AWARDS AND FUNDRAISING DINNER IS COMING MAY 29!

You are cordially invited to our Fourth Annual Award and Fundraising Dinner. It will be held on Wednesday, May 29 from 5:30 to 8:30. The dinner will be at St. Sophia’s Greek Orthodox Church on 440 Whitehall Rd in Albany. It is an amazing evening where people, from many parts of the state who are involved in our diverse ministries, gather to learn and fellowship together.

This is our major fundraiser of the year which is important to supporting the ministry of the New York State Council of Churches. We invite you to give a sponsorship as an individual or an organization and to purchase tickets by clicking here or going to WWW.nyscoc.org. If you can’t attend but would like to sponsor us and have an ad in the booklet, your contribution will be most welcome.

We are delighted to confer awards on the following individuals and groups:

**EXCELLENCE IN CHAPLAINCY**

* Kairos Prison Ministries
* The Reverend Petero Sabune

**EXCELLENCE IN ECUMENISM**

* The Reverend Ann Akers, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Port Jervis
* The Reverend Aaron Baughman, Pastor, St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Port Jervis
  
  Zachary Pearce, Deerpark Reformed Church, Port Jervis

**EXCELLENCE IN FAITH FORMATION**

* The Reverend Kate Forer
  
  Senior Pastor, Presbyterian New England Congregational UCC Church, Saratoga Springs

**EXCELLENCE IN SOCIAL JUSTICE**

* Hotel Trades Council
  
  Brigit Hurley, Policy Director, Children’s Agenda, Rochester
  
  Ravi Ragbir, Executive Director, New Sanctuary Coalition
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

RESTORING HOPE IN A ROOT SHOCKED WORLD

To kick off the Council’s new Community Development Initiative, we gathered at Union Seminary in New York City for a special presentation by Dr. Mindy Fullilove who encouraged faith communities to take a leadership role to create inclusive towns and cities in rural, suburban and urban communities. Added theological reflections were offered by The Reverend Dr. William Wilkinson, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Medina. You can see the presentation and conversation by clicking here.

We are grateful to the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church, Goldstein Hall Attorneys at Law and Union Theological Seminary for making this event possible and their continued support of this community development initiative. We also thank Yuxin Hou who kindly filmed and edited this program.

We are now seeking grants, sponsorships and contributions to begin a series of seminars in the fall which will offer very structured and specific guidance to faith communities to think deeply about their mission, how they can make changes in laws, policies, and attitudes to make their communities more economically and socially inclusive and to use and improve their property to be a blessing on their parish (ie. neighborhood, town, and county). Please be in touch with Peter Cook at 508-380-8289 if you are a faith community who would like to participate in our seminars or if you can offer sponsorships, funding and/or expertise to this initiative.

We also bring your attention to this piece on CBS on the rural housing crisis.

ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

The New York State Council of Churches was pleased to organize the New York delegation at the Ecumenical Advocacy Days, April 5 to 8 in Washington D.C. This year we worked to advocate for passage of comprehensive voting rights based on House Resolution 1. While the House passed HR1 it languishes in the Senate with the Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell refusing to bring the bill to the floor. We held a pray in at his office which lasted all day. We also advocated for the Global Fragility Act, shaped by many peace-making organizations, to counter violence in many parts of the world. Please click here to see the asks and the video tapes of all the presentations.

STOP AND SHOP WORKERS END STRIKE

The New York State Council of Churches gives thanks that the Stop and Shop workers were successful in their strike which resulted in a new three-year contract. Click here to see the story in the Associated Press. Peter Cook from the New York State Council of Churches, Mark Emanation from the Capital Area District Labor Federation, Dominick Patrignani, President of IUE-CWA Local 81359, who lead the successful strike against Momentive, and Bill Ritchie, President of the Albany County Central Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, joined the strike line with workers at the North Adams Stop and Shop on April 19.

