

Resolution No. -2023

**TO THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF LEGISLATORS
COUNTY OF WESTCHESTER, NEW YORK**

WHEREAS, these Committees have reviewed the following items for the
2023 Westchester County Federal Joint Legislative Package; **Now Therefore Be It**

RESOLVED, after that considerable deliberation, it is recommended that this Honorable
Board approve these legislative initiatives and that they be presented to and considered
by the Westchester County Federal Delegation during the current federal legislative
session.

Dated: April 17, 2023
White Plains, New York



Margaret A. Cygo

COMMITTEE ON
Legislation

WESTCHESTER COUNTY FEDERAL PACKAGE

Identifying the Legislative, Appropriative and Agency-related Priorities of
Westchester County



APRIL 17, 2023
WESTCHESTER COUNTY

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Westchester County is home to over 1 million people – a quarter of whom are foreign born, and a third of whom speak a language other than English at home. These people are spread across 500 miles of bustling cities, picturesque villages, and verdant towns – and 45 separate municipalities.

Westchester's County government sits at the nexus of these diverse people and fights to support their needs. We boast a nationally accredited parks system and miles of sprawling, beautiful parks. We support the needy through our Department of Social Services that provides high quality child care, food support, housing assistance, and more. We have built over 2,700 units of affordable housing to push back against the housing affordability crisis. We support new businesses with our Launch1000 program which has helped create hundreds of new jobs and MWBE businesses. We pushed back against COVID, facing one of the first cases in the U.S. and achieving one of the highest national vaccination rates.

Our nation is facing challenges. Housing is increasingly unaffordable; our schools are increasingly unsafe due to gun violence. Our planet is warming, and massive populations of animals crucial to our environment are dying every day. Westchester's homeowners are beset by federally sponsored double taxation as costs spiral out of control.

The 117th Congress took strong steps against these challenges. Passing the Inflation Reduction Act will transform our energy sector, making it cleaner and safer against supply chain shocks; passing the United States Chips and Science Act kept our nation competitive in the face of authoritarian aggression; passing the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act was a crucial first step in protecting our children, and passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act helped rebuild our aging infrastructure.

Westchester hopes that in this 118th Congress, our delegation will again take strong steps to respond to these challenges and protect the people of our County, and our Country.

Enclosed, you will find information regarding federal FY24 appropriations and legislative items that will benefit the people of Westchester County. These items are approved by a bipartisan coalition of Westchester's County Legislators, underscoring our conviction as to their necessity for our residents.

Please do not hesitate to contact any of us here in Westchester County government if we can be of any support as you conduct your negotiations. We thank you for your consideration, and the tireless efforts you put into representing our County.

Sincerely,

George Latimer,
Westchester County Executive

Catherine Borgia,
Chair, Westchester County Board of Legislators

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

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Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Westchester County's Top Priorities:

Repeal the Limits Imposed on State and Local Tax Deductions (SALT)

Westchester County strongly supports the repeal of the \$10,000 limit imposed on the amount of state and local taxes that can be deducted from federal income taxes.

Prior to the enactment of the Federal Tax Reform Act of 2017, New York taxpayers who itemized their federal tax deductions could deduct the full amount of their state and local property and income taxes. Previously, this SALT deduction had been a major source of tax fairness for highly taxed donor states like New York, and particularly in Westchester County, which has high property taxes.

Prior to 2017, 70% of Westchester's middle income families (defined as families making less than \$200,000 per year) itemized their federal tax deductions for an average of \$36,263 in savings. The present cap of \$10,000 results in double taxation, dis-incentivizing home ownership and exacerbating the economic troubles of thousands of middle class families struggling to manage their finances in the face of high gas prices and an economy still recovering from the second wave of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic.

From 2021-2022, our federal delegation made progress in securing this relief. In particular, the SALT Deductibility Act, responded particularly effectively to this crisis. We support the 2021-2022 SALT Deductibility Act, and support further efforts to reintroduce and pass this crucial legislation.

