



NORWOOD NEWS

Vol 35, No 7 • PUBLISHED BY MOSHOLU PRESERVATION CORPORATION • APRIL 7-20, 2022

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GIBSON SWORN IN AS 14TH BRONX BP



VANESSA GIBSON GIVES her first address as the first woman and first member of the Black community to hold the office of Bronx Borough President during her swearing in ceremony at Lehman College on Sunday, March 27, 2022.

by **DAVID GREENE**

Surrounded by family and close friends, as well as a large contingent of local elected officials, former District 16 city councilwoman, Vanessa Gibson,

was officially sworn in as the 14th Bronx borough president during a ceremony at her alma mater, Herbert H. Lehman College, in Bedford Park on Sunday, March 27. She is

the first woman and the first member of the Black community to hold the position. Gibson also previously served as assemblywoman for the 77th assembly district.

Deputy Bronx Borough President, Janet Meija-Peguero, took to the stage at the Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, and address-

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NORWOOD NEWS

Vol. 35, No. 7

Norwood News is published
bi-weekly on Thursdays by
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Tenants & Allies Rally to Protect Right to Counsel

By JULIAN NAZAR

On a frigid Monday morning, on March 28, Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA), held a rally in front of Bronx Housing Court, the purpose of which was to sound the alarm on reports that some tenants were reportedly being denied their Right to Counsel (RTC), and to ask the Office of Court Administration (OCA) to stop cases moving forward where tenants were not being given legal representation.

According to its website, CASA's mission is "to protect and maintain affordable and safe housing through collective action." The Right to Counsel law was enacted in 2017 to ensure low-income New Yorkers receive legal representation in housing court. At the time, New York City was the first in the country to offer this protection to tenants.

Randy Dillard, a tenant leader at CASA, and Yoselyn Gomez, a community leader for CASA, were the emcees at the rally. Dillard spoke about the importance of the current moment. "The eviction protections we fought for lapsed in January," Dillard said, referring to the expiration on Jan. 15, of the State moratorium on COVID-19-related residential and commercial evictions, which had been in place throughout the pandemic.

"Now, we have hundreds of thousands of cases moving through the court. We know judges and court staff are overwhelmed by the backlog of cases. We can't expect our legal service representatives to be able to support folks in a meaningful way if they have 40 or 50 cases and sometimes more."

He then shared the demands of the group. "We need these cases to slow down," Dillard said. "No one should lose out on their right to counsel. That's why we are demanding the Office of Administration to send a clear message to court judges to stop putting new cases on the calendar." He also recognized two individuals who were instrumental in the passage of the RTC law: Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine and Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson. In 2014, while serving as city council members, they introduced the RTC legislation.

Levine spoke to the crowd in both English and Spanish, explaining why the developments at Bronx Housing Court were concerning. "As Bronx Housing Court resumes in-person eviction cases, there are over 200,000 eviction cases pending in New York City right now, double the number [from] last year. The number of eviction cases is growing so fast that it has now overwhelmed the legal protection system we put in place. There are tenants to-



Photo by Julian Nazar

YOSELYN GOMEZ FROM Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) introduces herself alongside CASA tenant leader, Randy Dillard, and Manhattan Borough President, Mark Levine, in front of Bronx Housing Court on Monday, March 28, 2022.

day who are not receiving their legally mandated right to counsel in New York City Housing courts."

Levine offered some solutions to address these issues. "Slow down the pace of cases," he said. "Do not allow any case to move forward if the tenant does not have an attorney. The court system has this power. The OCA has this power. We are demanding that the Chief Justice exercise this power to ensure that the legally mandated right to counsel is not violated at this moment when tenants are so vulnerable." Levine concluded his remarks by praising Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson. "There would not be a right to counsel in New York City without Vanessa Gibson," Levine said.

Paulette James, a tenant leader for Flatbush Tenant Coalition, experienced housing court firsthand. Her group, based in Brooklyn, works collectively to build tenant power. She warned the crowd that there would be dire consequences if the RTC law wasn't respected by the OCA. "If you do not uphold the law, you will create the worst homelessness crisis that New York City has ever seen," James said. "If you do not slow down eviction cases and respect tenants' cases, you will drive us out of our homes. You will make thousands of New Yorkers homeless."

Like James, Councilwoman Althea Stevens (C.D. 16) said she had also had experience of having to attend housing court. "I remember sitting there being scared, thinking that me and my daughter were going to be homeless, and having no one to turn to," Stevens said. "This is personal. I will do every-

thing in my power to stand with you."

For her part, City Councilwoman Pierina Sanchez (C.D. 14) shared some of the conversations she had with neighbors in her building surrounding housing court. "I've had neighbors come to me, knock on my door because they know where I live," Sanchez said. "They say, 'Ms. Sanchez, I went to my first appointment, and I did not have an attorney. Miss Sanchez, how come I don't have an attorney?'"

Manhattan City Councilman Shaun Abreu (C.D. 7) later highlighted the burden being placed on legal service providers due to the backlog in cases. Prior to being elected to the city council, Abreu was a tenant rights lawyer. "We're seeing 80 cases for each lawyer," Abreu said. "I had 30 to 40 and I was drowning. Imagine having 80 cases? We also know right now that there's the great resignation of young attorneys. Lawyers are leaving because of how much they're inundated by the capacity and the caseload."

His solution was for the OCA to set an upper limit on the number of housing cases that one judge can put on the calendar at a time.

Andy Jones, staff attorney at Mobilization for Justice, echoed those sentiments. The mission of his organization is to "achieve social justice, prioritizing the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised, or have disabilities." "We are all at max capacity," Jones said. "Nonetheless, the Human Resources Administration has no plan to deliver the necessary funds to hire enough attorneys to meet the demand. The OCA, here, has no plans to slow

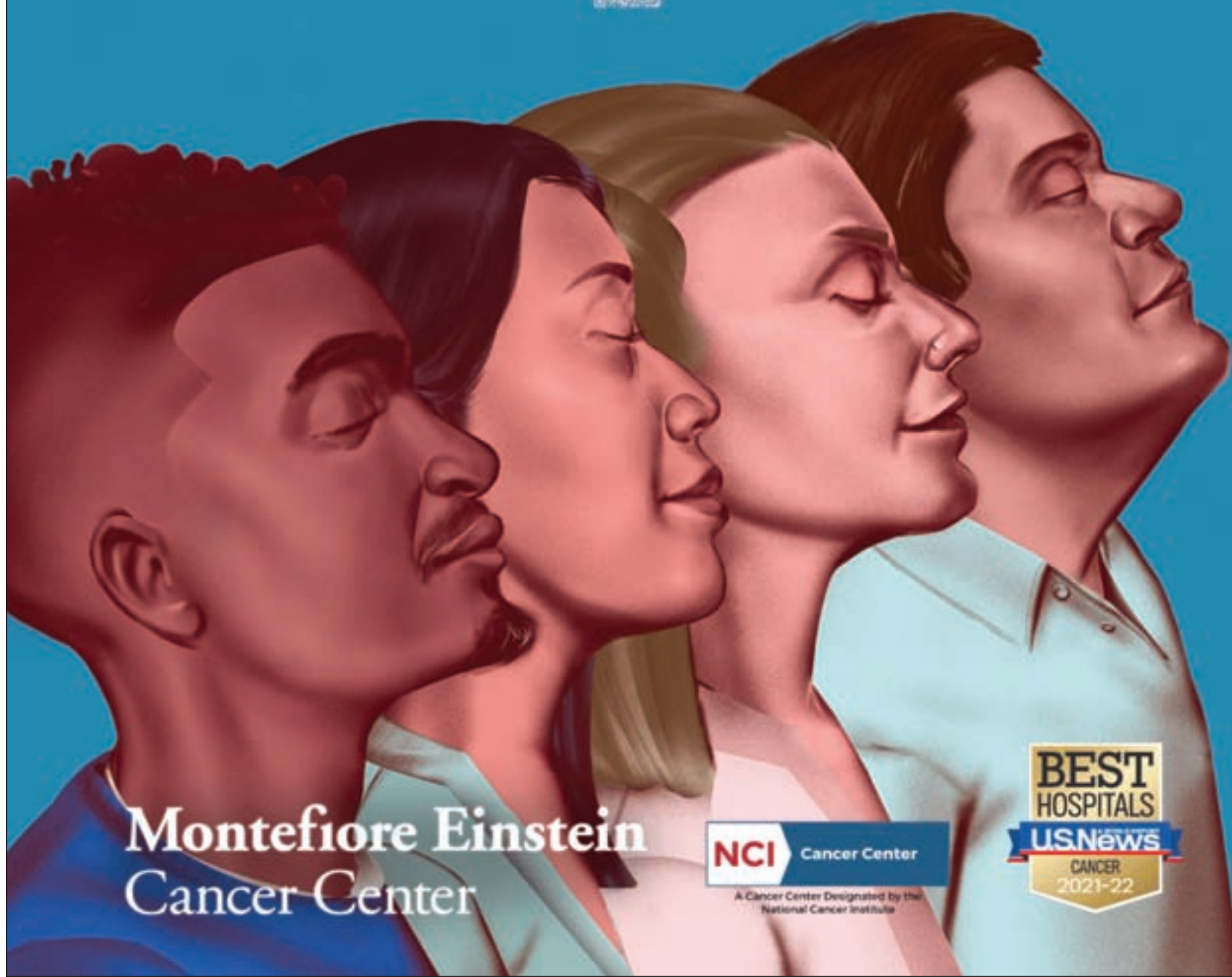
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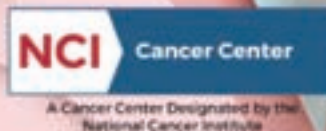
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INQUIRING PHOTOGRAPHER

By **DAVID GREENE**



This week, we asked readers what message it sends to kids about sportsmanship and fair play when professional, “elite,” athletes and performers are given an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination rules, while spectators are required to be vaccinated.



“The mandate should be equal across the board for the players as well as the community. That’s how I feel about it right now. Other than that, it’s crazy! You don’t know what’s going on from one day to the next. Things are changing too rapidly, and we’re not getting clear answers as to what’s going on. Are we taking a health risk by doing this? Is there a health risk out there for all the players as well as the spectators because they’re doing that?”

**Joyce Johnson,
Norwood**

Photo by David Greene



“I think it tells children to be safe at home and to stay at home. I don’t think it’s fair. I think the proper thing to do is stay at home, yeah. I think to be at the proper place at the right time, you’ve got to know what you’re doing. If you’re going to mess up, you might as well mess up the right way. The same rules should apply for everybody. Yes, I think the mayor made the wrong decision. I’m a [Phoenix] Suns’ fan, but if the players wouldn’t get the vaccine, then I wouldn’t go.”

