was certainly into politics. He said he was a Republican, although I don't believe he was registered that way with the Board of Elections. He favored Marco Rubio to be the Republican presidential candidate in 2016.

I believe that Jules once traveled up to New Hampshire to cover the presidential primaries; maybe it was 2004, and maybe The News sent him there?

Jules also had a sense of fairness. After General Michael Flynn was forced to resign as National Security Advisor in early 2017, Jules was dismayed. He felt that General Flynn was the right man for the job.

I also remember Jules's mother, Sylvia, quite well. They were a nice family.

Jules was the original "Inquiring Photographer" with the *Norwood News*. He interviewed me once for that column after

Eliot Spitzer had been elected Governor of New York in 2006.

**Paul Birnbaum**  
The Bronx

### St. Brendan's Church

My heart wept for the two lives destroyed on East 206th Street which is no longer in the media. [*Norwood News*: Man Stabbed, Dies, 50-Year-Old Man Arrested on Murder Charges] One was a young, 26-year-old man macheted to death by another 50-year-old man. One man's life is snuffed out while the other will be in the criminal justice system for years to come.

Why? Because both were looking for love and companionship in the wrong places. If they had only looked at the building that abutted the location they were at, on East 206th Street, they would have found love in there! That building, of course, is the beautiful St. Brendan's Church. Inside, they would have found love, peace, companionship, meditation and joy while worshipping the Almighty. They could have spoken to the Church Pastor, Fr. Raul, who would have offered guidance in a spiritual, heavenly manner that is so much more than the empty promises of a dating website.

Even though, this horrible incident is no longer in the news, let us, wonderful people, in this great and special community called Norwood turn it into something beautiful. Make a donation to the local food bank, or simply say a prayer for these two. And if you are not religious, but say a prayer for these two men, rest assured, God will hear your prayers first!

**Richard Marias**



## Stay Healthy in 2021: Enroll in Insurance Today

By **MELISSA CEBOLLERO**

The COVID-19 pandemic brought healthcare into the spotlight this year. If you haven't already done so, take time to enroll in a 2021 health plan through New York State of Health, the state's official marketplace. Open Enrollment is happening now. You can enroll until Dec. 15 for coverage that begins Jan. 1, 2021.

If we talk to our friends, family and neighbors, we can help families get the coverage they need to take care of their health.

### Why use NY State of Health?

The digital marketplace allows anyone to shop and compare quality affordable health plans. Once you make your decision, you can enroll on the site, too! All plans offered through NY State of Health are Qualified Health Plans, meaning they provide essential health benefits or more, and follow established limits on cost-sharing.

### Medicare Recipients

If you have Medicare, you need to review and renew your benefits for the 2021 year, before Dec. 15.

### Need help with the cost of health insurance?

NY State of Health is the only place you can see the options for financial assistance and find out if you qualify. If you meet the requirements for Medicaid, Child Health Plus or

the Essential Plan, due to loss of income/employment or reduced wages, you can enroll all year long. If you are not sure if you qualify for these benefits, our navigators can help you find out. Contact them by visiting [www.montefiore.org/nys-health-benefits-exchange-help](http://www.montefiore.org/nys-health-benefits-exchange-help).

### COVID-19 Health Coverage Enrollment

NY State of Health continues to serve as a safety net during the pandemic. In March 2020, a special enrollment period opened, allowing people to continue their insurance coverage into 2021. Those who needed emergency health coverage won't have to worry about a break in their health insurance or avoid seeking COVID-19 related testing or medical care.

### Need help figuring out what's right for you?

Montefiore Health System and NY State of Health are working together to share this information with the community via webinars to help you select the best coverage for you and your family. Join an upcoming web meeting to connect with local health navigators who can help you with questions and enrollment.

For more information on upcoming virtual events, visit [www.montefiore.org/events](http://www.montefiore.org/events). NY State of Health can be reached at [www.nys-tateofhealth.ny.gov](http://www.nys-tateofhealth.ny.gov) and by phone at 1-855-355-5777.

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## Public and Community Meetings

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the **52nd PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL** meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. The next meeting date is to be confirmed. Meetings are typically held on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at 718-220-5824 for further details.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** committee meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. The next full Board meeting will be held on **Tuesday, Dec. 22 at 6.30 p.m.** Zoom details will be circulated ahead of the meeting. Contact [mirosario@cb.nyc.gov](mailto:mirosario@cb.nyc.gov) to be added to the distribution list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **Bedford Mosholu Community Association** meetings have been held via **ZOOM**. The next meeting will be held virtually on **Wednesday, Jan. 6, 2021 at 8 p.m.** For further details, contact [bedfordmosholu@verizon.net](mailto:bedfordmosholu@verizon.net).



