



# ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATURE NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2019  
Special Edition

## Helping families for the holiday season



The Albany County Legislature kicked off its Adopt-A-Family gift delivery on December 23 with a special presentation in the 7th Floor Caucus Room.

Chair Andrew Joyce presented Albany County DCYF a \$1,000 check and 10 coats on behalf of the Legislature's Majority Office.

The Legislature partnered with DCYF and received help from the community this year to raise funds and purchase items to provide a room full of gifts for 21 families in the Adopt-A-Family program.

Following the presentation, DCYF caseworkers and staff began delivering gifts to each of the families. See more, page 4.



## Legislators deliver gifts to Shaker Place residents



Legislators spent the afternoon on December 17 spreading some holiday cheer at the Shaker Place Rehabilitation & Nursing Center.

Majority Leader Dennis Feeny, Deputy Majority Leader Lynne Lekakis, Legislators Paul Miller and Frank Commisso, along with staff, delivered gifts to residents and presented a \$1,000 check to help provide essentials. Legislators were also treated to an impromptu tour of the ongoing renovations at the nursing home.



# Legislature says goodbye to 11 members

For 11 members of the Legislature, the December 16 meeting was their last. Chair Andrew Joyce took a moment to recognize, from left, Legislators Doug Bullock, Travis Stevens, Richard Touchette, Peter Crouse, Richard Mendick, Charles Cahill, Brian Hogan, John Frainier, Paul Miller, Lucille McKnight (not pictured) and Charles Dawson (not pictured).



**Lucille McKnight**  
District 1

Elected in 1992, McKnight is the longest serving African American woman legislator in the state. She has served as President of NYSAC, and Chair of the Albany County Youth Board. McKnight has been instrumental in updating the County's Affirmative Action Policy.



**Peter Crouse**  
District 24

Crouse has served two terms representing portions of the Town of Colonie. Crouse has used his experience working for advocacy services and government relations to work on bipartisan legislation, including the recently adopted Local Law O, to establish a redistrict commission in Albany County.



**Charles Dawson**  
District 35

Since being elected in 2000, Dawson has concentrated on budgetary issues, economic development, conservation matters & public safety. He sponsored legislation for the 11-mile County Rail Trail and authored a measure creating the Bethlehem Landslide Nature Preserve.



**Douglas Bullock**  
District 7

Bullock has served as a Legislator since 2008. A life-long labor leader and activist, Bullock has supported several labor initiatives including most recently, a law to require paid sick leave. He has also been instrumental in improving relations between union leaders and the County.



**Charles Cahill, Jr.**  
District 30

Cahill was appointed in January 2019 to represent the 30th district. During his brief term, he served as a member of the Public Works, Social Services and Health Committees.



**Richard Mendick**  
District 36

During his two terms in office, Mendick has served on the Audit and Finance Committee where he provided input to ensure that the County adopted a fiscally balanced and transparent budget.



**John Frainier**  
District 17

Frainier was appointed in January 2019 to represent the 17th Legislative District. Frainier is retired from the NYS Thruway Authority after 38 years of service. His experience helped in the Legislature where he served on the Public Works and Conservation, Sustainability and Green Initiatives committees.



**Travis Stevens**  
District 31

Stevens served one term in the Albany County Legislature, representing the 31st Legislative District. During his term he served on multiple committees including Public Safety and Personnel. Stevens also worked to bring resources to the Hilltowns.



**Richard Touchette**  
District 37

Touchette has served one term, providing input on the Elder Care, Social Services and Personnel Committees. Most recently, Touchette sponsored a resolution that addressed the hiring of relatives in the County.



**Brian Hogan**  
District 21

Hogan served a term representing the 21st Legislative District, which consists of a portion of Latham. During his term, Hogan worked to bring resources to his district. He served on multiple committees, most recently Health, Mass Transit and Elder Care.



**Paul Miller**  
District 32

During his term, Miller's main priority has been protecting the health of County residents. He sponsored legislation that increased the age for tobacco sales in the County to 21 and prohibited tobacco sales in pharmacies. Most recently he worked to address the sale of flavored tobacco products, including vaping, among youth.

*Thank you for your service!*

# Legislative accomplishments in 2019

The Legislature has had a busy year. As they look to continue the momentum in 2020, here is a recap the Legislature's actions in 2019.

## Adopted 2020 Budget

The Legislature adopted the County's 2020 budget in December that provided additional programs and initiatives while cutting taxes.