**Henry Moreta,
Parkchester**

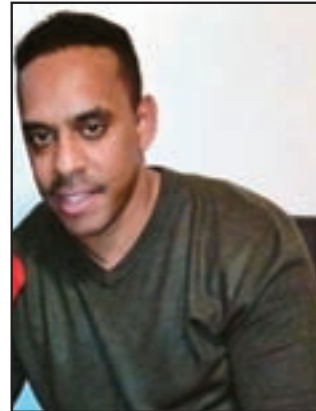
Photo by David Greene



“They want to bring more money into the economy in New York. They’re losing a lot of money and it will bring money back. It doesn’t teach kids anything at all. There’s no fair play; it’s all about money! It’s all about the money - power for dollars. But I’d still go see the Yankees, of course. I’m a Yankee fan. I’m fully vaccinated. I work at the stadium.”

**Dishawn Smith,
Norwood**

Photo by David Greene



“I think for older children who I believe are far more mature and savvy these days than when I was, say, 12 years old - I’m using my daughter as an example - people that generate money and that are extremely gifted and talented are going to receive special privileges in life. Life is not fair, and there are thousands of people that basically were forced to get a vaccine to save their jobs, and many refused and lost their jobs. The law, the way it was set up, was ridiculous because you had visiting players that were unvaccinated that were allowed to play. Meanwhile, a home team player was not allowed to play in the same arena. The law, itself, was flawed from its inception. I think as far as the original question, it gives kids a quick glimpse into the reality of things.”

**Socrates Palmer, Jr.,
Pelham Bay**

Photo courtesy Socrates Palmer, Jr.



“I think that it’s biased, catered directly or indirectly by the mayor [Eric Adams] and the administration by that. What it shows our kids is that it’s good for one but not good for all. So, it creates a divide in the thinking and how they look at the overall social landscape. If you’re an athlete, you’re cool but if you’re a hard-working person, you’re not. It’s an unfair measure that the mayor took, and it confuses children when they look at the judgement aspect. Like what’s right and what’s wrong. Why is it okay for one but not the other?”

**Russell Cheek,
Highbridge**

Photo courtesy Russel Cheek



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Royal Kingbee's Murals Buzz in The Bronx

By JULIAN NAZAR

Maybe you've sometimes exited the Kingsbridge Road subway station on Jerome Avenue and looked across the street in awe at a mural that highlights the best of The Bronx? Or perhaps you've passed by Walton Avenue and East Burnside Avenue in the Mt. Hope section of the borough, and taken a moment to read the messages on the comic, book-esque mural that deals with gentrification? Walking around The Bronx, chances are you've seen one of the murals by Alfredo Bennett, aka, Royal Kingbee.

The muralist completed his latest work, "Invasion of the Colorful Honeycombs," in March. It's on a commercial building on East 133rd Street and Cypress Avenue on the Mott Haven border. He decided his latest mural would be more of a personal piece, representing himself. To that end, he spray-painted giant honeycombs on the walls outside the building in different colors.

Kingbee has been a player in the graffiti game for a while now, having completed around 500 murals to date. His works have appeared on walls in all of New York City's five boroughs, as well as in states like Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Florida.

The artist grew up near Burnside Avenue in the Mt. Hope section of The Bronx and has been drawing since he was in kindergarten. "You know when you're a kid and they make the whole class draw and the best one, they put on the door? Mine was always the best one," he told the *Norwood News*.

In 1988, he first started putting together murals. "I would do my name big or in fifteen different colors in spray paint," Kingbee said. He recalls that at the time his creative influences were the murals he saw along the number 1 subway line. He particularly admired the

artwork that was being created at that time by graffiti artist groups, 156 Crew and Tats Cru.

The origin story behind Kingbee's name is that he was looking for something that was shorter and would read cleaner than Alfredo Bennett. He discovered that "bee" fitted perfectly because the letters "b" and "e" were in his last name. After settling on "bee," the next step was adding something that would make him stand out. "There's only a queen bee," Kingbee said. "I'll be the only king bee."

At first, he would only write "Kbee" on the walls. However, after completing several pieces using this format, the real bee was born. "I tried to leave a mark that people can recognize, because most of the time you can't read graffiti," Kingbee said. "I came up with the iconic bee." Once he had settled on his symbol, he added it to his murals.

Typically, Kingbee says he spends two weeks working on a mural. However, sometimes it will take longer. "I don't push myself to do things too fast," he said. "I take my time." Lately, the graffiti artist has been working with colleague, Rob Velez, on murals in his home borough. Velez considers himself to be Kingbee's apprentice and has worked with him for over a year on 20 different projects.

"It's been a privilege working with maestro," Velez said. On their latest project, Velez said he helped Kingbee with the measurements for the honeycombs. "One thing that maestro loves about me is my numbers game," Velez said. "The hexagon design is something I like. I'm good at that."

To create his murals, Kingbee mostly uses cans of spray paint, which he orders online. He explains that the spray cans he uses contain European paint. Occasionally, he might also need to use

a scaffold. Later, Velez tells *Norwood News* that Kingbee prefers to use the European spray paint brand, Montana Black, because he likes its texture and display.

"In America, they make the paint for the common man; it's watered down," Kingbee said. Referring to the Montana Black brand, he added, "The color palette is large. It's good for pictures because the flash doesn't bounce back; the pressure is good."

Kingbee said the owner of the commercial building on East 133rd Street and Cypress Avenue found him on Instagram and emailed him because he was having problems with vandalism on his walls. To solve the problem, Kingbee proposed covering it over with honeycombs. "When I told him about honeycombs with different colors, he went along with it," the muralist said. "It was a good idea. I showed him a sketch."

The owner liked what he saw and Kingbee was hired to paint the mural on the outside walls of the building. Using his sketch as a reference point, he spent a week designing and spray-painting the honeycombs. The graffiti artist recognizes the impact murals like this one can have on the larger community. "It puts a smile on people's faces, the colors," Kingbee said. "When you drive through here, you say, 'Oh, I was in The Bronx.'" His apprentice has a similar feeling. "Art is a very big thing, a very big expression," Velez said. "A little simple design in a school entrance with bright colors can bring adrenaline to kids."

Fellow Bronx muralist, Kathleen Howie, aka Lady K Fever, said she believes murals can impact the community in other ways too. She recalled one time she was painting on the side of the Bruckner Bar and Grill in 2010. "This tourist from France was there," Fever said. "She was like, 'Oh, it's

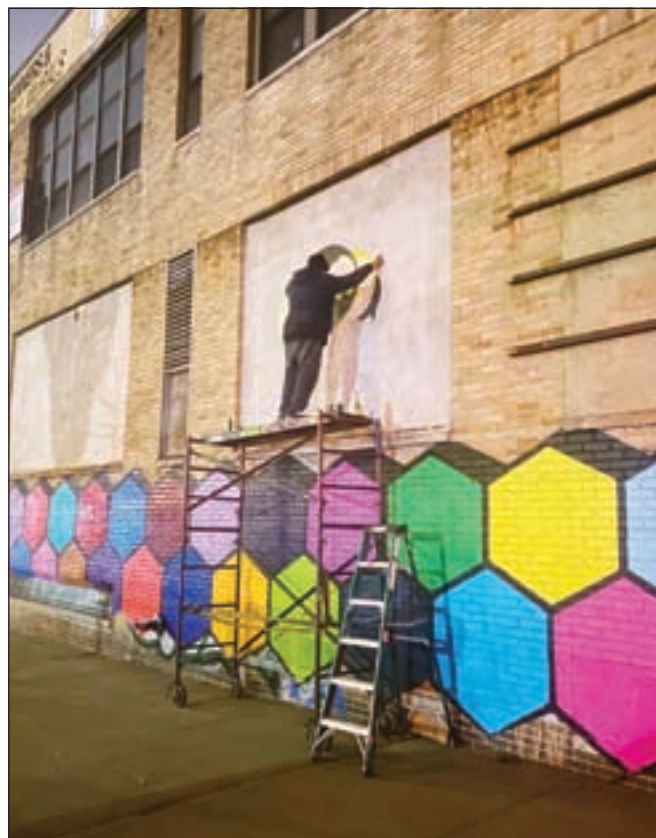


Photo courtesy of Royal Kingbee (<https://www.instagram.com/kingbeeuw/?hl=en>)

MURALIST, ROYAL KINGBEE, works on his latest mural, *Invasion of the Colorful Honeycombs*, located at East 133rd Street and Cypress Avenue on the Mott Haven border in March 2022.

so nice to see artwork because it makes me feel safe. With the murals, it just gives a sense of peacefulness."

Fever has known Kingbee for over 20 years. They met at the Graffiti Hall of Fame in Harlem. According to the website, *atlasobscura.com*, it is a place where up and coming graffiti artists could hone their craft in a safe space. Harlem community leader, Ray "Sting Ray" Rodriguez, dubbed the concrete walls of the Jackie Robinson Educational Complex's schoolyard, located at 106th Street and Park Avenue, "The Graffiti Hall of Fame." The site has been attracting some of the best street artists in the world for more than 30 years.

Fever considers Kingbee to be one of her graffiti brothers. Over the years, she has closely observed his work. "What separates Kingbee is his style," she said. "It's very clean and graphic. His concept with the bees is brilliant. A lot of it now is 'Save the Bees' because bees are [becoming] extinct."

Coincidentally, a new peace memorial mural, with a section dedicated to the life

of graffiti artist, Alfredo Ricardo Oyague, was unveiled on Monday, April 4, in the Soundview section of The Bronx. More than a dozen graffiti artists from as far away as London and Germany had gathered on the day after Ricardo Oyague, 56, aka "Per One" of FX Crew, called on fellow artists to join together to create the peace memorial mural on Close Avenue. Sadly, Ricardo Oyague, who had lived with diabetes, died on Wednesday, March 30. The peace memorial and gathering ultimately transformed into a post-humous tribute to the artist.

Meanwhile, reflecting on how he wants **his** work to be remembered, Kingbee pauses before sharing his dream. "I want my murals to last forever," Kingbee said. "I have murals that have been in Burnside for 20 years. When I'm gone, I want them walls to last forever."

More of Kingbee's work can be viewed on his Instagram page:

<https://www.instagram.com/kingbeeuw/?hl=en>.

**Sile Moloney and David Greene contributed to this story.*

NEWS BRIEFS

By SÍLE MOLONEY

Redistricting Update

Following the 2020 census and subsequent hearings, the Bronx County hearing to discuss the final drafts of the proposed redistricting maps put forward by the State Independent Redistricting Commission was held on Nov. 9, 2021. The final redistricting maps for Assembly, State and Congress prepared by the commission were submitted, on Jan. 3, to the State legislature which, ultimately, did not vote on them. Instead, members voted to approve alternative maps proposed by the Democratic Party, and these were signed off by Gov. Kathy Hochul on Feb. 3.

Republicans filed a lawsuit and on March 31, a judge overruled the legislature's vote as unconstitutional, saying the districts were gerrymandered by Democrats, and ordered new maps to be redrawn. Lawmakers have until April 11 to submit the new maps. On Monday, April 4, the court issued an interim stay, pending appeal, on the judge's March 31 decision, allowing the latest approved maps to remain in place for a limited time, and allowing candidates running for office time to turn in the required petition signatures gathered in their respective districts ahead of the June primaries. As reported, following the latest approved congressional redistricting, Norwood falls out of the 13th congressional district, represented by Rep. Adriano Espaillat, and into the 15th congressional district, represented by Rep. Ritchie Torres.