Relevant Legislation:

117th Congress:

- S.85: Securing Access to Lower Taxes by ensuring Deductibility Act
 - Sponsored by Senator Charles Schumer
 - Cosponsors include: Senator Gillibrand
 - This bill repeals the temporary restrictions in taxable years 2018 through 2025 on the deductibility of state and local taxes.
- H.R.613: Securing Access to Lower Taxes by ensuring Deductibility Act
 - Cosponsors include: Congressman Bowman; Jones; S.P Maloney
 - This bill repeals the temporary restrictions in taxable years 2018 through 2025 on the deductibility of state and local taxes.

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support Federal Gun Control Initiatives

Westchester County strongly supports federal action to strengthen gun control through universal background checks, safe storage legislation, expansion of extreme risk protection orders, and increasing the minimum age to own a semi-automatic rifle.

From 2021 to 2022, the U.S. saw 553 school shootings – a twelvefold increase compared to 2001-2002. In 2023 alone, there have been 95 school shootings as of Tuesday, April 4th. Over 500 people have been killed, and over 1,000 wounded in the last twenty years.

Firearms became the number one cause of death for American children and teens aged 1-19 years in 2020.

In Westchester, parents and students are deeply concerned. A dozen Westchester school districts have received threats of violence, many of which identified elements of the schools' layouts. Westchester's Department of Public Safety (WCDPS) is working in consultation with districts and local police departments to provide logistical and technical preparatory support, and WCDPS officers are deployed as School Resource Officers at School Districts including the North Salem Central School District, Lakeland School District, Hendrick Hudson School district and others.

Despite these efforts, the threat remains. School Resource Officers were present at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, and the school had deployed 'Social Sentinel' and the 'Rapid Visitor Management System' as initiatives to 'harden' the school against attack. Despite these measures, 22 were killed. Even with a rapid police response, 6 died at the 2023 Covenant School shooting in Nashville and 12 were killed in the 2023 Monterey Park shooting, where the gunman was even able to escape the scene of the crime.

With this in mind, the only comprehensive response to this critical problem must come from the federal government, and must prevent firearms from reaching those experiencing mental illness – as the perpetrators of the Monterey Park, Covenant School and Robb Elementary shootings were.

Mental health care should be deployed in conjunction with these efforts, but if perpetrators are able to purchase and utilize firearms legally or with limited illegal effort, repeated shootings have made clear that no amount of hardening or mental health support will reduce the threat capacity facing our schools.

Relevant Legislation:

118th Congress:

- S.247 - Extreme Risk Protection Order Expansion Act of 2023
- H.R.768 - Extreme Risk Protection Order Expansion Act of 2023
- H.R.7910 - Protecting Our Kids Act

117th Congress:

- H.R.2377 - Federal Extreme Risk Protection Order Act of 2021
 - Passed the House
- H.R.7910 - Protecting Our Kids Act
 - Passed the House

**Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations
Westchester County**

**Westchester County's
Federal Appropriations Priorities**

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Continue Funding to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act

Westchester County supports the continuation of Enhanced Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentages (eFMAP) under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Westchester has seen tremendous benefit as a result of eFMAP earned by New York State's expansions of Medicaid programs in conjunction with the ACA. The State currently caps our weekly Medicaid contribution, but we pay millions less than the cap due to additional eFMAP provided under the ACA. Currently, Westchester sees savings of \$20-30 million per year because of the ACA.

New York State's ability to cap county Medicaid expenses is dependent on the ACA, because the State has generated eFMAP associated savings related to its expansion of Medicaid. Were the costs of Medicaid shifted back to the states, our savings would be in jeopardy.