The New York State Council of Churches seeks to make faith communities aware of efforts to unionize and to support strikes underway by inviting people of faith to walk the line and lend their support wherever possible. We will continue to bring worker struggles for justice to your attention as we learn of them. Union strong!
CHAPLAINCY VACANCIES

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision currently has openings for Protestant Chaplains in three correctional facilities. We seek candidates with full ordinations and pastoral experience in a recognized denomination, a Bachelor's and Master of Divinity degree and at least one unit of CPE. For those interested in a call to prison chaplaincy please contact the New York State Council of Churches at 518-436-9319 or go to nyscoc.org and click on ‘Chaplain Resources’ at the bottom of the web page.

THE STATE BUDGET --- WHAT HAPPENED?

In December, 2018 the New York State Council of Churches submitted to our law makers the New Hope, New York Budget Principles which offered them guidance on creating a moral budget. The Principles were developed in collaboration with the Fiscal Policy Institute, Strong Economy for All, the Labor-Religion Coalition of New York, Metro-New York Health and 26 other organizations. Now that the New York budget has been approved, we wish to take this opportunity to see how our lawmakers measured up and what we can learn from this experience as we go forward.

The bright spot in the budget was the passage of the criminal justice reform package to drastically lessen the use of cash bail and put in place strong discovery and speedy trial reforms. For the thousands of New Yorkers who have been needlessly incarcerated, passage of these reforms is such a welcome development. In the end, our lawmakers did not succumb to grandstanding for a bad bill, but put in place really strong reforms which avoided the pitfalls of other states like California which passed very flawed laws. As Speaker Heastie said he wanted to do this right. Albany delivered. We thank Katal Center, Public Defenders Association, Trinity Wall Street, Central Synagogue, Riverside Church, the Presbytery of New York, #FREENewyork and many, many other individuals and groups for helping bring about this reform.

One wishes the bold steps that were taken by law makers around criminal justice reform could be seen when it came to the rest of the budget. The New Hope, New York Principles identified massive wealth inequality in the state and asked the very wealthy, who overwhelmingly benefited from the Federal Tax Cut and Jobs Act, to contribute more to the budget. We applaud the passage of congestion pricing, the internet sales tax, and some modest revenue from the imposition of a real-estate transfer tax and mansion dedicated to the MTA. For the most part, however, the very wealthy, unlike most other New Yorkers, were not asked to contribute more. No carried interest fairness fee (3.5 billion loss) No Ultra-Millionaires Tax ($2.1B loss), and no Pied-a-Terre Tax ($650M loss).

The result of our state’s failure to ask very wealthy to pay more is predictable. Most grievous was that the human service sector of the budget was flat lined or cut as it has been since 2011. There were a lot of casualties, but a few examples highlight the problem. The majority of the human services workforce was once again denied a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) in the budget for what is now 10 years running with the exception of direct care workers. The final budget also included less than half the funding needed to bring human service contracts up to the minimum wage. The proposed 20 million-dollar increase in child care subsides was also cut out of the budget. No additional funding, beyond a small pilot program, was included for the bi-partisan Home Stability Support Act which would be cost effective in keeping people in their homes and would have substantively addressed the homeless crisis.
Education, to be sure, received an increase targeted to the poorer school districts but the figure fell far short of taking a significant step needed towards fulfilling the state’s commitment to foundation aid. Health care saw a 3.6% increase, but this was just to keep pace with increased costs and did not result in relieving additional health care burdens including health care for immigrants and help with paying for high deductible policies.

If revenue would have gone up, the above austerity would not have been necessary. The other dynamic, however, was the imposition of the 2% spending cap which means that if you go above 2% of the budget for education and health care, the rest of the budget gets flat-lined or cut. This cap creates a situation where groups with legitimate needs must compete for one piece of pizza. Lifting the cap and adding revenue would stop this “hunger games” dynamic where the very wealthy who are not doing their part while watch everyone else, with legitimate claims, fight it out for a limited resource pie.

The principles also highlighted the need for significant tax relief. Property taxes in most parts of the state are too high because the state cost shifts its responsibilities onto counties and towns who must figure out how to pick up the burden. This has resulted in high property taxes. The “solution” offered was to cap property taxes at two percent or the rate of inflation whichever is less. This is an austere political gimmick which does not provide real property tax relief. Instead of asking the very wealthy to give a bit more so the state can pick up more of its responsibility and relieve burdens on homeowners, we force towns to come up with other revenue sources like fines and fees to make up for the lost revenue from property taxes because of the cap. The people who end up shouldering the most burden are the poor who can least afford these fines and fees while offering no significant relief for over taxed homeowners many of whom are on fixed incomes. These higher taxes are the consequence of not asking the wealthy to do more.