The reelection campaign for Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (NY-14) announced it has formally presented nearly 5,000 signed petitions to the New York Board of Elections, for the congresswoman's reelection, well exceeding the 1,250 minimum signatures required. The campaign team recently organized joint petitioning events with other elected officials running for reelection, including Bronx State Sen. Gustavo Rivera (S.D. 33) and Bronx Assembly Members Karines Reyes (A.D. 87) and Nathalia Fernández (A.D. 80). New

Tenants & Allies Rally to Protect Right to Counsel

from page 2)

down the number of cases despite numerous pleas from legal services providers. It's fully within all the judge's powers to adjourn the cases."

Atenedoro Gonzalez also spoke, saying that both he and Councilman Oswald Feliz (C.D. 15) were former tenant attorneys. He delivered a message on behalf of Feliz. "Having a lawyer makes the process of applying for government aid and applying for public assistance easier, and the numbers show it," Gonzalez said. "More than 85 percent of tenants who are represented by lawyers were able to keep their homes. Lawyers find ways to help those families afford their homes."

Indeed, according to a 2019 Office of Civil Justice report entitled "Universal Access to Legal Services," 84 percent of households represented in court by lawyers were able to stay in their homes.

One of the last speakers at the rally was Manhattan Councilwoman Carmen De La Rosa (C.D. 10), who vowed to continue fighting for tenants. "We are here to stand in solidarity, but also say that this is a call to action," De La



Photo by Julian Nazar

MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Mark Levine delivers remarks in both English and Spanish in front of Bronx Housing Court on Monday, March 28, 2022.

Rosa said. "Because if you don't stand with tenants, you don't stand with people. We are a city council that responds to the pain of our community. So, we're here and we're going to stand with you. We're going to continue to fight and we're asking this court right here to do right by the tenants that

have built up The Bronx."

The rally concluded with Yoselyn Gomez thanking everyone for attending and leading a chant. "Inquilinos, unidos, jamás serán vencidos! Tenants, united, will never be defeated!"

Norwood News reached out to the Office of Court Administration for comment on the rally, and a spokesperson responded, saying, "We have repeatedly maintained that the inability of Right to Counsel providers, such as LSNYC and Legal Aid, to meet their contractual obligations and to be able to manage their operations, will not adversely affect the functioning of Housing Court. The providers are contracted through New York City's Office of Civil Justice, not the court system. We have been in conversations with OCJ about this continuing issue. Last month, LSNYC declined more than 475 cases in The Bronx. The cases were sent to resolution parts for both parties to begin settlement negotiations. Also, the tsunami of filings [...] predicted have not materialized." Norwood News has contacted both The Legal Aid Society and LSNYC for comment.

York is one of a handful of states that still requires all candidates running for office to file petitions with a minimum number of voter signatures to secure a place on the ballot.

Torres Calls for Investigation into Russian Diplomatic Compound

Two days after Rep. Ritchie Torres (NY-15) called for an investigation into the Russian diplomatic compound, located at 355 W 255th Street in the Riverdale section of the Bronx, on March 22, and amid the ongoing invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the FBI announced, on March 24, that four Russian government employees have been charged in two historical hacking campaigns, targeting critical infrastructure, worldwide. The Department of Justice unsealed two charges on March 24, charging four Russian government employees with attempting, supporting and conducting computer intrusions [hacking] that together, in two separate conspiracies, targeted the global energy sector be-

tween 2012 and 2018.

In total, these hacking campaigns targeted thousands of computers, at hundreds of companies and organizations, in approximately 135 countries. The offenses carry maximum sentences ranging from five to 20 years in prison. Norwood News asked the FBI if any of the four defendants live or have lived at the Russian Diplomatic compound in Riverdale. We did not receive an immediate response.

According to Torres, the Riverdale compound is believed to be home to Russian foreign agents and spies who Torres' office said may be gathering sensitive information on the United States. On March 21, the congressman said he was introducing the "Reveal Risky Business in Russia Act." If passed, it would require U.S. companies to publicly disclose if they have business ties to Russia or any other country that has invaded a sovereign nation. The legislation aims to hold companies accountable for refusing to denounce Russia's invasion of Ukraine,

and to disincentivize countries from engaging in what was described as amoral business practices with oppressive governments.

While at least 400 companies have withdrawn from Russia, according to Yale School for Management, since the invasion of Ukraine, many others are refusing to do so. The bill also requires such companies to report on other companies that do business with the Russian government or the government of another country that has invaded or annexed the territory of another country. We asked the Torres' office about the scope of the bill since there are currently several areas of ongoing conflict around the world which stem from the invasion of independent territories. A representative responded, saying, "It would just be from the point of law enactment, and forward."

Medical Team Donates Feminine Hygiene Products to Ukrainian Women

Montefiore anesthesiologist, Dr. Tracey Straker,

and three Albert Einstein College of Medicine medical students, Cory Ransom, Breckin Horton, and Diana Dominguez-Garcia, in collaboration with The AFYA Foundation, prepared personal care kits, on March 31, for shipment to Ukraine, which include needed, feminine hygiene products for Ukrainian women. Dr. Straker had previously launched a campaign to raise funds and create personal care kits to address the lack of access to feminine hygiene products locally, saying one out of four women struggled to purchase period products in the past year due to lack of income and one in five girls missed school due to a lack of menstrual products. Straker and the students later decided to make a donation worth more than \$17,000 to Ukrainian women in need. "As we close on Women's History Month, I have made the decision to donate the majority of the feminine hygiene kits to female Ukrainian refugees," the doctor said while thanking everyone for their support.

Norwood: Search for Missing 21-Year-Old Woman

By SÍLE MOLONEY

The NYPD is seeking the public's help locating a 21-year-old woman who was reported missing in Norwood. It was reported to police that Gabriella Vargas, 21, of 2160 Walton Avenue in Fordham Heights, was last seen on Tuesday, April 5, at around noon as she was leaving 111 East 210th Street in Norwood.

Vargas is described as female, is around 5 feet, 2 inches tall, weighs around 100 pounds, is Hispanic, and has brown eyes and black hair.

She was last seen wearing a black coat, pink shirt, royal blue pants, and black sneakers. A photo of Vargas is attached.

Anyone with information regarding this missing person is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782). The public can also submit their tips by logging onto the CrimeStoppers website at <https://crimestoppers.nypd-online.org/>. All calls are strictly confidential.

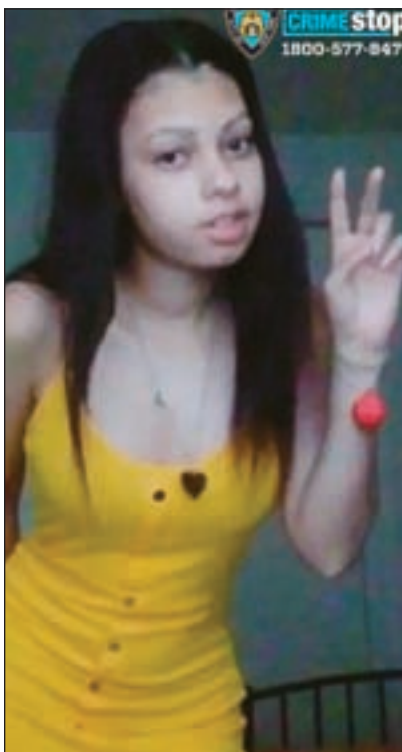


Photo courtesy of the NYPD
GABRIELLA VARGAS, 21, from Fordham Heights was reported missing in Norwood on Tuesday, April 5, 2022.

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Huge Pothole in Middle of Street Finally Fixed

BY DAVID GREENE

A huge pothole that had been doubling as a trash receptacle in the middle of a Jerome Park intersection has finally been fixed, after an official from the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) explained the cause of the delay was a broken “catch basin” that needed to be repaired.

A catch basin is located at the point where a street gutter discharges into a sewer and is designed to catch and retain matter that would not pass readily through the sewer.

The pothole, which first appeared in late November 2021, at the intersection of East 204th Street and Jerome Avenue, gradually expanded to become more crater-like. When *Norwood News* took the initiative to report the issue to the City’s Department of Transportation, the hole had become a traffic hazard, as evidenced by the cones that had been erected around it, preventing Bronxites from driving over the hole due to the potential damage it would cause their vehicles.

DOT said they had no record of a complaint and advised us to log a 311 complaint. A complaint was duly filed with 311 on December 2, and the 311 operator said the problem would be corrected within 15 days. It wasn’t. Construction workers would return at least three more times over the next three months, and on two occasions placed a sheet of metal that covered the hole temporarily, until the catch basin was eventually fixed on March 15.

On March 24, Douglas Auer, an official with the DEP press office told *Norwood News*, “The emergency contractor completed repairs at this location on Tuesday, March 15. Final paving is done, and the roadway is no longer plated.”

Auer was asked what caused the problem to begin with. On March 25, he replied, saying, “The road condition was caused by a collapsed catch basin chute pipe from the basin on the north-east corner.” He added, “The contractor replaced it.”

Moral of the Story? Despite the apathy that is sometimes felt by residents when it comes to their faith in the 311 service, the message appears to be, “If you see something, say something.” Persevere and log a complaint. It might take a while, but you’re guaranteed issues will take even longer to resolve if no 311 complaints are logged.



Photo by David Greene

THE POT HOLE AT the intersection of East 204th Street and Jerome Avenue in Jerome Park continues to grow as seen on Saturday, December 11, 2021.



Photo by David Greene

SOMETIME AFTER THE required 15-day timeframe cited by the City’s 311 service to fix a huge pothole at East 204th Street and Jerome Avenue in Jerome Park, workers examined and temporarily covered the hole with a metal plate as seen on Friday, December 24, 2021.



Photo by David Greene

WORKERS COMPLETE THE needed repairs to a huge pothole at East 204th Street and Jerome Avenue in Jerome Park, and the street was repaved on Tuesday, March 15, 2022.



Photo by Adi Talwar

ON THE AFTERNOON of February 11, 2022, Council Member Eric Dinowitz taking part in a PPE and COVID test kits giveaway at the North West corner of Bainbridge Ave & Van Cortlandt Ave East in the Norwood section of the Bronx.

Dinowitz Gets Top Score on Environment

By **SÍLE MOLONEY**

District 11 City Council Member Eric Dinowitz announced on March 28 that he received a perfect score of 100 on the recently released NYC Council environmental scorecard tracked by The New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV). The scorecard evaluates council members based on their support of environmental issues, and is the NYLCV's main tool to hold elected officials accountable for progress on such issues.

Each council member's score is determined based on their voting and sponsorship records on 13 key environmental bills selected by the NYLCV, and Dinowitz was one of just eight returning members to receive a perfect score. The Bronx received a score of 79, which is four points higher than their previous score, carried by the collective perfect scores of Dinowitz, District 12 Council Member Kevin Riley, and former District 16 council member, now Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson.