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# “Jashawn’s Law” Passed After 18 Years

(continued from page 1)

life of Jashawn Parker, aged 8, who lived there with his father and brother.

At the time, the building had over 350 building code violations and its owner had been ordered to make repairs by a housing court judge, but those repairs were never made. Explaining the passage of Senate bill 3320 during the call, Jackson said, “It was being blocked by my Republican colleagues in the New York State Senate.” He continued, “They held it up all these years, and now, finally, because in 2019, the Democrats became the majority in the senate, this legislation has passed like many other pieces of legislation.”

Jackson added, “The life of this child should never have ended. I mean, he should never have died as a result of an electrical fire or any other situation regarding life, health and safety, so understanding that this should have been done a long time ago.”

Meanwhile, Dinowitz said John Reilly of the Fordham-Bedford Housing Corporation played a “very major role” in ending the life-threatening conditions at the fire location, once the corporation was appointed as a 7-A administrator of the building and took control of it from the landlord in November 2002.

With the rent payments of residents going back into the building, rather than into the landlord’s pocket, Reilly said, “The conditions in the building were deplorable. There were hundreds of very serious code violations that had been neglected for many years.” He continued, “So, tenants started to see improvements right away.”

According to Reilly, thanks to financing from the City, the building had all its plumbing replaced, the electricity was upgraded, and the building’s leaky roof was replaced. Lead paint violations and other hazards inside individual apartments were also addressed and corrected.

Reilly concluded, “So, it didn’t really need to come to a tragedy to force this to happen. This law will hopefully help avoid this from happening in the future, that repairs can be gotten [to], in a timely manner.”

Jessica Bellinder of the Legal Aid Society said it was critical for housing court judges to be better attuned to the dangers faced by tenants in some buildings. “Having the court recognize that time is of the essence is a really important aspect of this legislation, because what we find often is the court process doesn’t really recognize the urgency that tenants feel.”

Bellinder explained that residents with “really terrible conditions,” such as no heat or running water, active leaks, mold, electrical issues, broken security systems or rodent infestation have few places to turn for help. She said of most residents, “They don’t have a lot of options to just move when the building deteriorates. They need to hold the homeowner accountable to be able to stay in affordable housing, so they need every tool available to force landlords to step up and take re-

sponsibility for their building.”

According to Bellinder the new law also covers harassment by the landlord, illegal evictions and withholding of services.

Greg Baltz of Take Root Justice added, “This law can really make a meaningful difference for tenants living with dangerous conditions. The law, as written, says that a judge can take control of a building away from a landlord who has failed or refused to address conditions that are dangerous to the health, life and safety of the tenants in that building, and those conditions just need to have existed for five days, which is already too long.”

Meanwhile, Josh Stevenson of the West Bronx and Neighborhood Resource Center recalled how former director, Sally Dumford, had spent two years petitioning the court to take over the DeKalb Avenue building, but the landlord kept requesting, and was granted, numerous extensions until Jashawn’s tragic death occurred.

*Norwood News* reported in 2004 how the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition began to help the tenants get an outside administrator appointed to run the building. At that point, they learned that another troubled building, 15-19 West Moshulu Parkway, was connected to the same landlord, as well as to nearly 100 other Bronx buildings.

They began to organize tenants in those buildings, meet with Washington Mutual Bank, the mortgage provider for many of the properties, and to work with the City’s Housing & Preservation Development (HPD) to address the issue. The Coalition and another Bronx nonprofit, the Highbridge Community Life Center, were subsequently sued, and a restraining order was taken out against the groups.

The purpose appeared to be to frighten community organizations from doing their work, and it had the desired chilling effect. The restraining order was subsequently lifted, but before then, the group had been unable to talk to the bank about any building, even those not part of the lawsuit.

The judge involved in the case at the time eventually saw for herself the conditions in the affected buildings and subsequently urged those responsible to take action, saying, “What this court saw has not been forgotten. I will go back [to the buildings]. They better be fixed.”

In 2012, journalists and housing activists were still trying to establish how the City should enforce housing code violations and hold landlords accountable for conditions that put tenants at risk.

A panel discussion was held at Manhattan College that year, organized by the school’s Urban Affairs department, *City Limits* magazine and Jordan Moss, former *Norwood News* editor.

