

ASSEMBLYMEMBER LINDA B. ROSENTHAL



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District Office: 230 West 72nd Street, Suite 2F, New York, NY 10023 • Phone: 212.873.6368 • Email: rosenthal@nyassembly.gov

Abortion Rights Under Attack

The U.S. Supreme Court put the lives of countless women in danger when it overturned *Roe v. Wade* this past June. For decades, far-right extremists have been hell-bent on dismantling women's rights, particularly reproductive rights. Like many of you, I was devastated though not surprised, that this activist court, composed of members who vowed their respect for precedent during Senate confirmation hearings, decided to ring the death knell on a 49-year-old legal decision.

After the *Dobbs* ruling came down, states began enacting their own draconian abortion bans. In Texas, for example, a law triggered by the fall of *Roe* makes it a felony to perform an abortion, with a penalty of no less than \$100,000 and the possibility of life in prison. A provider can perform an abortion only in the event of a medical emergency, with no exception for rape or incest.

Texas also has a law on the books that empowers private citizens to sue anyone who has performed or helped a person get an illegal abortion. Those who bring a successful suit would collect a bounty of \$10,000 and legal fees.

In order to protect access to reproductive rights here in New York, the Legislature passed a package of five bills, two of which I introduced. To safeguard New York's medical professionals who provide reproductive health services to patients who travel here from states where abortion is illegal, my legislation will shield them from professional misconduct charges for performing, recommending or providing reproductive health services. In addition, any out-of-state applicant seeking licensure to practice in New York will not be denied because they are subject to disciplinary action in another jurisdiction for performing an abortion.

The second measure I introduced will prohibit medical malpractice insurance companies from taking adverse action against New York State-based providers who perform health-related services on an individual from a state where such care is illegal.



*I attended a press conference with my colleagues and reproductive rights advocates to speak out against the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and to declare New York State a safe haven for those seeking health care services banned in their home states.*

We also passed legislation ensuring the confidentiality of reproductive health care providers and their patients' addresses; protecting reproductive health care providers against extradition, arrest and other legal proceedings related to providing care that is permissible in New York State; and creating a private right of action for anyone whose New York State constitutionally protected rights are violated.

In addition, we passed the Equality Amendment, which amends the New York State Constitution to affirm that no person shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or other characteristics, including pregnancy, pregnancy outcome or reproductive health care. The Legislature will need to pass this amendment once more in the new session, and then it will be up to the voters to decide whether to add it to our constitution.

Protecting reproductive rights will remain critically important in the years to come and we must send this message loud and clear: we will fight back.



I organized a walking tour of my West Side district with the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY). The City dramatically slashed DSNY's operating budget during the COVID-19 pandemic, and my constituents reported an exponential increase in overflowing garbage bins and vermin. During the tour, DSNY agreed to schedule more frequent cleaning on certain blocks and to monitor hotspots identified by my office, residents and small businesses.



I joined Brady United Against Gun Violence, Moms Demand Action, March for Our Lives and Gays Against Guns in Union Square immediately after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down New York's century-old concealed carry law.

New Tool to Solve Gun Crimes

Following on the heels of the law I passed banning the sale and possession of ghost guns, I introduced a measure the Governor signed into law that requires all newly manufactured semi-automatic handguns sold in the state to be equipped with microstamping technology.

Microstamping technology imprints a unique code on a gun's cartridge casing each time the gun is fired. Law enforcement can recover the casings at a crime scene and then look up the code in a database maintained by the state Department of Criminal Justice to identify the gun's owner.

With the historically low clearance rate for gun-related offenses, this technology will serve as an additional tool to help solve crimes and get guns off our streets.

On June 23, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional

New York's concealed carry law, which required individuals to establish proper cause for their need to carry a handgun outside the home. The Legislature returned to Albany, and we passed corrective legislation specifying sensitive locations where firearms would be prohibited, including Times Square, bars and restaurants that serve alcohol, government buildings, places of worship, public playgrounds and parks, and child care facilities. In addition, we passed bills establishing new eligibility requirements for those applying for concealed carry permits, enhancing safe storage provisions, expanding background checks to ammunition purchases, and prohibiting people with certain criminal convictions from carrying a concealed weapon.



After I successfully advocated for the redesign of West 57th Street and 8th Avenue, a notoriously dangerous intersection, I was determined to re-imagine one of the most congested and confusing stretches in Hell's Kitchen: West 42nd Street and 11th Avenue. After I organized a site visit with the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) and Manhattan Community Board 4, DOT agreed to install new traffic calming measures at this intersection to alleviate congestion and ensure safer conditions for pedestrians.

Protecting Newborns from Cytomegalovirus

Every year, approximately 30,000 babies are born in the U.S. with congenital cytomegalovirus (CMV), the most common non-genetic cause of birth defects. While such infections rarely present an issue for healthy adults, it can result in deafness and other significant disabilities for newborns. Despite CMV claiming the lives of approximately 400 newborns each year, many expecting parents are not even aware such an infection exists.

CMV is transmitted through saliva, urine and other bodily fluids, with those who care for babies and young children at the highest risk. Those who are pregnant or contemplating pregnancy must be especially mindful of CMV.

In 2018, I passed a law requiring that newborns who fail their initial hearing screening be tested for CMV. Working with a team of doctors as well as parents whose children were affected by it, led me to pass legislation requiring

that licensed daycare providers and their staff be given materials on the dangers of CMV as well as ways to avoid infection. Obstetricians, gynecologists and midwives will also distribute those materials. The bill is awaiting the Governor's signature.