Among the bills incorporated in this year's scorecard were the Diesel School Bus Phase Out bill, which requires all school buses subject to NYC school bus contracts to be fully electric by 2035, the Five Borough Comprehensive Resiliency Plan bill, the Building Electrification bill, the Electric Vehicle Charging Stations bill, the Skip the Stuff bill, the Organic Waste Drop Off Sites bill, the Community Recycling Centers bill, and the Notice Requirements for Transportation Projects bill.

Among other environmental-related stories, Norwood News previously reported on the installation of

a new electric charging station in Norwood, on the councilman's stance on a proposed ban on plastic straws and on compost awareness.

Reacting to the news of his perfect score, the councilman said, "I am thrilled to receive a perfect score on the NYLCV's Environmental Scorecard."

He added, "I am committed to doing all that I can to ensure a safer, cleaner and more sustainable future for our children. I appreciate the NYLCV for their commitment to climate justice, and I encourage all of my colleagues to commit to doing the necessary work to protect our future."



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New Law Aims to Prevent Another Twin Parks Tragedy

By JULIAN NAZAR

On a chilly Tuesday morning on March 24, City Councilman Oswald Feliz (C.D. 15) held a press conference at City Hall Park in Manhattan, alongside members of the Twin Parks citywide taskforce to, once again, discuss the importance of fire prevention. The taskforce was created by the speaker of the council, Adrienne Adams, and Feliz and others had previously held a number of press conferences in The Bronx to outline plans to enhance fire safety in the immediate aftermath of the Twin Parks fire tragedy which took place in the Fordham Heights section of The Bronx in early January.

Joining Feliz was Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson, Bronx City Councilwoman Pierina Sanchez (C.D. 14), Queens City Councilwoman Joann Ariola (C.D. 32), Brooklyn City Councilwoman Alexa Aviles (C.D. 38), and Courtney Curd, communications director for Bronx City Councilwoman Amanda Farías (C.D. 18).

The additional press event was, once again, organized to highlight new legislation first drafted by Feliz in January, which aims to prevent future fire tragedies, like the Twin Parks fire, from occurring. As reported, on Sunday, Jan. 9, a massive fire ripped through



Photo by Julian Nazar

CITY COUNCILMAN OSWALD Feliz (C.D. 15) delivers opening remarks during a press conference, alongside members of the Twin Parks citywide taskforce on fire prevention, at City Hall Park in Manhattan on Tuesday, March 24, 2022.

the Twin Parks Northwest housing complex, killing 17 people who were mostly immigrants. U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and others spoke of the tragic loss of life at the time, noting that it was the deadliest fire in New York City in 30 years.

Feliz, in whose district the fire occurred, opened the conference, remembering the tragic day. "That Sunday morning, we saw a fire start due to a malfunctioning space heater," he said.

"Had those self-closing doors been properly functioning, that fire would have been enclosed to the section it started. Smoke would not have inundated the entire 19-story highrise."

To ensure a similar incident doesn't occur again, Feliz said he introduced legislation that creates a stronger system of enforcement when it comes to fire safety. He highlighted four core components of the legislation. The first is that landlords will be given no more than 10

days to address self-closing door violations. Under the current system, landlords have 21 days to fix such issues.

The second component obligates New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to legally re-inspect self-closing door violations to ensure they are corrected. Another component increases fines for landlords who willfully violate laws related to fire safety and self-closing doors. "If landlords willfully, falsely certify that they have cured a self-closing door violation, they face a fine of up to \$1,000," Feliz said. The final component strengthens the definition of self-closing doors to mean a door that fully shuts, and fully latches.

Ariola said she believes the legislation will save the lives of City residents and first responders and was grateful to be a part of the legislative effort. "I am so proud to stand here with these legislators who believe we need to put not party first, but people first," she said. "It is [a] bipartisan legislation. We will work together so that we can really keep this City safe."

Vanessa Gibson called the legislation a step in the right direction. She also spoke about the importance of the recent signing of Mayor Eric Adams' ex-

(continued on page 14)



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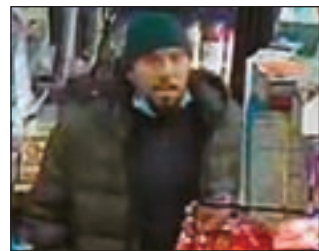
BY SÍLE MOLONEY

**Fordham Heights: 61-Year-Old Bystander Shot Dead**

A 61-year-old female bystander was shot dead in crossfire amid a dispute among a group of young men in Fordham Heights on Monday, April 4. Police said at around 7:05 p.m., officers responded to numerous calls regarding a person who had been shot outside a grocery store at 164 East 188th Street, between Creston Avenue and the Grand Concourse. Upon arrival, they found the victim bleeding heavily from a gunshot wound to the back.

Police requested EMS assistance, applied quick-clot bandages to the victim's injury, and performed CPR. EMS transported the victim to St. Barnabas Hospital where she was pronounced deceased. Police said they believe two groups of men were involved in a dispute at the location, involving multiple guns, and one gun was fired in the direction of the Grand Concourse, striking the victim. The investigation is ongoing, and po-

lice have appealed to the public for assistance.

**Fordham Heights: Man Slashes Woman in Face**

The NYPD is asking for the public's help locating the unidentified man seen in the accompanying photo who is sought in connection to an assault that occurred in Fordham Heights. According to police, on Wednesday, March 30, at 10:55 p.m. inside Fordham Road subway station, the victim, a 45-year-old woman, got involved in a verbal dispute with the man who produced a knife, slashed her in the face, and then fled the scene. The victim was transported in stable condi-

tion by EMS to St. Barnabas Hospital, where she was treated for a laceration. The photo shows the man inside a bodega located at 221 East 188th Street in Fordham Heights, after the incident.

Fordham Manor: Teen Assaulted by Gang of Three

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying the three people seen in the top right accompanying photo who are sought in connection to a robbery and assault in Fordham Manor. Police said on Tuesday, March 15, at around 3:28 p.m., in front of 2654 Valentine Avenue, it was reported that a 13-year-old girl was approached from behind by three people, two male and one female. The female allegedly began kicking and punching the victim multiple times in the face, while the two males allegedly kicked her in her stomach, removed her sneakers and cellphone, and later fled on foot. The victim refused medical attention at the scene. The assailants are described as being

between 16 and 18 years of age. Photos of the three were obtained from the incident location.

**Jerome Park: 16-Year-Old Assaulted, Robbed**

The NYPD is asking for the public's help identifying the person seen in the accompanying photo, right, who is sought for questioning in connection to a robbery that occurred in Jerome Park at Mosholu Parkway subway station (number 4 line). Police said on Thursday, March 17, at around 2:55 p.m., at the station, a man approached a 16-year-old male youth from behind on a staircase between the mezzanine and northbound 4 train platform. He placed the victim in a chokehold and simulated a firearm in his jacket pocket be-

fore forcibly removing the victim's cellphone from his pants pocket. The assailant then fled to the southbound platform of the subway station. The victim suffered minor injuries and did not require medical attention at the scene. The assailant is described as male and has a dark complexion. He was last seen wearing a dark-colored, hooded jacket, light colored pants, and dark colored sneakers.



Anyone with information regarding these incidents is asked to call the NYPD's Crime Stoppers Hotline at 1-800-577-TIPS (8477) or for Spanish, 1-888-57-PISTA (74782).

St. Brendan Student Instigates Support for Ukraine

By JOSÉ A. GIRALT

A group of almost 200 students at St. Brendan School in Norwood helped unveil a mural in support of the people in, and fleeing, Ukraine, a country which has been under attack from Russian troops since Feb. 24, causing the greatest displacement of refugees since World War II. So far, it has resulted in "five weeks of bombardment, thousands of deaths in ruined cities, and the displacement of more than 10 million people inside Ukraine and beyond" according to a report by BBC News.

The steady stream of images of the destruction in Ukraine has moved many Americans to ask how they can help. Kevin Corraj, 13, a St. Brendan student, was among those who viewed the photographs and video reports and was moved to act. He said he remembers coverage of one aspect of the war as being especially heartbreaking. "There was one thing that really struck my heart," the teen said. "It was the mass graves that I was seeing. It was so devastating to see all these people that were now killed because of the invasion and their bodies thrown in a mass grave. It made me feel terrible for them."

The eight-grader wondered what he

could do. After initial discussions with his teacher, Mr. Bond, the idea of a mural, comprising paper cut-outs of hands in the blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag took shape. Once the principal approved the project, it became more inclusive and other students were invited to contribute enough hands to cover one wall of the school gymnasium. The students also wrote words of support on the paper cut-out hands.

The hands are just one visual representation of the unity and support for Ukraine at the school. Corraj, his teacher, and the principal agreed that the school could also help raising funds.

Michele Pasquale has been associated with St. Brendan School for 20 years, the last 18 as principal. She explained how "dress down days" at the school were identified as opportunities to collect funds to support Ukrainians. "When we do a dress down day, we normally ask for donations. So, we thought, 'Let's make this a bigger project.' So now, all of our dress down and other donations that we collect are all going to go to Ukraine, right now."

"Dress down days" can be exciting for the students at the Catholic school.

Pasquale explained, "Normally, the children wear uniforms, so a dress down day can be a very big deal because they get to wear their own clothes. So, when we support a good cause [like] Ukraine at this point, we ask them to bring in a donation. We say two dollars, but if they can bring in a dollar [or] they bring in 50 cents, or [even if] some of them can't bring in [any money] it's ok. We're all just showing solidarity."

At the ceremony marking the unveiling of the mural on Monday, a banner showed that \$1,039 had been collected for the cause. By Wednesday, it had increased \$1,083. By Thursday, the students' donations had been matched with a further \$1,000 from Deacon Paul Hveem and his wife from St. Brendan Church.

Asked how the money will be used to help Ukrainians, Pasquale responded in an email, writing, "We are working with the Archdiocese of NY to connect with a charity that is working with Ukrainian families that are now in Poland."

Before a prayer service at the ceremony on Monday, superintendent for Catholic schools for the Archdiocese of New York, Michael J. Deegan, reminded the students of the impact their help is having at a local level. "The reason I'm here [at St. Brendan is]... I want to let you know that what you're doing today is happening in 170 Catholic schools all over the Archdiocese of New York. That's 60,000 children and teachers all praying for the same thing, for peace in



Photo by José A. Giralt

ST. BRENDAN SCHOOL student, Kevin Corraj, 13, sits in the school gymnasium in front of a mural comprised of paper cut outs of hands in blue and yellow in support of the people of Ukraine on Monday, March 28, 2022. Corraj came up with the idea, together with a collection of donations with the help of his fellow students, to help Ukrainians impacted by the recent invasion of their country by Russia.

Ukraine" he said. "You know, you're a part of something bigger than yourselves."