The event followed the investigation into landlord practices and regulations that had been published at the time, in *City Limits*. It comprised a series of stories written by Moss, investigative journalist, Tom Robbins, and a team of students at the CUNY Graduate School of Journal-

ism which focused on wealthy real estate operative, Frank Palazzolo, who had been tied to dozens of dilapidated Bronx buildings over the years, including 3569 DeKalb Avenue. Moss covered the fire story for the *Norwood News* at the time.

The New York Times reported in 2004 how there had been problems ascertaining the ownership of the impacted properties, citing one source who said Palazzolo had carefully covered the methods by which he controlled the properties. *Norwood News* was unable to reach Palazzolo for comment for this story.

The murky intricacies of property dealings continue today among landlords. LLC companies are often registered at the same business address, and some even require tenants to pay their rent through an online portal, rather than via wire transfer, making it more difficult for tenants to see who the final beneficiary of the payment is.

The supposed purpose of financial services regulation, including laws covering tax avoidance and anti-money laundering, which are now commonplace across the world, is to increase transparency, and oblige the final beneficiaries of payments to be make themselves known. The fact that many LLC companies are registered at the same business location, along with the use of online payment portals would appear to go against the spirit and intent of such regulation.

When the *Norwood News* began looking at other buildings linked to Palazzolo, it found some 19,000 violations. In another of his buildings, a 7-year-old boy suffered brain damage from lead paint. “Landlords like this somehow never see the inside of a criminal court,” Moss said, at the time. “Apartments shouldn’t make people sick or scared.”

The issue of substandard housing has come up again and again in the Bronx, making headlines over the years with incidents like those at the Milbank and Ocelet buildings, where developers looking to turn a profit, paid too much for properties they couldn’t afford, or didn’t know how to properly manage.

“It’s pretty easy, if you don’t know what you’re doing, to run a crappy building,” said Gregory Lobo Jost, of the University Neighborhood Housing Program at the 2012 event.

Meanwhile, Harold Shultz, a former official with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), who later worked for the Citizens Housing and Planning Council, said at the event that the problem was not with housing laws, but with how they were enforced or not – through housing court.

The system is so cumbersome and overburdened with cases, he said, that most housing violations are never brought before a judge, and the majority of landlords don’t actually face penalties for breaking the rules.

“You have a system in which the vast bulk of landlords believe, correctly, that there is a very low chance of having to pay a fine, that there really is no one

looking over their shoulder making sure they’re doing the right thing,” he said.

Robbins, who led the *City Limits* investigation and who covered housing for years for the *Village Voice*, agreed. “It’s a pretty useless mechanism, in terms of getting housing justice,” he said of the court system. “It’s where good cases go to die.”

Meanwhile, Bronx property owner, Sandra Erickson, was the one member of the panel representing the landlord’s perspective. While bad landlords do exist, she told the crowd, the majority of property owners maintain their buildings, and any reforms to the city’s housing laws should keep them in mind.

“We do provide a very important service in the city of New York,” she said. “I think it’s important that you don’t hurt the good landlords, overly burdening the ones that are doing the right thing.”

*Norwood News* reported previously that the City has tried other tactics to get bad landlords to act, like HPD’s Alternative Enforcement Program, which cuts through some of the bureaucratic red tape by allowing the agency to go ahead and make emergency repairs on the most distressed buildings, and then bill the landlord for the work.

However, the program only targets the worst property owners, and some housing advocates, like Kerri White, a tenant organizer with the Urban Home-Steady Assistance Board (UHAB) said there needed to be a more comprehensive way to monitor the rest.

One idea was to require landlords to hold a license before they can purchase new properties, which White said could help the City track which owners were buying up distressed buildings, or who had a bad track record when it came to repair violations.

Shultz was skeptical. “Isn’t the real issue: is the building being managed well?” he said at the time. “If the building is not well-managed, they should go after you, whether or not you have a permit.”

In 2020, despite the new “Jashawn’s Law,” it seems concerns still exist about enforcement. Stevenson said at the recent virtual discussion, “One of the things we’re worried about is the potential for property owners to outright refuse to make repairs, citing the economic conditions from the COVID pandemic.”

Nonetheless, those who participated acknowledged that some progress has been made. Dinowitz thanked Sen. Jackson for his support on the bill and said, “And all our advocates here, the work you do really makes a difference in the lives of countless people and it’s much appreciated.” In conclusion, Dinowitz said, “I just want to point out that if Jashawn Parker had lived, he would be 26 years old today, and perhaps even raising his own family. It’s really a tragic loss.”

Former and current *Norwood News* employees contributed reporting to this story.



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