

Fall 2023



Assemblyman **Fred W. Thiele, Jr.**



Reports to the People

Local Highlights of the 2023-24 Enacted State Budget

Historic Support for Local School Districts

Total funding for public schools was increased by \$3 billion for a total of \$34 billion. This included \$24 billion in Foundation Aid. Every school district saw increased aid. For the first time, all school districts are fully funded under the Foundation Aid formula. Steps were also taken in the enacted State Budget to expand Pre-Kindergarten programs and increase student access to free meals.



I took a break from budget negotiations to visit with the Pierson Whaler's Robotics Team 28 as they prepared for the 2023 NY Tech Valley Regional FIRST Robotics Competition at the MVP Arena in Albany on March 30th.



Suffolk County Community College (SCCC) students traveled to Albany on February 7th for Higher Education Advocacy Day. The enacted 2023-24 State Budget invested a total of \$1.38 billion in operating aid for State University of New York (SUNY) schools, keeping tuition flat and ensuring public colleges and universities remain affordable and accessible to all New Yorkers. Capital project funding was also included to upgrade facilities to support the growth and innovation of SUNY State-operated campuses (\$1.3 billion) and community colleges (\$106 million).



I visited John Jermain Memorial Library in Sag Harbor, where I sat down and spoke with all East End Library Directors about their priorities for 2024. This year, New York invested \$99.6 million in operating aid to our state's libraries and \$34 million to fund eligible capital improvement projects.

Seeking Innovative Public Transit Solutions

Ridership on the South Fork Commuter Connection (SFCC) continues to grow. I fought to secure \$750,000 in the 2023-24 State Budget to meet the growth in the operation of the “last-mile” bus shuttle service. The shuttle service transports commuters from train stations to their workplaces. I also partnered with other local elected officials to urge the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) to fund improvements that were part of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s (MTA) 20-Year Needs Assessment that include signal upgrades, station enhancements, and other associated infrastructure work to increase capacity on the LIRR’s Montauk Branch between Speonk and Montauk. These improvements would allow for additional service to and from Long Island’s South Fork, increase operational flexibility, and enhance the ability to recover from delays and service disruptions. I will continue to advocate for these improvements in the next MTA Capital Program.



A Milestone for the Peconic Bay CPF

Residents on the East End continue to enjoy protections of our land and water through projects supported by the Peconic Bay Community Preservation Fund (CPF). I authored the legislation that enacted the CPF in 1998 and it has far exceeded all projections since its implementation in 1999. This year, the CPF surpassed the \$2 billion mark and has preserved more than 10,000 acres of land for open space, farmland, parks and recreation, and historic preservation purposes.



– Photo credit: www.peconicestuary.org

Strengthening East End Behavioral Health Initiatives

The South Fork Behavioral Health Initiative and the North Fork Coalition for Behavioral Health received \$175,000 each in the enacted 2023-24 State Budget. These initiatives are a collaborative effort between school districts, Family Service League, Stony Brook Medicine, local governments, and other local service agencies to provide increased mental health services in East End public schools.

Boost for PEP

On the East End of Long Island, our environment is our economy. Since its inception, the Peconic Estuary Partnership (PEP) has worked diligently to protect our water, habitat and wildlife, and to support coastal resiliency projects throughout the estuary. I was pleased to help secure an additional \$100,000, for a total of \$550,000, in the final budget to support PEP’s essential environmental protection programming.



Helping Small Businesses Thrive

John Kowalenko, Vice President of Operations, Art of Eating Catering, Bridgehampton, stopped by my Sag Harbor office to thank me for my efforts in getting the off-premises catering liquor license legislation signed into law. This new license, being issued by the State Liquor Authority, will help to grow our local economy by streamlining the process for our local businesses.

Protection of Native American Burial Sites

After being vetoed last year, I worked with the Governor and New York's Native American Tribes to agree on the provisions of the "Unmarked Burial Site Protection Act". The Act was included as part of this year's State Budget. These protections provide necessary measures to prevent destruction of these sites when culturally significant remains or funerary items are uncovered by developers during home construction or renovation. This is a major victory for our Native American communities on the East End of Long Island who have long advocated to preserve their sacred burial grounds, which are of great historical and cultural significance to all the people of the State.

Right to Clean Water

I sponsored the "Suffolk County Water Quality Restoration Act" that was included in this year's State Budget. Once the Suffolk County Legislature adopts the necessary resolution to place this initiative on an election ballot, voters will have the ability to approve a 1/8 of a cent county sales tax that will be used as a dedicated funding source to support projects to restore water quality by connecting homes and businesses to sewers, and provide rebates for replacing outdated conventional septic systems with nitrogen-reducing innovative/alternative (I/A) septic systems.



The State and local government partnership that supported the connection of the Village of Westhampton Beach's business district to Suffolk County's wastewater treatment plant will greatly improve water quality by preventing nitrogen from entering the groundwater and allow local businesses to reach their full potential. I joined Mayor Maria Moore, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, and other local elected officials at the "First Flush" ceremony to mark the project's completion on March 3rd.

– Photo Credit: Suffolk County



The establishment of conference committees during the State Budget process sets up a cooperative framework for resolving the differences between the budget resolutions passed by each house of the Legislature and the Governor's Executive Budget. I was appointed by Speaker Heastie to serve as co-chair of the 2023 Joint Budget Subcommittee on General Government and Local Assistance, where we examined critical issues such as funding for municipalities across the State.

Protecting New York's Oldest Lighthouse

Legislation I sponsored authorized the Department of Environmental Conservation to fund the erosion control projects needed to protect the Montauk Point Lighthouse, owned by the Montauk Historical Society (Chapter #310 of the Laws of 2016). This project paved the way for the State to partner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to implement and complete the critical shoreline resiliency project that will keep the beautifully renovated lighthouse complex standing on a sound structure for generations to come.



Celebrating the grand reopening of the Montauk Point Lighthouse with Governor Hochul, state and local officials, along with members and friends of Montauk Historical Society on August 16th.



The Bridgehampton Child Care and Recreational Center is a cornerstone of our East End community. Here, we celebrated the grand opening of their new facility on August 18th. It was an honor to stand with Executive Director Bonnie Michelle Cannon and other local elected officials to welcome Governor Hochul to the official ribbon-cutting ceremony. I was happy to secure \$250,000 in state funding for this project, that also received a \$300,000 grant recommended by the Long Island Regional Economic Development Council, reflecting New York's commitment to promoting social equity and expanding economic opportunities for underserved communities across the State. Congratulations!

– Photo Credit: Office of Governor Hochul

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 Permit No. 75

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