For his part, Corraj, who has attended the school since second grade, expressed appreciation for all the support this project has received. "I feel grateful that the Archdiocese approved this idea to represent my family and St. Brendan School," he said. "I'm proud knowing that I've helped Ukraine as much as I can, and I made a change in the world. No matter how small it was, I did make as much of a change as I could."



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Letters To The Editor

Editor's Note: We reserve the right to edit letters for space, clarity, civility and accuracy.

American Choice and Innovation Online Act May Hurt Small Businesses

I am the owner of AI Rides LLC, a Personal Electric Vehicle Repair and Sales Shop, located in the South Bronx off Bruckner Boulevard on 132nd Street and St. Ann's Avenue. I became the owner of this business in August 2021 and have since been met with open arms and flowing traffic.

My business is not located on any store front, so all my business is done by appointment only. The only way that my business can be found online currently is through Google Map searches for personal electric vehicle and bike repairs. I am concerned that a draft congressional bill, the *American Choice and Innovation Online Act*, may negatively impact upon my small business. It has the potential to put an end to any growth of my small business and many others like it that cannot afford store fronts or to pay for large ads, thereby putting them at the forefront of Google searches.

The customers I receive via the internet keep my business alive and running. Passing this Act in Congress will work against everything I've been working hard to build.

I understand both the House and the Senate are considering passing this bill, which would not allow Google searches to contain Google Maps as part of the results. Since the Senate Majority Leader is our one and only, U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer, I strongly urge him to consider the devastating impact it could have on small businesses like mine.

New York City is only just now recovering from the pandemic. I think we should reconsider doing anything, even inadvertently, that may hurt small businesses in New York City.

Samuel Pacheco
Mott Haven

NYC Transit President Should Have Come from In-House

The appointment by MTA Chairman Janno Lieber of former Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation, Richard Davey, to serve as the next NYC Transit President is disappointing. The job requires a detailed knowledge of the agency and navigating the difficult political landscape of City Hall and Albany. The portfolio also includes \$40 billion worth of NYC Transit bus subway and Staten Island Railway capital projects within the MTA's \$54 billion 2020-2024 Five Year Capital Plan. There is little time for on-the-job training to run the nation's largest subway and bus system.

Any good organization develops in-house talent by promoting from within. It will take an outsider such as Davey many months to come up to speed in understanding such a complex system and opera-

tions.

Just like many of his predecessors, brought in from the outside, watch how he will depart within a few years for the greener pastures of a higher salary at another transit agency, consulting firm, or falls out of favor with the current governor and is asked to leave.

Why didn't Lieber have confidence in the ability of someone from within NYC Transit to fill this position? It is an insult to the hard-working, current NYC Transit management team, the 55,000 employees, and the more than 5 million pre COVID-19 transit riders, not to have appointed someone from within NYC Transit for this role.

Larry Penner
Great Neck

Adams, Just Another Politician

Mayor Eric Adams seems to have the problem of many election winners. Once taking office, he turns into a politician. Suddenly, the skepticism he had for the Medicare Advantage Plan, his predecessor tried to saddle City retirees with, disappeared. He welcomed the thought of an extra \$600 million in his budget. Never mind that it is only a fraction of the proposed \$98.5 billion budget.

Now, he's decided that the vaccine mandate that he originally insisted applied to everyone, will not apply to athletes and other entertainers. His "reasoning" is that because it doesn't apply to visiting teams' players, it should not apply to the city's teams' players. Of course, the solution is to expand it to the visiting players as well. I assume the reason Adams' predecessor did not do that was because he had trouble doing anything right. But what's Adams' excuse?

It's been reported that if the mandate had not been lifted, one player who would have been affected is the Yankees' Aaron Judge. This doesn't surprise me. I remember when I googled the at bat where Judge broke his hand. I watched it three times because it was hard to believe what I was seeing. Judge's response to an inside pitch was not to get out of the way. Instead, he swung at the pitch and hit it not with the bat, but with his hand. Add to this all the times I've seen Judge strike out taking a fastball down the middle or swinging at a pitch way out of the strike zone, and it doesn't surprise me that he's too stupid to get the vaccine. But if owners were smart, they'd suspend, without pay, all players without a legitimate medical reason who refuse to get vaccinated.

Considering that the firing of non-celebrity employees who refuse to be vaccinated has withstood court challenges, I don't see ballplayers doing any better legally. But it's been reported that the Yankees are considering offering Judge a multi-year contract extension. Considering that in his five, full seasons, Judge has only had two in which he did not miss serious playing time due to injuries, giving him anything more than a one-year contract would make Yankee management just as dumb as Judge.

Richard Warren,
Van Cortlandt Village

New Law Aims to Prevent Another Twin Parks Tragedy

(continued from page 10)

ecutive order 12. On March 20, Adams signed the order which, among other things, will increase collaboration between FDNY and HPD inspectors.

"It is often the case that agencies work in silos," Gibson said. "We need to make sure that the information [regarding safety hazards] is being shared on one database. We are also making sure that agencies and landlords provide information on evacuation procedures and fire escape information in multiple languages because we have to make sure tenants know what to do in the event of a fire."

Gibson concluded by thanking New Yorkers. "New Yorkers are resilient and tough," Gibson said. "During times of challenge, we step up. New Yorkers stood up in a major way. As the Bronx Borough President, I am grateful."

For her part, Sanchez thanked Gibson for her tireless efforts in helping all those affected by the Twins Park fire. She then pointed out the culpability of landlords in such situations. "The fire at Twin Parks Northwest shows that there is negligence, and that landlords have impacted the lives of New Yorkers," Sanchez said. "The City already requires self-closing doors, but landlords have not taken seriously the obligation to protect our residents."

Aviles went one step further. She delivered a direct message to landlords in the City. "We are here to tell you that we will hold you accountable for doing the job, for having the privilege of having property and having renters, to make sure that you provide the safety that is expected of you," she said. "That is part of that responsibility of owning property."

As reported, a \$3 billion class action lawsuit has been filed by Twin Parks tenants against the building's landlord, Bronx Park Phase III Preservation LLC, former Mayor Bill de Blasio, and the City of New York, since the building is part of the City's public housing network, and home to 875 public housing residents.

Aviles later stressed the significance of having conversations with family members about what to do in the case of emergency. "These are conversations, while they feel funny and weird, we need to have with our children," she said. "We need to remind them: Where do they go when this happens? What do they do? It is a fundamental conversation that absolutely saves lives."

Speaking on behalf of Farias, Curd argued for more government action on safety prevention in residential buildings. Having gone door-to-door in many of the buildings in her district, Curd said Farias has seen firsthand their shortcomings in terms of safety. "It is clear that serious investments need to be made to keep residents safe," Curd said. "This is the case for too many communities in this City and that is why legislation is absolutely necessary."

Feliz echoed those sentiments in his final remarks. "We have to build a system that protects our families," he said. "That is exactly what we are doing today. Designing a system that makes sure that our landlords are taking self-closing doors and fire safety violations seriously and those that fail to do so are quickly held accountable."

**Sile Moloney contributed to this story.*



Photo courtesy of Flickr user reivax, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/reivax/246687040/>, CC BY-SA 2.0

THE VERNON C. BAIN Correctional Center (VCBC) on September 4, 2006

Opinion

BY EDWIN SANTANA

The Vernon C. Bain Center, also known as “The Boat,” is perhaps the only floating jail in the country. Advocates have equated it to a slave ship. It’s an extension of Rikers Island. I know both The Boat and Rikers Island well, since I’ve been detained at both places, and I know they both deserve to be a chapter in the history books and not part of anyone’s present.

The Boat opened in 1992 to make room for the ballooning population held pre-trial at the height of mass incarceration. Thirty years later, it’s still in use, even with the jail population at a fraction of what it was back then. With a plan in place to reduce NYC’s jail population to 3,300 people by 2027, and to establish four, borough-based facilities, while closing all other NYC jails, The Boat is set to see its last days, along with the Rikers Island jails.

A broad coalition of advocates, faith leaders, service providers, and grassroots organizations, along with the people most directly impacted by incarceration, have spoken clearly that the time is now to advance this plan. Our primary goals are to reduce incarceration, improve conditions of confinement, and redistribute the funds that have so long been used to operate a brutal jail system. We need a new way of thinking about people’s rights when they enter our courts.

Maybe the most important reason to close The Boat, along with the ten jails on Rikers, is that they are built to separate people from justice. In a very real sense, a boat is like an island. You have to leave solid ground to get to it, and when you’re there, you’re not part of the mainland. I got the feeling it was just a holding facility, only they wouldn’t tell me where I was going next. I was kept in a cell by myself for two days. I was so alone, with no human interaction, that I could feel the boat rocking. I eventually ended up at Rikers while waiting for my case to be adjudicated.

Why the Vernon C. Bain Center Should Close

Because they’re so isolated, both The Boat and Rikers, effectively separate people from the courts, and any chance of a just handling of their cases. Almost every jail in the country is close to the court associated with it, for good reason. When I was arrested in June 2009 in Bushwick, I was taken to The Boat from Precinct 104, and I wasn’t the only one going from this boat in The Bronx to Brooklyn, Queens, or Manhattan.

Like thousands of other people detained there, I had to wake up at 4 a.m. on my court dates to be bussed to the borough where my case was. I think now about how many millions of dollars were wasted on transit alone. Having one jail in The Bronx that is far more accessible, instead of a makeshift floating jail and an island penal colony in the Long Island Sound, is one way of eliminating this waste of time and money and reconnecting people to due process.

Another key connection between Rikers and The Boat is the general corruption and dysfunction they both breed, by being out of sight and out of mind for most New Yorkers. When I was there, two officers on The Boat were open gang members, flashing signs to everyone. I watched officers do nothing to intervene when an old man was beaten.

As New York City moves to a jail system that is both smaller and less isolated, we must ensure that the way DOC operates is brought out of the shadows as well. That starts with transparency, like publishing disciplinary records for correction officers, and we must also continue with accountability, like disciplining officers who abuse their power, and firing the ones in leadership positions who don’t hold their officers and staff accountable.

The Boat and Rikers are also notoriously ill-equipped to deal with the medical and mental health needs of the people detained there. I was dealing with many mental health issues during my detention,

which they responded to by medicating me heavily for my time there. I didn’t shake the medication until a good two years later, when I was upstate at Franklin Correctional Facility.

The unfortunate death of Stephen Khadu on The Boat this past September reminds us that medical care there is still deficient. We need replacement facilities with more accessible and well-designed clinic areas, and we also need oversight to ensure the detained people receive quality care. At the same time, we need to invest in meeting people’s mental health needs before they enter the court system or engage with police, as laid out in the NYC Roadmap for Mental Health Resources and Diversion.

Both Rikers and the Boat are filled with people who have been failed by our social safety net, who are then subjected to conditions that no human being should have to endure. It’s time to put them out of existence.

Edwin Santana is a community organizer at Freedom Agenda, a member-led project, dedicated to organizing people and communities directly impacted by incarceration to achieve decarceration and system transformation. Santana writes from his experience about why the Vernon C. Bain Center “VCBC” aka “The Boat” needs to be closed as part of the plan to close Rikers Island.