The amended budget includes a tax levy of \$94,886,294, a .5 percent decrease from the budget proposed in October. As a result, the new average tax rate will be \$3.49 per \$1,000 of equalized assessed value.

The spending plan funds several initiatives including the addition of two legal secretaries in the Law Department to help reduce the time it takes to foreclose on properties; more caseworkers for the Department of Health to enhance its Mobile Crisis Team; \$225,000 for an Albany County Departmental and Community Development program; \$30,000 for a senior employment summer program; funding for new youth summer programs; funding to strengthen the compliance and review process of MWBEs; and renewing the annual contribution to the Altamont Fair.

## Adopted legislation to create a nonpartisan redistricting commission

Local Law O amends the Albany Charter relating to commissions on redistricting to create a non-partisan process for determining the County's legislative districts following the next federal Census in 2020.

The Commission, which will consist of nine members who are County residents, will be transparent, accountable and function independently, without the influence of sitting elected officials and their representatives.

A special Majority-Minority District Reapportionment Sub Committee, consisting of seven members, will also be created to assist the Commission to ensure the fair representation of Albany County minority communities in all aspects of the redistricting process.

The Legislature adopted Local Law O in May and Albany County residents voted for it on the ballot on November 5.

## Passed several environmental laws to minimize the use of plastic

The Legislature adopted Local Laws D and F this past fall in an effort to address the issue of single-use plastics.

Local Law D, also known as "The Albany County Reusable Shopping Bag Incentive Act" institutes a five cent fee on paper shopping bags to incentivize the use of reusable shopping bags. The law comports with the NYS Environmental Conservation Law that institutes a ban on plastic bags beginning March 2020.

Local Law F bans the use of straws and requires Albany County restaurants and eating establishments to provide plastic cutlery upon request.

## Established a policy regarding the hiring of relatives

The employee rules and regulations will be amended to include a provision to prevent nepotism from occurring.

According to the resolution, no County employee, either individually or as a member of a board, may participate in any decision specifically to appoint, hire, promote, discipline or discharge a relative for any position within the County.

## Approved relocation of Board of Elections

At the beginning of the year, the Legislature approved the relocation of the Board of Elections from 32 N. Russell Road to the former Department of Motor Vehicles building at 260 South Pearl Street.

The Russell Road building costs the County approximately \$375,334 in rent, utilities and other costs.

The Board of Elections is expected to move into the downtown location in 2020.

## Modernization of legislative operations

The Legislature has begun to implement its electronic management system that will allow for a public and searchable legislative database, electronic voting and the rapid creation of agendas.

Members of certain committees have begun receiving their tablet devices and a full roll out will occur at the beginning of the year.

## Celebrated 1 year anniversary of LBC

The Legislative Black Caucus celebrated its 1 year anniversary in March with a special reception prior to the monthly meeting. The LBC is the legislative voice of those underrepresented individuals and groups in Albany County who are African American.

## Plan for improved cell phone coverage in Albany County

The Legislature continues to partner with the Sheriff's Department on an analysis of cell phone coverage and E-911 infrastructure throughout the County to identify areas that need to be improved.

Throughout the year, the Sheriff's Department held meetings with all the major cellular carriers, collected data and conducted assessments, and began to implement steps to improve wireless coverage in the County.

## ACNH Renovation Project

The ongoing renovation of the County nursing home is on schedule to be completed in 2020. The nursing was renamed this year to "Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center." The facility will include 140 private rooms, community and green areas and more.

# Legislators gather to celebrate the holidays

The Legislature held its annual holiday party on December 16 at City Beer Hall in Albany.

**RIGHT:** Legislators Brian Hogan and Sean Ward. **FAR RIGHT:** Deputy Chair Wanda Willingham and Chair Andrew Joyce.



Legislators Chris Smith, Sam Fein and Dave Mayo.



Legislators Joanne Cunningham and Deputy Majority Leader Lynne Lekakis.



Legislators Peter Crouse and Pat Lockart.

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# Legislators raise funds for Adopt-A-Family program



The Legislature held a fundraiser at Blaze Pizza on December 4 to help raise funds for the Adopt-A-Family program. **ABOVE:** Chair Andrew Joyce sits with his wife Jennifer and kids, Colton and Willow. **TOP RIGHT:** Legislator Mark Grimm, Minority Leader Frank Mauriello, Deputy Minority Leader Paul Burgdorf and Legislator Vicky Plotsky. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** Legislators Sean Ward, Frank Commisso, William Reinhardt and Bill Ricard.