One obvious systemic solution to wealth inequality is to institute a small donor matching system. For example, when you have politicians in a poorer rural district having to beg hat in hand for donations from say the real estate or charter school industry which is centered far away from those districts, those politicians are less inclined to represent their constituents as they seek to keep their big money donors happy. The result is that we make costly budget decisions to favor the wealthy with lower taxes and sweet heart economic development deals than spending the money on what makes economic and social sense. The recent lobbying efforts of the big donors who made sure there was no ultra-millionaires tax and carried interest fee, and the work of the real estate industry to pull the Pied d’ Terre Tax off the table was a graphic illustration of the cost of not having a small donor system. Poor people don’t get high powered lobbyists and end up holding the bag.

One can hope that the public financing commission will propose reforms that will allow for constituents, through their small donations, to make the primary claim on the people they elect. We are concerned, however, that the commission will be used as a political cover to kill public financing. There is also the danger the commission will be ruled unconstitutional which would further delay passage of reforms in the legislature where the decision properly belongs. We are hoping for the best but there is good reason for us to remain skeptical and vigilant in our advocacy.

Finally, Albany failed to take even modest steps to address the abuse and inefficiencies of its economic development programs. A data base of deals was passed but it is rather toothless since it conceivably will still not provide the public the most transparent information about the return they are receiving from businesses in terms of promised jobs. It’s important to note that the congestion pricing plan, which does not come under the rubric of economic development,
offers one of the most cost effective programs because the parts and subways cars for the MTA made in upstate New York will result in thousands more good jobs than was offered up by the more-costly Buffalo Billion and Amazon proposals. MTA investment is an example of economic development approaches that do work.

Where do we go from here as we look towards the 2020 budget? Here are some initial thoughts.

1. An all-out campaign to add the ultra-millionaire’s tax, impose a Carried Interest fee, keep the stock transfer tax we already collecting and impose a stock buyback. None of these taxes impact the vast majority of New Yorkers but it will make all the difference in the budget to address wealth inequality which is greater in New York than any other state in the union.

2. We must lift the 2% spending cap to help the state assume more of its responsibilities and not cost shift to the cities and counties making property tax relief and funding of needed services and infrastructure development much more difficult.

3. We need to be sure we put in place a strong public financing system so politicians are making more cost-efficient policy choices which are not primarily designed to appease big donors.

4. We need to revisit how we use our economic development dollars and consider more bottom up investments in clean energy, housing, roads, mass transit, job training and other infrastructure.

These moves and some others will allow the state to pick up more of its responsibility for county and town costs to offer really property tax relief for home owners and businesses while more properly funding human services, health care and education which not only lift people up out of poverty but are better economic drivers than misguided economic development programs.

FOLLOW UP SEMINARS ON STATE BUDGET AND WEALTH

The Council will partner with the Fiscal Policy Institute and others to sponsor four or five public conversations which will be held around the state to reflect on what happened with the state budget and how we need to proceed going forward. The conversations will be held in May and June and we will let you know the dates soon.

CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT

The New York State Council of Churches is one of over 170 sponsors of the Climate and Community Protection Act. Click here for a good explanatory article from City and State. Go to NY Renews for more updates.

ANNUAL INTERFAITH IMPACT OF NEW YORK ADVOCACY DAY

Please join our friends at Interfaith Impact of New York for their annual advocacy on May 6 from 9:30 to 3:30 at the Legislative Office Building where they will promote reform in environmental and criminal justice.
DRIVERS LICENSE ACCESS FOR IMMIGRANTS

A strong push remains underway to encourage lawmakers to pass the Green Light Bill which will give immigrants access to driver's licenses. Here are some sample twitter posts you can use to make your case:

Did you know? States that provide driver’s licenses to undocumented immigrants have lower rates of uninsured drivers, less hit-and-runs, fewer traffic fatalities, and reduced out-of-pocket expenses for all drivers. #GreenLightNY is good for New York. Pass #DriversLicensesNOW.