Editor’s Note: The Vernon C. Bain Correctional Center (VCBC) is an 800-bed, jail barge used to hold inmates for the New York City Department of Corrections. The barge is anchored off The Bronx’s southern shore, across from Rikers Island, near Hunts Point. It was built for \$161 million at Avondale Shipyard in Louisiana, along the Mississippi River near New Orleans, and brought to New York in 1992 to reduce overcrowding in the island’s land-bound buildings for a lower price. Nicknamed “The Boat,” by prison staff and inmates, it is designed to handle inmates from medium to maximum-security in 16 dormitories and 100 cells.

Out & About

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY

EVENTS

The Orchid Show: Jeff Leatham's Kaleidoscope, returns to The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) from Feb. 26 through May 1. Lifestyle icon and floral designer to the stars, Leatham returns with dazzling creations, transforming each gallery of the exhibition at NYBG, located at 2900 Southern Blvd., into a different color experience, like the turn of a kaleidoscope. On select Fridays and Saturdays in March and April, adults, 21 and over, can experience the exhibition at night, with music, cash bars, and food available for purchase. The singular style and high energy of the evening performers set the stage for signature cocktails and local flavors from the Bronx Night Market. **Orchid Evenings** take place on April 9, 16, 22, and 23, from 7 to 10 p.m. Entry times are at 7, 7:30, 8, and 8:30 p.m. Go to: <https://www.nybg.org/event/the-orchid-show/> for more information.

Bronx Fashion Week returns to The Mall at Bay Plaza, located at 200 Baychester Ave, Bronx NY in the 3rd floor food court, on Saturday, May 7, at 3 p.m. Bronx Fashion Week events have become preferred for diverse and

inclusive audiences, and their objective is to provide real-time business opportunities to local, emerging and established designers to showcase their skills and abilities in an industry that is often non-accessible. Surrounded by over 100 retailers from The Bronx, the mall has over 25 million visitors per year. Designers being showcased at the show include Callejas Atelier, Yo Soy Mia, Mia Roman, Boulevard Menswear, Daysi Collection, Macy's, Forever 21, and Ashley Stewart.

MUSIC

New York City Gay Men's Chorus (NYCGMC) is giving a preview performance of their show, "Beginnings" on April 24 at 3 p.m. at Hostos Community College, located at 500 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY. The show features inspiring and uplifting music from Beyoncé, Tracy Chapman, Barry Manilow, Stephen Sondheim, Marc Anthony and more. Complimentary tickets for Bronx-based community groups can be requested by emailing info@nycgmc.org. For more information on Beginnings and NYCGMC, visit <http://www.nycgmc.org/>.

A Tribute to Selena y Los Dinos takes

place at Lehman Center for the Performing Arts, located at 250 Bedford Park Blvd West, The Bronx, New York 10468, on Saturday, April 9 at 8 p.m. Los Chicos del 512 present a tribute to Selena y Los Dinos! The members came together for one reason: to bring the magic of Selena to old and new fans worldwide. This concert will transport you right back to 1995 at a live Selena Concert! Visit www.LehmanCenter.org for more details.

Bronx Arts Ensemble presents Bronx-Born trumpeter and composer, **Ray Vega, in concert with The Bronx Arts Ensemble String Quartet** at Woodlawn Cemetery, Conservancy and Crematory, located at 3800 Jerome Ave, Bronx, NY, on Sunday, April 24, at 2 p.m. The concert will include old standards by Duke Ellington, Bernie Miller, and Kurt Weil, as well as original compositions by Mr. Vega. Ray Vega is a multifaceted composer, educator, musician, and Bronx native. The concert is free, but you must be pre-registered. Go to: <https://www.bronxartsensemble.org/event/ray-vega-woodlawn/> for more information.

DANCE

NYC Parks hosts the **Sidiki Conde Tokounou Concert** at Williamsbridge Oval Recreation Center, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval East, Bronx, NY, on Monday, April 18, at noon. Sidiki Conde Tokounou is a dancer, drummer and singer from Guinea, who despite losing his legs at 14, followed his dream to become a dancer. Call (718) 543 8672 or email sarah.bishow@parks.nyc.gov for more information.

ART

The Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1040 Grand Concourse, Bronx NY 10456, holds the **12th Annual Taino Awards Ceremony** on Sunday,

April 17, 2022, at 5 p.m. The Taino are indigenous people of the Caribbean, and the Taino Awards are given in order to recognize Taino people for all of their efforts in keeping the culture alive. Doors open at 4 p.m.

Friday Night Art with Ana, hosted by NYC Parks, takes place at the Williamsbridge Oval Park, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval East, Bronx, NY on Friday, April 29, Friday, May 27, and Friday, June 24, at 6 p.m. Call (718) 543 8672 or email Ana.Torres@parks.nyc.gov for more information.

MOVEMENT

Bronx Buccaneers football club meets on Saturdays in the Williamsbridge Oval in Norwood from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., where kids are taught the fundamentals of football in a safe, fun atmosphere. Understanding there is more to football, the Buccaneers strive to develop the students/athletes, and the hope is that the players will use the program not only as a steppingstone to advance to upper-level sports in high school and college, but also as a means to engage in positive behavior and as a healthy distraction from idleness which the group says can lead to poor decisions. The Buccaneers accept kids from any community, boys or girls, ages 6 to 14. Contact Tasha Andrews at (917) 662-3632 for further information.

NYC Parks will host the **Annual Spring Egg Hunt** in Williamsbridge Oval Park, located at 3225 Reservoir Oval E, Bronx, NY 10467, on Saturday, April 16, at 11 a.m. This event is free and open to the public. Call (718) 543 8672 or email Victor.Campbell@parks.nyc.gov for more information.



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NEIGHBORHOOD NOTES

COMPILED BY SÍLE MOLONEY



COVID-19 UPDATES

Omicron BA.2 Variant Preparation

The Omicron BA.2 variant is now the dominant coronavirus strain in the U.S. since late March 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). The Omicron variant is comprised of a number of lineages and sub-lineages, the three most common being BA.1, BA.1.1 and BA.2.

As of March 29, citywide COVID-19 cases were increasing but hospitalizations, and deaths were still on the decline, according to NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Meanwhile, the NYS Health Department is now using an alert level system that tracks COVID-19 transmission and health care capacity in the city. These levels aim to help New Yorkers understand what precautions need to be taken and how to best protect themselves and others based on each level. For more information in English and other languages, go to: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/covid/covid-19-alert-levels.pdf>.

The risk rate was low as of March 29, despite rising cases. However, Dr. Ashwin Vasan, health commissioner with NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, said during the last week in March, "We're asking for a bit more patience and a bit of grace. Cases are definitively rising, and it's gotten our attention. **They will continue to rise over the next few weeks, and it's likely that over these weeks, we will move into a different level of overall risk across the city.** Masking, along with getting vaccinated, getting boosted if you're eligible, testing regularly, and getting treated are the best tools we have to take on this virus, whatever it throws at us, and you should integrate those tools into your daily lives as we adapt to the next phase of this pandemic."

DOHMH officials said additional at-home testing kits are being distributed en masse to all New Yorkers in the coming weeks to allow people to stay at home if sick, and a new telemedicine service will also be implemented to ascertain whether New Yorkers who contract the new variant need access to life-saving COVID-19 treatment [oral pills], to prevent hospitalization and death. DOHMH officials said that if people do need the treatment, it will be delivered same day to their homes so that, again, they will not need to leave their homes, thereby curtailing the spread of the virus and keeping the City open.

COVID-19 Vaccination Updates

NYS Department of Health (DOH) officials have said New Yorkers who are 12 and older who received their Pfizer-BioNTech initial vaccine series at least five months ago are now eligible for the Pfizer-BioNTech booster. New Yorkers who are 18 and older who received the Moderna initial vaccine series at least five months ago or the Janssen/Johnson & Johnson COVID-19 vaccine at least two months ago, are eligible for a booster dose.

Children aged 5 to 11 with certain immunocompromising conditions who received their Pfizer-BioNTech initial vaccine series at least 28 days ago are eligible for an additional dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Dosages vary for different groups. All individuals 5 years of age and older that reside in the United States are eligible to receive the vaccine. FDA fact sheets for recipients and caregivers on each vac-

cine are available on the FDA's website.

COVID vaccines are widely available at pharmacies, local health departments, clinics, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and other locations across the state, irrespective of immigration status. To schedule an appointment directly at a New York State-run site, go to <https://am-i-eligible.covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/> and follow the instructions. Walk-in appointments are also accepted at New York State mass vaccination sites for all eligible individuals.

State Health officials said a booster dose helps maximize protection, prolongs the vaccine's durability, and continues to safeguard communities against the virus. Visit the CDC's website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/janssen.html>, for more information.

Guidelines for Business & Other Public Settings

For the latest COVID-19 business guidelines and industry guidance from New York State Department of Health, go to: <https://forward.ny.gov/active-industry-guidance>. All businesses must develop a written business safety plan to outline how their workplaces will prevent the spread of COVID-19.

According to the NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, workers in New York City who perform in-person work or interact with the public in the course of business must show proof that they have received a COVID-19 vaccine. Businesses may not allow any unvaccinated workers to work at their workplace. A workplace is considered any location — including a vehicle — where you work in the presence of at least one other person. New York City has discontinued the Key to NYC vaccination requirement as of March 7, 2022, for customers. Businesses can still choose to require proof of vaccination.

New York State announced that effective March 2, masks are no longer required in schools. However, Mayor Eric Adams announced on Friday, April 1, that New York City will keep its school mask mandate in place for children under 5 due to the recent uptick in coronavirus cases in New York City and because such children cannot yet get vaccinated. The State also announced that effective February 10, the statewide indoor business mask or vaccine requirement is lifted.

As of March 1, masks are still required at indoor train stations and onboard subways, commuter rail, buses, and paratransit vehicles. New Yorkers do not have to wear a mask at outdoor train stations and platforms, or at bus stops, but must wear a mask once they board a train, bus, or paratransit vehicles. Riders who refuse to wear a mask could get a \$50 fine.

COVID-19 Vaccine Exceptions and Reasonable Accommodations

This private sector workplace requirement does not apply to people who work alone, at home or otherwise, and do not have in-person contact with co-workers or others in the course of their business; people who enter a workplace briefly for a limited purpose, such as to use the bathroom; performing artists and college or professional athletes; or people who have requested reasonable accommodations for medical or religious reasons. If a worker is granted a reasonable accommodation, businesses must record the basis for the accommodation and

keep supporting documentation.

MTA Rider Feedback Survey

New York City Transit and the MTA are inviting New Yorkers to participate in a survey to obtain feedback on public transportation on subways and buses in New York City. To complete the survey, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NYCT-CoMET>.