Westchester identifies the following to inform your discussions as to the needs of our residents:

- In light of the tremendous savings provided to counties by these programs, Westchester County opposes block granting and/or the privatization of programs like Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. Block granting and privatization would deprive thousands of residents of their benefits, dramatically increase their financial stresses, and burden other social service programs.
- We support the continued reauthorization of the Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) program. Active FQHCs throughout Westchester provide essential and affordable services to our County's high-need populations. These centers were of critical need during the coronavirus pandemic, serving as a mechanism to directly support testing and vaccination efforts in especially vulnerable communities. We support ongoing funding for these centers, including funding for prevention and treatment of substance abuse and teen pregnancy prevention programs.
- Westchester County also supports funding for mental health services, as well as mandates for adequate coverage for mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen a dramatic increase in demand for mental health support, particularly among populations aged 0-17, as well as an increase in mental health incidents.
- Westchester County supports the expansion of telehealth and telemedicine services. These programs can reduce the short and long term costs of care and increase access to care, particularly among the mobility impaired.
 - Westchester's Telehealth Intervention Programs for Seniors (TIPS), debuted in June 2014, is at the forefront of telehealth. TIPS provides a unique collaborative approach between telehealth, social programs, and hands on volunteer programs, reaching more people in need of care and helping them stay in their homes longer.
 - If your office would like to connect to gather information on telehealth programs or our TIPS initiative, please do not hesitate to contact Westchester County.

Relevant Legislation:

117th Congress:

- H.R.366: Protecting Access to Post-COVID-19 Telehealth Act of 2021
- H.R.341: Ensuring Telehealth Expansion Act of 2021
- H.R.434: Preventing Mental Health and Substance Use Crises During Emergencies Act

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Fund the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program

Westchester County supports allocating additional funding to the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program (CIAP) in order to allow Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) to upgrade and repair the units under their purview.

The Public Housing Capital Fund (PHCF), which provides funds to PHAs for the development, financing, and modernization of public housing developments, has been underfunded for decades. Due to this chronic underfunding, more than 10,000 public housing apartments are lost annually nationwide; these apartments are so damaged that they cannot be safely occupied. Without reliable funding through the PHCF, PHAs have no way to repair them.

Westchester County supports providing funding to the Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program (CIAP) in order to respond to this problem. CIAP provides capital funding for modernization to public housing authorities that own or operate less than 250 units of public housing, allowing them to physically improve the building and upgrade management and operations.

Funding CIAP will have a positive drag-on effect on Westchester's climate and economy, and will support many of its most disadvantaged residents. Westchester has 10 distinct PHAs across 45 jurisdictions, which administrate hundreds of public housing units. Securing funds to improve these facilities will reduce their carbon footprint by allowing the buildings to receive green upgrades, and will provide more low income residents with security and the means towards upward advancement in the form of housing which they can afford.

Relevant Legislation:

103rd Congress:

- S.2281 - Housing Choice and Community Investment Act of 1994
- H.R.5245 - Housing Programs Extension Act of 1994

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support the Maintenance of Existing Funds to Social Services

Federal allocations to the following sources ensure that Westchester County is able to provide crucial social services to thousands of Westchester County's neediest residents. COVID-era programs are expiring, placing additional strain on traditional programs. As you navigate the budgetary process this cycle, we ask that the following programs be fully funded and supported to ensure that our County is able to continue supporting its residents.

- **Social Service Block Grants (Title XX)**
 - Derived from Title XX of the Social Security Act of 1981, funding from the SSBG supports a wide variety of services in Westchester County, including child care, child and adult protective services, foster care, and special services for the disabled. SSBG funding can be used for up to 29 service categories that have broad application, making the funding flexible and underscoring how well it can be utilized to positive impact locally. Westchester strongly supports the continuation of SSBG funding.
- **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**
 - TANF funding helps low-income families with children achieve economic self-sufficiency. Westchester's TANF-supported families are alternatively served by the County operated Safety Net program, which is 71% county funded. Cuts in TANF, which is 99% federally funded, would burden the majority-county funded Safety Net program, and would result in steep decreases in child welfare, domestic violence victim support, drug and alcohol treatment, employment support, foster care services provided to Westchester's neediest populations. Westchester applauds President Biden for allocating funding to this crucial program in his FY24 budget proposal.
- **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and HOME programs**
 - Westchester re-established its Urban County Consortium in 2018 in order to receive CDBG/HOME/ESG grant funds from HUD for municipalities that do not receive direct allocations. 31 communities are now participating in the program. These communities, and 4 of Westchester's cities, rely on CDBG funds to support a slate of infrastructure and public service programs that enhance our local economy. Westchester asks that CDBG, HOME and ESG funding continue to be fully funded by Congress.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**
 - SNAP provides cash assistance and benefits to families with high need. Recipients must engage in work activity in order to receive benefits. Participants in this program are expected to grow by 3% nationwide in 2023, but the amount of money expended towards SNAP is declining as enhanced pandemic relief benefits end, resulting in eligible families having at least \$95 less to spend on groceries in a month, while food is one of the hardest hit inflation categories: Prices of food are up over 10% year over year as of February. Westchester asks that SNAP continue to be fully funded by Congress.
- **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)**
 - Authorized by the Older Americans Act, SCSEP provides income support and part-time work experience in community service activities to ensure that the program's clients, unemployed low-income persons aged 55 and older, transition to unsubsidized employment and avoid public assistance. Westchester's budgeted funding for this program directly funds our countywide Department of Senior Services. Westchester asks that SCSEP continue to be fully funded by Congress.

**Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations
Westchester County**

**Westchester County's
Federal Legislative and Agency Priorities**

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support Critical Westchester County Infrastructure Projects

Penn Station Access

- Penn Station Access is a project planned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) that would connect Metro North to both the west and east side of Manhattan. In doing so, it would create 6 new Metro North stops – West 125th street and West 62nd street on the Hudson line and Manhattan’s west side, and Co-op City, Morris Park, Parkchester, and Hunts Point on the New Haven line and the east Bronx.
- Westchester County advocates strongly in support of this project; these stations will further connect Westchester to New York City, enhancing the local economy along the Hudson and New Haven Metro North lines and providing benefits of mobility to many of Westchester’s residents. Residents who commute to work in New York City will see benefits in a wider variety of destinations, enhancing their economic opportunity – and allowing for more time with their families – while residents of New York City interested in exploring Westchester’s nationally recognized park system or cozy local businesses will have an opportunity to explore our county and support main street economies.
- The recent Memorandum of Understanding developed between the MTA and Amtrak, as well as funding secured by Senator Chuck Schumer, will do much to ensure that this project comes to fruition. Westchester thanks our delegation for their efforts on this topic and encourages further prioritization of this project through incorporation in any transit oriented development plans and the provision of agency support.

Bridge Strikes

- Northeastern states have a large number of older, lower bridges. Westchester, in particular, has a number of low bridges which overlook highly trafficked roads and are often struck by large trucks. These include the King Street Bridge in Rye and the Hutchinson River Parkway, the Saw Mill River Parkway, and the Bronx River Parkway.
- While New York State law prohibits commercial vehicles of all sizes from using State parkways, many drivers use GPS applications which do not mention these laws. Without this guidance, commercial vehicles strike these low bridges, causing damage to infrastructure and putting motorists in serious danger.
 - Westchester saw 636 bridge strikes on County and State parkways between 2017 and 2023.
 - Bridge strikes increased by 21% from 2022-2023.
- Westchester seeks your assistance in asking the U.S. Department of Transportation to consider the following actions:
 - Work with mapping companies (Google, Waze) to require the companies to update their software to add warnings for trucks and other commercial vehicles.
 - Require the truck height to be posted inside the truck cabin in view of the driver.
 - Require the low bridge/parkways system to be included in Commercial Driver’s License training.
 - Require truck rental companies to share information on route limitations of commercial vehicles with drivers.
 - Require trucking companies to install commercial GPS in the cabs of all 53’ trucks and rental companies to do the same with rental vehicles

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Yonkers Wastewater Treatment Plant

- Westchester County operates a wastewater treatment plant on the west side of Yonkers, the third largest city in New York State. This plant caters to roughly 500,000 residents and filters over a million gallons of waste every day. Local residents and neighboring municipalities report noxious odors emanating from the plant
- Westchester County sponsored an odor control study by CDM Smith which was completed in 2019; this study determined that the smell was due to aging scrubbers and poor insulation at the facility, and identified other infrastructure issues which required improvement. This plant is located in a predominantly Black and Hispanic section of Yonkers; residents living on the city's west side are primarily middle class. Westchester County believes that the disproportionate exposure of these communities to pollution and crumbling infrastructure is unjust, and has been working to secure environmental justice for this population.
- In order to support these residents, Westchester County requests \$69.1 million in budgeted federal grants in order to provide long term infrastructural repairs to the Yonkers Wastewater Treatment Plant. Westchester thanks Congressman Jamaal Bowman for securing \$750,000 towards this project in FY23 allocations.