Did you know? Studies shows that allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain “drive-only” licenses has improved public safety in Connecticut. It’s time to #GreenLightNY and pass #DriversLicensesNOW [http://bit.ly/2IOA6gH](http://bit.ly/2IOA6gH)

Did you know? If passed, #GreenLightNY would allow undocumented New Yorkers to apply for a standard driver’s license ONLY, not a “Real ID” or “enhanced” license. New York’s standard licenses cannot be used for federal purposes. Learn more at [http://bit.ly/2veSlnB](http://bit.ly/2veSlnB)

Did you know? #GreenLightNY would generate more than $2.6M in annual revenues for Nassau and Suffolk counties alone, out of $57M statewide. @toddkaminsky @Gaughran4Senate @KevinThomasNY @AnnaMKaplan @NYSSenatorMRM @NysBrooks it’s time to pass #DriversLicenseNOW. [bit.ly/2ItOb2X](http://bit.ly/2ItOb2X)

Did you know? Without access to #DriversLicensesNOW undocumented New Yorkers risk being separated from their families every time they get behind the wheel to drive to work, pick up a child from school, get to a medical appointment, or buy groceries. It’s time to #GreenLightNY!

**Be sure to tag your State Senator and Assembly Members--especially Long Islanders!**

**Tag the Long Island Six:**

Sen. Kaminsky @toddkaminsky

Sen. Gaughran @Gaughran4Senate

Sen. Thomas @KevinThomasNY

Sen. Kaplan @AnnaMKaplan

Sen. Martinez @NYSSenatorMRM

Sen. Brooks @NysBrooks

**Please also tag:**

Senate Majority Leader @AndreaSCousins

Senate Deputy Majority Leader @SenGianaris

Assembly Speaker @CarlHeastie
Here are some additional resources:

Green Light NY Campaign Fact Sheets

Fiscal Policy Institute Report on the Benefits of Allowing All New Yorkers to Apply for Licenses

Databrief: How and Why Passing a Greenlight Law Will Reduce Harms to US Citizen Children

National Academy of Sciences Article on Improvements to Traffic Safety in California

**PLANNED ACTIONS**

**Capital District**

**Wednesday April 24th**, at the Rensselaer County Department of Motor Vehicles in Troy, opponents of the Green Light NY bill will be holding a press conference to continue spreading lies and misinformation about the bill, and seeking to build further opposition. **Join us at the Rensselaer County DMV, 1600 7th Ave, Troy - at 10am. Wear green to show your support and solidarity with the campaign.**

If you live in any of the following districts, your assemblymembers are soliciting feedback on this legislation. Please take a moment and fill out these surveys in support:

John McDonald (Assembly 108)
Pat Fahy (Assembly 109)
Carrie Woerner (Assembly 113)

**Long Island**

**Wednesday, April 24th**

7:00pm - Televised Panel: Restoring Driver’s License Access to Immigrants

Location: LTV Studios, 75 Industrial Rd., Wainscott Sponsoring Organizations: OLA of Eastern Long Island, Progressive East End Reformers (PEER), Neighbors in Support of Immigrants, Centro Corazón de María, North Fork Unity Action Committee, with Assembly Member Fred Thiele

**Thursday, April 25th**

Long Island 6 Call-In Day: Make Calls to Senators Kaminsky, Kaplan, Thomas, Brooks, Martinez & Gaughran to ask them to support #DriversLicensesNOW. (More instructions, including a sample call-in script will be circulated shortly.)
**Friday, April 26th**

Long Island 6 Legislative Office Visits: Stop by the local district offices of Senators Kaminsky, Kaplan, Thomas, Brooks, Martinez & Gaughran to ask them to support #DriversLicensesNOW. If you've been collecting postcards or letters of support, this the perfect day to drop them off!