Sophomore Skills Course

The 2022 New York Cares/Fordham Bedford Community Services Sophomore Skills program is a partnership to offer college preparation classes to high school sophomores. This program will be offered through Fordham Bedford Community Services. This year, the course will be offered remotely. If you are accepted into this program, New York Cares volunteers and FBCS Staff will tutor you and share strategies to prepare you for success in taking your SAT Exam. This tutorial program is a 2-hour, weekly-commitment that lasts from April 2022 to June 2022. The class is from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, click <https://bit.ly/3LGoJEQ>.

Notice of Replacement of Trunk Water Mains, Rehabilitation of Sewers in Norwood and Woodlawn Heights

NYC Department of Design and Construction (DDC) has advised that a replacement of the trunk and distribution water mains and a rehabilitation of the sewers is taking place in Norwood and Woodlawn Heights during the second quarter of 2022. Residents should expect water service interruptions, trash collection changes, new traffic patterns, and increased levels of dust and noise while the project is ongoing.

DDC has advised of the following impacts to the community:

There will be a temporary rerouting, around the clock until June 30, of BX16, BX34, and BXM4, northbound, from Bainbridge Avenue, between East 212th Street and Jerome Avenue, to Jerome Avenue, between East 212th Street and Bainbridge Avenue. Board the bus at 210th Street.

There will be a temporary rerouting, around the clock until June 30, of BX10, westbound, on East Gun Hill Road and the intersection of Bainbridge Avenue. Board the bus on East Gun Hill Road between Rochambeau and Dekalb Avenues.

There will be no curbside parking, around the clock until June 30, on Bainbridge Avenue, between East Gun Hill Road and 211th Street.

There will be a temporary lane closure, around the clock until June 30, northbound, on Bainbridge Avenue between Jerome Avenue and East Gun Hill Road. Residents are asked to be mindful of traffic detours and message boards.

Donate Life Month

April is National Donate Life Month. Residents are encouraged to register as an organ donor. Montefiore Health System is hosting a number of educational events throughout the month. Email ltrevino@montefiore.org or call (718) 798 4285 for more information.



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Public and Community Meetings

The 52nd PRECINCT COMMUNITY COUNCIL meetings are usually held on the third **Thursday of each month at 7 p.m.**, sometimes virtually and sometimes, in person. Call the 52nd Precinct Community Affairs office at (718) 220-5824 to be added to the email list.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March, **BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD 7** meetings have been held via ZOOM. The next full board meeting will be held on **Tuesday, April 26 at 6.30 p.m.** via Zoom. The meeting ID is 859 4776 2187 or by phone (646) 558-8656. Contact KCabreraCarrera@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 meetings are usually held on the **first Wednesday of each month at 8 p.m.** The last meeting was held on April. 6. For further details, contact bedford-mosholu@verizon.net.



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NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection Reminder:

New Yorkers that there is almost one month left until Tax Day, which is **Monday, April 18, 2022**. NYC Free Tax Prep is available for families with dependents who earned \$72,000 or less and individuals who earned \$50,000 or less in 2021.

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“Faith for Fair Pay” Rally Seeks Remedy to Home Care Crisis

By JULIAN NAZAR

As elected officials continue to crunch the numbers in efforts to finalize next year's New York State budget, home care workers took center stage during a “Faith for Fair Play” rally in Co-Op City on February 25, organized by Rep. Jamaal Bowman (NY-16), Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson, Assembly Members, Nathalia Fernández (A.D. 81) and Chantel Jackson (A.D. 79), and over a dozen Bronx faith leaders and 1199SEIU union members.

The rally was scheduled to announce support for “The Fair Pay for Home Care Act,” a draft State law which advocates said is also backed by the NAACP, AARP, Democratic majorities in the State Senate and Assembly, and has bipartisan support in both houses. AARP advocates for people over fifty.

Advocates called for funding for the act to be included in the upcoming State budget, following similar calls by over 300 faith leaders across the State, as outlined in a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul. According to a 2018 healthcare workforce analysis conducted by Mercer HPA, New York faces the worst home care shortage in the nation.

An October 2021 report by the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Association of New York State (CDPAA-NYS) found that low wages are the single largest driving factor of this shortage. Meanwhile, according to City data, The Bronx has the highest rate of elderly poverty and the most people living with disabilities of all five boroughs.

The rally began with Jose Hernan-



Photo by David Greene

ASSEMBLYWOMAN NATHALIA FERNÁNDEZ (4th from left) and Congressman Jamaal Bowman (center) join others in rallying for higher pay for home care and health-care workers in Co-Op City on Friday, February 25, 2022.

dez, community organizer for CDPAA-NYS, sharing a personal story. “One of my home care workers contracted COVID, and I was basically homeless because I couldn’t find anyone else to take care of me,” Hernandez said. “I had to struggle day in and out over three weeks over the holidays and I almost missed spending time with my family. Needless to say, the pay isn’t enough for individuals like me to find proper home care which leaves me in a precarious situation.”

Hernandez then explained what the caring majority is. “We are a movement of older adults, individuals with dis-

abilities, home care workers, and family caregivers working together to fix New York’s worst in the nation home care crisis.”

According to the October 2021 report entitled, “The High Cost of Low Wages,” 74 percent of New York seniors and people with disabilities were unable to retain their home care workers in 2021. Hernandez attributes the shortage in home care workers to low wages. “Home care workers are paid as little as \$12.50 in most parts of New York City,” he said. “That’s why clergy and faith leaders from across New York are joining our movement to win living wages for home care workers and New York and wipe out the home care work shortage.”

Rev. F. Romall Smalls from the Grace Baptist Church in Mount Vernon also delivered brief remarks before Bowman spoke. “Do the right thing for an industry that has been neglected for so long,” the congressman said, directing his remarks at the governor. “Please let us put our money where it belongs. We can’t have a thriving, healthy society if we don’t take care of our home care workers.” He then also shared a personal story.

“My mom needed care during the months before her passing,” Bowman said. “It was almost impossible for us to get her the 24 hours of care that she needed. I receive calls constantly from constituents who want to bring their mothers home from nursing homes so that they can receive care in their homes. This is a process that takes



Photo by David Greene.

JOSE HERNANDEZ, A community organizer for home care workers, joins supporters at the “Faith for Fair Pay” rally on Dreiser Loop on Friday, February 25, 2022.

months and months to happen if it ever happens at all.”

Bowman also highlighted efforts being taken at the federal level to improve the lives of home care workers. “We were looking and fighting to have \$450 billion invested in the home care economy so that we can dramatically increase home care that is provided and making sure the workers are paid a prevailing wage,” he said. Before handing the microphone back to Hernandez, Bowman posed a couple of rhetorical questions to the crowd. “Who are we?” Bowman asked. “What do we want to become? How do we hold ourselves and elected officials accountable for a magical vision for America?”

Sandra Diaz, a home care worker of 12 years, and member of 1199 SEIU, the largest healthcare union in the nation, also spoke. “It has been 12 years of working in an invisible workforce,” Diaz said. “It is time for us to be recognized and valued.”

She then spoke about the different ways home care workers help the elderly. “We are there on a daily basis,” Diaz said. “We are there to bathe them, feed them, keep them company. Sometimes, I have patients crying when I leave.” Diaz continued, “The governor wants to give us a bonus,” Diaz said. “That is putting a band aid on the wound. We need a higher raise. We are fighting for higher pay. We need a comfortable living so I can take care of my son and my elderly father who I take care of every day.”

Sasha Kessler of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, later addressed the crowd, sharing what the ultimate purpose of fasting is on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in Judaism. “When so often, we are thinking about our bodies and our personal needs, God is re-

(continued on next page)



Photo by David Greene.

CONGRESSMAN JAMAAL BOWMAN (2nd from left) joins supporters at his “Faith for Fair Pay” rally in Co-Op City on Friday, February 25, 2022.

(continued from page 20)

minding us that your fast is not for the purpose of just satisfying your body,” Kessler said. “It is ultimately about how you are serving the people in your community. How are you serving the people who work for you? How are you serving those who you love?”

Kessler argued the way to fulfill God’s message was to treat every worker and human being with dignity. “Dignity means ensuring that every person receives a fair wage that enables them to support their family and support themselves and do holy work like caring for older adults,” Kessler said. “Caring for those who need home care, ensuring that people can age with dignity in their own homes in their communities. It’s a mandate from Jewish tradition.”

She concluded with a plea to the governor. “I’m here today, proudly, as a member of the Jewish community calling on Gov. Hochul to use your power to ensure that every home care worker in this state is paid a fair wage now,” Kessler said.

For her part, Fernández encouraged those in attendance to engage in political advocacy. “I am committed to ensure this conversation doesn’t end until we see that line item in the budget,” the assemblywoman said. “We still have 30

days. Every single day, make that commitment to reach out to your legislature, reach out to the governor. Speak to your neighbor.”

With New York’s 65+ population slated to grow 25 percent in the next 20 years, the workforce shortage is projected to increase exponentially, and New York will have more than 600,000 home care job openings by 2026, according to research by the City University of New York (CUNY). CUNY researchers also estimate that the Fair Pay for Home Care Act would more than pay for itself through increased spending, job creation and moving home care workers off social assistance.

The final speaker at the rally was Tabatha Holley, a pastor at New Day Church. “I would never have known that Gov. Hochul would choose not to include fair pay for home care in her executive budget,” Holley said. “I realized that this is as much about the fair pay of workers as it is about the way we undervalue a large portion of black and brown women in boroughs like The Bronx, which has a disproportionately large need for home care.” She concluded her remarks with a few words of prayer. The rally ended with the singing of the caring majority anthem. As of April 4, the final budget remained under negotiation.

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Bronx Buccaneers Herald Sport as Path to Academic Advancement

By JULIAN NAZAR

The Bronx Community Board 7 (CB7) Education, Youth & Libraries committee held their monthly meeting over Zoom on March 2, during which local sports group, Bronx Buccaneers, made their case for getting kids more involved in sport to help them advance their education.

Before the meeting got underway, resident, Tayna Peña, asked if there had been any conversations held about utilizing the vacant space the Old Fordham Library, located at 2556 Bainbridge Avenue in Fordham Manor used to occupy. *Norwood News* previously reported that the City's department of administrative services (DCAS) had proposed converting the second floor of the vacant building into a new computer-based testing and job application center (CTAC).

Ischia Bravo, district manager for Bronx CB7, shared that the issue had been discussed during the CB7 Housing, Land Use & Zoning committee meeting, since it is no longer a library. Bravo said the center was indeed on track to become a job center.

During her prepared update to the committee, Bravo reminded attendees, once again, of the New York Yankees Community Council Leadership Award deadline. As previously reported, The New York Yankees partners with various Bronx community boards to provide five scholarships to five community residents in each district. According to the nomination form, winners receive a stipend of \$750 and are recognized on the field during a pre-game ceremony at Yankee Stadium.

"Unfortunately, the deadline was today at noon, and we have only received two applications," Bravo said on March 2. "I requested an extension." As reported, the deadline was subsequently moved to March 16, and was later extended a second time to Monday, April 4, at noon.