This legislation is named in memory of Elizabeth Saunders, a child born with microcephaly caused by a CMV infection. Her mother Lisa was infected with the virus while working as a childcare provider during her pregnancy and unknowingly passed the infection to Elizabeth in utero. Like so many parents, she questioned why she was never informed of the risk of CMV and the simple steps she could have taken to keep safe.

Increasing awareness of congenital CMV infection is critical to implementing prevention and intervention strategies. It is my hope that this legislation will do just that.

Say No to City Cuts to Education Budget

It should come as no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on New York City's education system. As the pandemic stretched on, public schools were opened and closed on short notice, far too many students suffered academically and emotionally and a general lack of transparency bred mistrust between parents and City Hall.

The Mayor and the New York City Council had an opportunity when negotiating this year's budget to reverse course. Yet, in a baffling move, they reduced education funding by more than \$350 million. The public schools in my district would lose significant funding were the City to follow through with its short-sighted cuts. After speaking with parents, teachers and principals I wrote to the Mayor urging him to revisit his decision.

The State has made an historic investment in education aid in fulfillment of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity promise, and billions of dollars were allocated through the federal American Rescue Plan. Although the Mayor recently agreed to free up about \$100 million in federal stimulus funding for schools, there's simply no reason to deprive our students of the resources they need.



Although New York State and City have relaxed most COVID-19 restrictions, it is critical that we continue to test regularly for the virus. I have distributed many thousands of COVID-19 at-home test kits to constituents and community organizations. Left to right: At Ryan Chelsea-Clinton Community Health Center in Hell's Kitchen: Daniel Pichinson, Executive Director, Arleigh Salce, Nurse Practitioner and William Arboleda, Deputy Director.



Twice a year, I sponsor one of the community's most popular events: shred day! Shredding is a safe and environmentally friendly way to dispose of confidential documents. I'm looking forward to holding another shred fest this fall.



I am a proud co-sponsor of the Build Public Renewables Act. This measure would allow the New York Power Authority to leverage public finance to develop renewable energy infrastructure that will reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions and convert 70% of its power generation to renewables by 2030. New York State would meet the goals of the Climate Act, customers would see lower bills and as many as 50,000 jobs would be created if this bill became law.

Statewide Housing Crisis Looms

New York State is in the throes of an affordable housing crisis. A dramatic spike in residential evictions, astronomical rent increases on new leases, a lack of supportive housing and the warehousing of rent-regulated apartments are among the factors contributing to an untenable situation for those who call, or wish to call, the Empire State home.

In January 2022, New York State's eviction moratorium expired, giving landlords the ability to file or restore eviction cases in housing court. The Office of Court Administration (OCA) allowed the rapid calendaring of eviction cases, which overwhelmed legal services attorneys who represent low-income tenants under the City's right to counsel law.

I organized a letter with my colleagues to the Chief Justice, urging her to slow down the docketing of cases to ensure that tenants were given every opportunity to obtain legal assistance.

Studies have shown that those facing eviction without legal representation are more likely to become homeless,

whereas 84% of tenants who have attorneys stay in their apartments.

A tenant in my district was recently served with eviction papers for unpaid rent. My staff had previously helped her apply to the state's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Unable to secure an attorney for the day of her hearing, she went to court, bringing information about the status of her ERAP application.

At the hearing, in a rush to move the case along, the judge belittled my constituent, wrongfully told her she had never applied for ERAP and instructed her to pay thousands of dollars in rental arrears to her landlord. Only after my constituent convinced the judge that she had indeed applied, was the case adjourned and later dismissed.

As evictions continue to trend upward throughout the state, it is critical that we pass bills like good cause eviction into law. Contact my office if you would like to join the effort or for more information on how the bill would impact your rights.

Monkeypox Health Crisis

Yet again, we are facing another public health emergency. This time, it's monkeypox.

New York State leads the nation with more than 3,000 confirmed cases of monkeypox, with a majority of those concentrated in New York City. Monkeypox is a virus that spreads through close, skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Anyone can contract monkeypox, but gay and bisexual men are more likely to be exposed to the virus.

One of the community health clinics located on the West Side contacted me after learning that their lab provider's monkeypox test had not yet been approved by the State Department of Health (DOH). This led to various bureaucratic obstacles that limited the number

of available tests and delayed reporting of results.

I wrote to DOH Commissioner Dr. Mary Bassett, urging the expeditious approval of the lab's application. At that point, 49 other states had already been using its test. I'm happy to report that DOH agreed and approved it a few days later.

I also wrote to Governor Hochul requesting that she issue an executive order requiring health insurance plans and Medicaid to cover the entire cost of monkeypox testing and care, a similar approach was employed during the COVID-19 pandemic when testing for the coronavirus. Some urgent care offices I contacted were charging people \$225 or more for a monkeypox test and visit. The Governor is currently reviewing my letter.



I was honored to receive the 2022 Housing Justice Award from Housing Court Answers, a nonprofit that educates and empowers tenants and small homeowners, assists pro se litigants in housing court and seeks to reduce homelessness in New York City. Left to right: Ellen Davidson, Staff Attorney at The Legal Aid Society; Jenny Laurie, Executive Director of Housing Court Answers; Judith Goldiner, Attorney-in-Charge, Civil Law Reform Unit, at The Legal Aid Society; and Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney, Civil Practice, at The Legal Aid Society at the Housing Court Answers Annual Conference at John Jay College.

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New York State Assembly
Albany, New York 12248

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In Albany I met with Rabbi Abraham Cooper, Associate Dean and Director of Global Social Action for the Simon Wiesenthal Center. The traveling exhibit "The Courage to Remember" was displayed in the Legislative Office Building, reminding and educating viewers about the atrocities of the Holocaust.