Environmental Protection and Clean Water

- The Long Island Sound is a national treasure and an economic engine for Westchester which draws families, boaters, tourists and anglers to the sound shore communities. We were glad to see the Long Island Sound Future Fund receive \$3.8 million in federal/state grants in 2020. Westchester asks that our federal representatives reinstate all EPA and environmental funds stripped away from 2017 to 2021.
- Westchester County thanks Senator Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and Congressman Jamaal Bowman for their work securing \$88 million in funding for the construction of the Mamaroneck Flood Mitigation Project. The Mamaroneck and Sheldrake River Flood Management Project was stalled for years until Senator Schumer broke the logjam. This project will protect residents from hundreds of millions of dollars in damages and will turn the tables on a region harrowed by deadly storms.
- Clean, safe water is essential. Many communities in Westchester have aging or insufficient waste water and drinking water systems. These systems are costly to build, maintain and upgrade, putting remedial action far beyond the budget of most municipalities, and making federal and state funding crucial. Despite strong bipartisan backing, the Drinking Water Infrastructure Act (S.914) has passed the Senate, but not yet the House in the 117th Congress. If passed, this legislation will reauthorize the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) and the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, which provide crucial support for water and sewer projects. Significantly, the CWSRF is the funding mechanism for \$50 billion authorized by the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for infrastructure improvements to drinking water and wastewater systems. Westchester County urges the introduction and passage of S.914 in the House.

Relevant Legislation:

117th Congress:

- S.914: Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure Act of 2021

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Public Safety Radio Project Phase 3

- Westchester County is upgrading its emergency services radio system; this upgrade includes the purchase of additional frequencies to expand interoperability capabilities county wide, the construction of new radio towers to expand and improve coverage, upgrading critical emergency response systems, and providing new compatible portable and mobile radios to police, fire and EMS agencies.
- This enhanced system will improve emergency response throughout Westchester County, and the overall total cost will be well over \$100 million. Senator Schumer has already delivered \$2 million in an earmark towards this project.
- Due to the large cost and wide benefit to residents of Westchester County, we ask that our federal delegation work to secure additional funding, to help reduce the tax burden on our local residents as we advance this critical public safety communications project.

Annsville Circle

- Annsville Circle is located in the Town of Cortlandt, in the northwestern part of Westchester County. It is a large traffic circle that leads to the City of Peekskill, Camp Smith, a military base, and the popular hiking destinations of Anthony's Nose and Westchester County's Blue Mountain Reservation. The Circle also feeds into the Bear Mountain Bridge, which leads to the popular Bear Mountain State Park. Much of northern Westchester utilizes septic systems for local sewage, and Annsville Circle and its surrounding area are no different.
- The Town of Cortlandt is interested in developing Annsville Circle for recreation, hotels, and mixed use and affordable housing. As a rare piece of undeveloped land, Annsville Circle would be perfect for this purpose – but without being connected to Westchester's sewer district, these developments would need to remain on septic systems, seriously limiting their capacity.
- In order to support economic development in the Town of Cortlandt, particularly following the closure of the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant, Westchester County requests that our federal delegation work to secure funding to support this sewer expansion. The cost of this sewer expansion is estimated around \$12 million dollars per the most recent estimates of the County.

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support Communities Impacted by the Closure of Indian Point

Following the closure of the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant in 2021, the Hendrick Hudson School District and Library, Village of Buchanan, Town of Cortlandt, Verplanck Volunteer Fire District and Westchester County experienced significant annual property tax losses. Westchester County has worked in partnership with local communities and New York state to identify and respond to job loss and the overall impact on the local economy. Efforts have been made to identify potential shared services, replacement revenue sources, opportunities for possible reuse of the property, and other economic development and workforce development opportunities.

Currently, Holtec International has been licensed to decommission the plant and has taken full control of the site; no energy is being generated on the site, and all spent fuel is secured in dry cask or pool storage.

Westchester County appreciates the work of our federal delegation in supporting initiatives designed to assist with these efforts, including securing prioritization for Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant opportunities. We ask our federal delegation to develop a safe solution for high level radioactive waste transportation and disposal. Without a solution from the federal government, nuclear power plants like Indian Point become de facto long term radioactive waste storage sites. This creates environmental and public health risks, challenges regarding emergency preparedness, and limits possible opportunities to repurpose Indian Point in the future.

Westchester County asks our federal delegation to work with the federal government to ensure that a decision is made on how best to safely transport and dispose of the plant's waste. We ask that transparency and community involvement be facilitated as cooperation with Holtec continues, and that emergency preparedness initiatives are supported.

The following legislation was introduced in current and previous sessions of Congress; we support their reintroduction and passage in furtherance of efforts at Indian Point.

Relevant Legislation:

117th Congress:

- S.1290: STRANDED Act of 2021

116th Congress:

- S. 2854: Dry Cask Storage Act of 2019

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support Net Neutrality and Affordable Broadband Access

In today's interconnected society, accessing economic opportunity, entertainment, education, social engagement and even government services require high speed internet access. As such, it is crucial that all residents have high quality, high speed internet access.

Net Neutrality is the idea that Internet Service Providers (ISPs) should not be allowed to block content, throttle speeds, or require payment for preferred access. Without net neutrality, internet access becomes a question of economic access, effectively slowing down lower income communities – and arbitrarily depriving them of crucial educational, economic and personal opportunities to profit a very limited group.

With the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic, this issue is more crucial than ever before; limited internet access can deprive communities of access to crucial resources necessary for health and personal safety. Establishing Net Neutrality additionally supports the economic and academic needs of our businesses and students.

Westchester County urges our delegation to support net neutrality by securing the appointment of a new FCC Commissioner supportive of Net Neutrality, or by taking Congressional action to overturn the FCC's 2017-2019 decision, and to take Congressional action to expand and enhance affordable broadband and high speed internet access.

Relevant Legislation:

118th Congress:

- PN8: Gigi B. Sohn - Federal Communications Commission

117th Congress:

- S.745 - Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act
- S.741 - Broadband Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2021
- S.1023 - Computer and Internet Access Equity Act
- H.R.1783 - Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act
- H.R.1700 - Broadband Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 2021
- H.R.2201 - Computer and Internet Access Equity Act

116th Congress:

- S.682: Save the Internet Act of 2019
- H.R.1644: Save the Internet Act of 2019 (Passed the House)

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Facilitate a Strong Response to Climate Change

Human activity, primarily the emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming. Hundred-year storms have ravaged Westchester County nearly every year, dealing hundreds of millions of dollars of property damage. Native insect populations have declined, instead replaced by invasive species such as lanternflies. Native trees are threatened by dozens of severe diseases that are expensive to manage, and each year seems to be the warmest on record.

Rising water levels will have significant impacts on Westchester's riverfront and sound shore communities, the county's commuter rail system, and even, as the last few years have proven, communities far inland.

Westchester County supports funding to review the feasibility of underground electric distribution wiring as a storm hardening measure, following years of severe power outages brought on by intense winds.

Westchester County also supports rapid implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act, as well as any assistance which our federal partners can provide in securing and strategically deploying the resources available through this historic investment.

Westchester County underlines the importance of supporting biodiversity in climate change mitigation initiatives. Biodiversity allows ecosystems to remain durable against disease or harsh conditions, and provides a greater stock of organisms which may provide advancements in biosciences.

We urge our federal delegation to continue to advocate for actions to mitigate the human impact on climate, and to aggressively fight to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Support Opioid Abuse Prevention, Treatment and Enforcement

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified that over 100,000 Americans died from drug overdose deaths between April of 2020 and 2021, an increase of 28.5% when compared to the year before. Seventy-five percent of those 100,000 overdose deaths were opioid-related, primarily involving fentanyl.

Westchester County experienced an increase in overdoses at the local level; 339 shots of Naloxone were administered to persons experiencing an overdose and 192 emergency department visits occurred involving heroin overdoses. 128 overdose deaths were recorded in 2020, an increase of 28 compared to the previous year. From January to June of 2021, 54 additional overdoses occurred.

Social isolation caused by the pandemic caused increased rates of anxiety, depression and other mental health issues. These factors have resulted in higher opioid usage, which has persisted. Coordination between health and mental health care services and law enforcement is necessary in order to achieve a successful and impactful response.

We support efforts to limit opioid prescriptions, expand addiction treatment programs, and to direct funding towards law enforcement coordination through efforts such as the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program and International Narcotics Trafficking Emergency Response by Detecting Incoming Contraband with Technology (INTERDICT) Act funding.

Westchester County asks that our federal representatives work to respond to the ongoing opioid crisis through this 118th Congress.

Related Legislation:

117th Congress:

- S.166: Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act
- S.485: Family Support Services for Addiction Act of 2021
- S.2353: LABEL Opioids Act of 2021
- H.R.706: Emergency Support for Substance Use Disorders Act
- H.R.433: Family Support Services for Addiction Act of 2021
 - Passed House
- H.R.1026: LABEL Opioids Act

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Continue Flood Hazard Mapping and Risk Analysis Program

Westchester County has seen increasingly intense, severe, and frequent damaging weather incidents as a result of climate change. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mapped over a million stream miles in order to communicate flood risks to communities and residents, inform local floodplain management regulations, help communities set minimum floodplain and building standards, determine who is required to purchase flood insurance, and to ensure that the agency itself is able to accurately price flood insurance for regional risks.

Although this program does not provide direct funding to the County, flood mapping does add significant value to our hazard/disaster mitigation programs at our Department of Planning and our Department of Emergency Services; these programs, in turn, benefit many of Westchester's communities. The most recent update of Westchester's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) was in 2007, requiring our staff to work on information which is in some cases inaccurate or which has not accounted for changes in the rising sea level. Westchester County has cooperated with multiple agencies towards the development of new maps, and hopes to have continued input as they are finalized.

Updated maps for Westchester's coastal panels are due to be finished by 2024, but the completion of these maps is conditional on continued federal support. Westchester's emergency management mitigation efforts will benefit immensely from updated flood maps. As such, Westchester County asks that our federal representatives ensure the expeditious completion of these maps.

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Pass the Local Journalism Sustainability Act

Westchester County supports work to pass legislation addressing the local news industry crisis.

The Local Journalism Sustainability Act (LJSA), first introduced in 2020, provides individual taxpayers a tax credit of up to \$250 for subscriptions to one or more local newspapers for the taxpayer's personal use. It also provides a payroll credit for wages paid to local news journalists by a local news employer.

Many local newspapers relied heavily on advertising in order to remain financially viable, with advertising representing as much as 85% of a newspaper's overall revenue. As readership has declined and advertising revenues have shifted towards online markets, many of these newspapers have had to resort to mass layoffs in order to make ends meet. Many more have been forced to close. Roughly 1,800 communities in the U.S. now have no professionally reported local news; more than 2,000 newspapers have gone out of business over the past 20 years.

In New York State, 13 counties have only one newspaper, while one county has no newspapers at all. From 2004 to 2019, the number of weekly newspapers in the state declined from 439 to 249.

Passing the LJSA will ensure that our residents are aware of school and zoning board meetings, budget hearings other crucial local government activities. It will also ensure that our communities are tied together, and that residents are aware of local events, festivals, and community gatherings, encouraging local economic activity.

Related Legislation:

117th Congress:

- S. 2434: Local Journalism Sustainability Act
- H.R. 3940: Local Journalism Sustainability Act

116th Congress:

- H.R. 7640: Local Journalism Sustainability Act

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Restore the Expansion of Child Tax Credits

As part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) monthly payments were made from July to December 2021 to the families of 60 million children in the U.S. Families received direct payments of \$300 each month for young children, and \$250 each month for those over the age of 6.

The Child Tax Credit was the singular most effective U.S. government program in decades; these payments decreased child poverty in the U.S. by nearly 40%. When they were not renewed in December of 2021, child poverty drew back up, sharply.

The U.S. historically has a high child poverty rate of roughly one in five children. This is in no small part because the U.S. dedicates roughly 0.6% of its GDP towards alleviating the issue, while other nations part of the more affluent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) spend an average of 2.1%. This high child poverty rate ripples outwards, resulting in large populations of adults in need of social services, their development stunted by the experiences of poverty while growing up.

Child Tax Credit payments were spent primarily on necessities by recipients. Parents spent the money on clothing, food, housing, utilities, and childcare. In the first month of the program alone, child poverty dropped from 15.8% to 11.9%. Further, a recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research estimates that in the long term, this program has the capacity to save and/or generate ten times its cost by reducing the burden of social services and the preponderance of crime while increasing the economic participation of those 60 million American children.

Discussions regarding this program have focused around whether or not a work requirement should be mandatory for those receiving these payments. Filing ‘proof of work’ through one’s annual taxes would be the necessary mechanism through which these families would receive the credit; but many families eligible for these payments do not have access to the resources or expertise necessary to file their taxes in such a way as to provide that proof and claim that credit. Westchester County thus supports a continued extension of this program as it was originally produced in the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act – without the ‘proof of work’ requirement.

Westchester County supports President Biden’s FY24 Budget Proposal, which would expand the credit from \$2000 per child to \$3000 per child for children six years old and above, and to \$3,600 per child for children under six. The Budget would also permanently reform the credit to make it fully refundable. The renewal of this program in order to combat child poverty and uplift low income youth is crucial as our country faces economic strain and works recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Related Legislation:

118th Congress:

- President Biden’s FY24 Budget Proposal includes the restoration of the Child Tax Credit.

116th Congress:

- S.690: American Family Act of 2019
- H.R.1560: American Family Act of 2019

Priorities for Federal Legislation and FY24 Appropriations Westchester County

Community Mental Health Priorities

Westchester County's Department of Community Mental Health emphasizes support of the following topics as informed by their experience through the COVID Pandemic. We hope that our experience can shape your advocacy as you craft a broad based response to the diverse mental health needs of our County, State and Nation.

Access to Mental Healthcare and Support

Access to mental health, substance use and co-occurring care should be easy and affordable. It is critical that both the federal and state government **enforce the Mental Health Parity Compliance Act**, especially for private/commercial insurance providers who often fail to adhere to parity requirements by significant margins. This bill revises the mental health parity rules to require private health insurance plans that offer both medical and mental health coverage.

Westchester urges that our delegation work to increase access to mental health and substance use care. This would include expanding current and proposed care delivery structures and developing innovative payment models, including expanding the model of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics.

Prevention and Early Intervention for Children, Youth and Young Adults

As with all Public Health Issues, mental health conditions should be prevented and treated long before they reach the critical points in the "disease" process. There needs to be great focus and allocation of resources towards implementing k-12 school-based education and in-school mental health services to prevent and intervene early in mental health conditions. This intervention will reduce costs and support the wellbeing of America's population through critical, formative years of their life. Intervention must include support of upstream efforts to address adverse childhood experiences and trauma and their impact on mental health.

Suicide Prevention and Access to Crisis Care

It is critical to enhance supportive alternatives to emergency rooms and criminal justice involvement in crisis response. With the passage of the new 9-8-8 number for suicide prevention and mental health crises, there is an opportunity to create a continuum of crisis care that ensures mental health responses to mental health crises and prioritizes equity. Westchester urges our delegation to continue to build on this strong foundation in order to support these alternatives.

Education and Awareness to Support those Individuals struggling with mental health, substance use or co-occurring disorders

Westchester has identified significant demand for awareness and skills to support children, adolescent and adults experiencing mental health, substance use, co-occurring disorders, and/or suicidality. This would include providing resources to expand Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. MHFA training should be highly recommended training for schools, workplace, law enforcement, first responders, and other settings to help address those in need and link to appropriate services and supports.