To be considered for the award, students needed to reside within CB7, be between 14 and 17 years old, and have completed at least 50 hours of community service. All committee members in attendance indicated they would make themselves available, at Bravo's request, to review any additional applications received, and vote on the winners.

Leurys Acosta, education committee chair, then carried on with the next order of business on the agenda. As there was nobody in attendance from the Department of Education, the New York Library, or from the Community Education Council Dis-

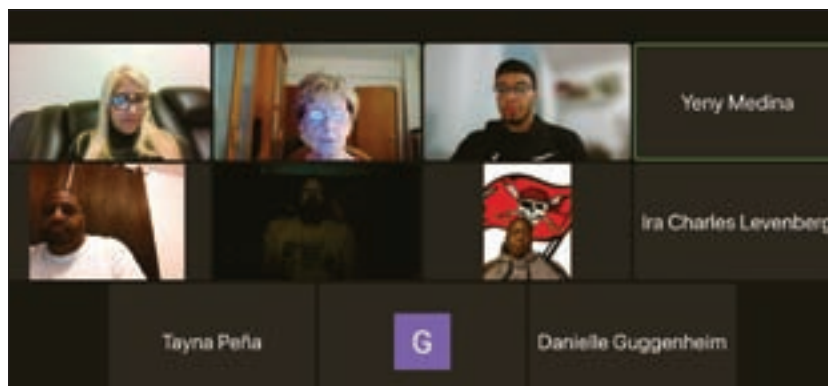


Photo by Julian Nazar

MEMBERS OF BRONX Community Board 7's Education, Youth & Libraries committee discuss various agenda topics during a committee meeting held on March 2, 2022, over Zoom.

trict 10, Keith Spivey Jr., president of the Bronx Buccaneers Youth Football Program, spoke at length about his football program. He thanked the committee for helping his program obtain permits to train at Williamsbridge Oval Park and provided some background information on his football team.

The Buccaneers have existed for over 20 years and are a full-tackle organization open to children ages 5-14. "Our main goal is to get kids in the high school of their choice and hopefully to get them a free education to college," Spivey Jr. said. To accomplish this, the group has partnered with high schools such as DeWitt Clinton, John F. Kennedy, and Cardinal Hayes. An important focal point of the program is academics. To participate, kids must have at least an average GPA numerical grade of 80. However, Spivey Jr. said that they do give kids the opportunity to make up their score.

He also shared that the Buccaneers have just sent their first wave of kids to college. "We have two kids attending Alfred State College on full scholarships," Spivey Jr. said. "We have another kid that just signed his offer to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Those particular kids all have a 90 [GPA numerical grade] average in school. They are doing what they have to do as young men and they are going to be productive members of society."

Spivey Jr. then opened up about the challenges COVID-19 had presented to the running of the program. "Normally we would recruit kids through school," Spivey Jr. said. "Unfortunately, because of COVID, we haven't had the opportunity to be in schools and actually present ourselves. So, we are trying to reconnect with a lot of schools that are in our neighborhood." Another challenge his football program faces that isn't

related to COVID is affordability. "With prices going up and everything else going up, like our insurance, for example, we have to go up on our fees as well," Spivey Jr. said. "We are trying to maintain affordability."

The coach concluded his talk by highlighting the impact of youth sports. "I think a lot of people overlook the educational component of youth sports because it is not predominantly academic," Spivey Jr. said. "It goes across life; we teach them responsibility, accountability. We teach them that they need to rely on their teammates and friends." He added, "Youth sports provide kids with a better chance of being a productive member of society instead of being in the street with nothing to do and getting themselves in trouble."

When Acosta later opened the floor for questions, Nora Fleury, a committee member, asked Spivey Jr. if the group was funded. He shared that their funds come directly from parents and that they do very little fundraising. However, he acknowledged that one of their biggest expenses is a specific Department of Education (DOE) expense. He said the group pays about \$700 a month to practice on DeWitt Clinton's football field. "That eats up a large chunk of our budget," Spivey Jr. said. "I was hoping someone from DOE would be here so we could figure out a way to get a discount to use their facilities."

After hearing this, Feury suggested reaching out to Councilman Eric Dinowitz's office to find out if Bronx Buccaneers would be eligible to receive funds through participatory budgeting, a program that allows community members to have a direct say in how they would spend \$1 million if they had input into such a decision. *Norwood News* contacted both the DOE and Dinowitz's office for comment. Acosta then asked Spivey Jr. if he had any kids who he

wanted to recommend for the Yankee Scholarship. He said he had a few kids in mind.

The next presenter was Gladys Gomez, community engagement manager at Fordham and Kingsbridge centers of LINC Literacy Inc. As reported, the organization is based citywide, advocates for children's literacy, and is committed to ending the literacy crisis. In New York City, nearly two out of three children affected by systemic poverty cannot read at grade level.

She shared that the organization had some great programming for its youngest readers aged zero to five. To register for upcoming events, readers can visit the website, <https://www.lincnyc.org/>. Gomez also mentioned that LINC Literacy Inc. is running an upcoming program in conjunction with the Bronx Library Center. Acosta asked Gomez if she was satisfied with attendance at their Bronx centers or if the organization was looking for more community engagement.

"We always love to reach out to more families," Gomez said. "We do see how social media is playing a role in that. What we are going to do is have just one page where we post all of our events to see if that gets a better algorithm. We are trying to go ahead and consolidate that to just one." Regarding attendance, she said the organization wanted to increase regular attendance by residents at follow-up events. "Enough families show up for one," Gomez said. "We want families to keep coming to more events."

Acosta wrapped up the conversation by inviting Gomez to attend the CB7 general board meeting. Before the education meeting concluded, Acosta gave Sirio Guerino the opportunity to speak to the committee. Guerino asked if there had been any progress made on the use of the swimming pool at DeWitt Clinton campus, a point raised at a previous meeting.

Guerino had mentioned that the school used to have a pool for students for gym and other activities but didn't use it anymore and he wanted to look into why it was not usable and see if that could be changed. "It would be beautiful if those 800 kids can attend and use that pool," Guerino said. "My sons have been there for four years and haven't been able to use that pool." Acosta promised to get back to him once he had done his homework. The next CB7 education meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, April 6.

Gibson Sworn in as 14th Bronx BP

(continued from page 1)

ing Gibson, said, “You have taught me so much about being an honest, dedicated public servant.” Peguero later recalled, “I knew she was the real deal when I stumbled into her district office to introduce myself as a city rep, conducting outreach to businesses and to my surprise, she assisted me along the Jerome (Avenue business) corridor.”

Peguero, who, herself, also made history by becoming the first Dominican immigrant to hold the office of deputy borough president, as reported, added, “She is a politician who’s doing the work with honesty, transparency and attention to detail, a woman who doesn’t take no for an answer, but always finds a way to reimagine and question the status quo. She is representing our borough for all the right reasons.”

New York State Attorney General Letitia James also praised Gibson, saying, “I worked with Vanessa for 15 years. She brought her talent, energy and character to the New York State Assembly, to the City Council, and I was so proud when The Bronx chose her to be the borough president, and I think The Bronx has already seen just what kind of a leader Vanessa is.”

For her part, U.S. Sen. Kristen Gillibrand (NY-20) said, “One in every four Bronx family members were out of a job at the height of this pandemic. Vanessa and I talked many times about our shared priorities for them and for all your families. We’re both committed to rebuilding the economy in a way that revitalizes industries and gets everyone back to family-supported jobs.”

The ceremony was also attended by Bronx Congressman Ritchie Torres (NY-15) who said, “I envy Vanessa’s ability to be everywhere at once. She is the most impressively visible elected official.” He added, “When people ask me, ‘Why are you not as visible as Vanessa? I see her everywhere,’ I’m like... well, you know Vanessa has an identical twin,” a line that drew laughter from the crowd.

For her part, Bronx District Attorney Darcel D. Clark said when she became district attorney, Gibson had stood with her in all things, public safety. “That was started from giving the Bronx D.A.’s office the funding that we needed, so you could have a D.A.’s office that you deserve.” Clark added, “As chair of the Public Safety Committee in the city council, she has contin-



Photo by Miriam Quiñones

VANESSA GIBSON (LEFT) is sworn in by Sallie Manzanet-Daniels (right), associate justice of the New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, on Sunday, March 27, 2022.

ued to do that, standing with me shoulder to shoulder as we march through the streets of The Bronx against gun violence.”

Assembly Member Jeffrey Dinowitz (A.D. 81) said he met Gibson about 13 years ago. “We were making some changes to the Bronx Democratic Party and then when Ruben Díaz Jr. made the incredibly smart decision to name Aurelia Greene as the deputy borough president, I presided over the meeting that nominated Vanessa to the assembly,” he said. “I’m so excited that Vanessa is our borough president, I look forward to working with her.”

Later, Gibson was joined on stage by her family as she took the oath of office. She was sworn in by Justice Sallie Manzanet-Daniels, associate justice of the New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division.

After thanking her family, colleagues, and those in attendance, Gibson vowed to put forward a bold, creative, and comprehensive agenda for what she said was a beloved borough. “To my colleagues in government, I am proud to partner with you each day to make this borough, our city, and our state a better place for all New Yorkers to live and raise their families. We are truly better together.”

Gibson continued, “I do not take

this responsibility lightly, and I stand proud on the shoulders of those who have come before me, those that have paved the way and created a path for our leadership. They have set their footprints in history for me to follow and for that, I’m thankful. My ancestors, our ancestors fought and died for me to be here today.”

Later, speaking to the plague of rising crime in the borough, Gibson said addressing it would be her administration’s top priority, while also announcing a new Office of Public Safety, which will be based at the Bronx borough president’s office. She also vowed to work with the NYPD, the Bronx District Attorney, the Department of Probation, the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice as well as organizations within the New York City Crisis Management System, local precinct councils, clergy leaders, and others to combat crime and gun violence.

It is unacceptable for New Yorkers to be fearful of going outside, due to fear of being senselessly gunned down in our city,” she said. “It is heartbreaking to continuously see mothers and fathers burying their children... as a result of this gun violence epidemic.”

On Monday evening, April 4, a 61-year-old female bystander was shot in

the back in crossfire in the Fordham Heights section of The Bronx, amid a dispute among a group of young men, while she was simply walking down the street. Year-to-date shooting victims are up 37 percent in The Bronx versus the same period last year, and year-to-date shooting incidents are up 38 percent across the borough.

Moving on to the topic of economic recovery, Gibson vowed to help existing businesses, and to also bring new business to the borough. In addition, she committed to finally putting through a workable plan for the Kingsbridge Armory and to “create a project that is going to have a tremendous impact” on the entire borough. Gibson said she would also work with public and private partnerships to bring new investment to the borough, help bridge the technological divide for Bronx students, and generate more healthy food choices for Bronxites.

Concluding her remarks, the borough president said, “We are a mosaic of different cultures and ethnicities, and a place of hope and opportunities for a better tomorrow.” She added, “Together we will be bold, and we will be brave, and I am excited for the bright days that lie ahead. I know the very best is yet to come. May God bless the boogie-down Bronx!”

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