Dinner & Phone Banking (Time TBA) Location: Port Washington Sponsoring Organization: Padres en Acción (for more information, email padresenaccionpw@gmail.com)

**Monday, April 29th**

6:45pm - Passover & Immigrant Justice: A Long Island Teach-In

Location: Temple Beth Torah - 35 Bagatelle Rd, Melville Sponsoring Organization: Bend the Arc Jewish Action

**Wednesday, May 1st - MAY DAY!**

4:00pm - May Day March Location: 1550 Franklin Ave, Mineola

Sponsoring Organization: National Day Labor Organizing Network

There are also other coalition partners working on organizing May Day actions and events incorporating messaging around the Green Light campaign. If you are working on a May Day event, please email Emma Kreche at nydrivers@googlegroups.com so they can compile a complete listing statewide.

Also, SAVE THE DATE for CONCURRENT ACTIONS IN YONKERS AND QUEENS to take place on THURSDAY, MAY 2nd at 12:00pm. These actions will be aimed at pushing our Senate leadership to prioritize passage of the bill. If anyone is interested in helping organize actions at either location, please contact Vanessa for the Yonkers actions (vagudelo@nyic.org) and Theresa for the Queens action (tthanjan@nyic.org).

**RENT REGULATION ADVOCACY**

*Faith Leader Sign-On Letter Organized by the Housing Justice For All Campaign*

We need our leaders in Albany to take action before June 15th to pass nine bills if we want to stem the tide of homelessness and displacement.

This is not just an economic issue but a moral issue. Everyone should have a home. Housing should be for people, not profit. To sign the letter below, please reply to this email or fill out this form. Please include how you would like your name and affiliation listed along with your City.

Institutional affiliations will be used for identification purposes only. We encourage you to circulate the letter to your colleagues.

There were very well attended gatherings around the state in favor or statewide rent regulations including in Rochester and at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem.
The Metro Council on Housing tells us that the “rent regulation laws expire in less than 8 weeks. Now is the time for us to make much need changes and to expand regulation. We all know the problems with our current rent regulation system. Too many of us suffer from legally allowed landlord harassment due to construction and rent increases or we live with no protections at all. We often complain to each other or to friends and family but on May 2nd we will have the chance to testify in front of the NYS Assembly Housing Committee. We know the problems these weak laws have caused in our life and the perils of being an unregulated tenant. To pass our Universal Rent Control platform, we need to share our stories. Testifying and public speaking our not easy for many of us. We are having a training to work on our testimony together as well as share updates on the campaign. This is especially important if you are unregulated tenant and would benefit from the good cause eviction bill.”

**Be Heard! Public Speaking Training for #UniversalRentControl**

Thursday, April 25, 2019 at 6:30 PM
168 Canal St Fl 6, New York
RSVP Here

We need the New York State Assembly & Senate to pass all NINE of our bills. The best way to make sure they understand how important these nine bills are to protecting our homes is to tell them directly at the Assembly Housing Committee Hearing on May 2nd.

Ever wanted a chance to tell your housing problems to someone that mattered? Now is your chance!

Assembly hearing will be 250 Broadway, New York on Thursday May 2nd sessions starting at 11am and 6pm. You must register in advance to testify. Please sign up here!

For more information contact Andrea at [www.metcouncilonhousing.org](http://www.metcouncilonhousing.org)

**CONFERENCE IN BUFFALO ON IMPACT OF MASS INCARCERATION**

The justice collective invites you to our fourth regional conference on the impact of mass incarceration on families and communities co-hosted by The Alliance for Families of Justice. The theme will be on Changing Criminal Injustice. The conference will be held on Friday, May 3, 5:30-8:00 pm and Saturday, May 4, 8:30 am-3:30 pm at the Mt. Olive Baptist Church 701 East Delavan Avenue, Buffalo, NY 14215. The event is free of charge! Please register at [www.afj-ny.org](http://www.afj-ny.org). Call Karima Amin at 716-834-8438 or BaBa Eng at 716-491-5319, or questions to email info@afj-ny.org.

In Faith,

Peter Cook

Executive Director

Remember to visit our website. We value your partnership in ministry with us. The New York State Council of Churches relies on contributions to carry out its ministry, please donate.

Also, like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter.