

**OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE**

*APRIL 2008*

*CLIPS*

# DAILY NEWS

APRIL 3, 2008

## Visa that offers a passport from fear

**T**HEY CAN BE lifesavers for hundreds of immigrants. Yet, most have never heard of them. "That's why we want to get the word out about the U visas," said Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum. "They protect immigrants from violence and they also help the police. It is a win-win situation."

Crimes against immigrants often go unreported because victims and witnesses are afraid of being deported. Criminals know this is a vulnerable segment of society they can victimize with a great deal of impunity.

"[But] if more people knew that the U visas exist, more criminals would be taken off the street," Gotbaum said.

With that in mind, Gotbaum and several organizations held a press conference yesterday at Children's Aid Society headquarters in Manhattan, urging immigrants to apply for U visas.

They also asked the Administration for Children's Services and the New York Police Department to designate staff to help increase access to this important protection for immigrant children and families.

"My younger sister and I applied months ago, but ACS has not certified our applications yet, because they have no designated staff to do it," said a sweet-voiced 26-year-old Nigerian woman, who asked to remain anonymous. She came to New York with her parents and three siblings when she was 7.

"We grew up with terrible violence at home," she added in perfect English. "My father tried to murder my mother. She could not take it any more, left us and went back to Africa."

Yet, not only did she survive the violence and the appalling poverty, but now she is an English major in college. The U visa will finally give her protection and hope.

U visa legislation was approved by Congress in 2000, but until last October regulations were not in

place to issue them. But even with the regulations, hundreds of people have not been able to fully benefit from the U visas.

Gotbaum also called on nearly 1,000 immigrants who received interim status to file an application to obtain final status. But they have to move quickly: The deadline is April 14.

The USCIS began granting interim status to victimized immigrants during the seven years regulations were not in place.

The fact that the law establishes that only the heads of certain government agencies, or individuals specifically designated within an agency, can certify the law enforcement section of U visa applications has slowed down the visa-granting process.

At the NYPD, for instance, only Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly has the authority to certify them. Participants in yesterday's press conference urged the department to entrust more officers with the ability to do the same.

The U visa provides temporary legal status for up to four years. It allows the recipient to work and to bring to the U.S. his or her immediate family. Every year, 10,000 visas will be available.

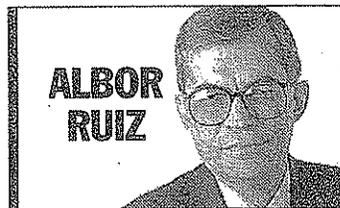
Applicants must assist in the investigation and prosecution of crimes such as domestic violence, rape, torture, trafficking, prostitution and kidnapping.

"Many victims hide in the shadows out of fear of deportation," said Elizabeth Reichard of the City Bar Justice Center. "This fear perpetuates their abuse, but the U visa offers them hope."

And hope is in short supply these days among immigrants.

To get help, call the public advocate's ombudsman line: (212) 669-7250; City Bar Justice Center: (212) 382-6717; or Children's Aid Society: (212) 949-4800.

[aruiz@nydailynews.com](mailto:aruiz@nydailynews.com)



## NY1 News

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Apr 3, 2008

Weather: Mostly Sunny. High: 57

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### **Public Advocate Promotes New Temporary Visas**

April 02, 2008

The Public Advocate is working to raise awareness among immigrants regarding a new visa option.

The new U-Visa is meant to protect immigrants who come forward and cooperate with law enforcement officials in the event of a crime. The visas are temporary, lasting up to four years.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum says the visas are available under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act.

"Immigrant victims of crime are afraid to come forward and report the crime because they are afraid they are going to be deported, and therefore many of them suffer in silence hidden away and won't report to the police or the Agency of Children Services some horrible crime that has been committed," said Gotbaum

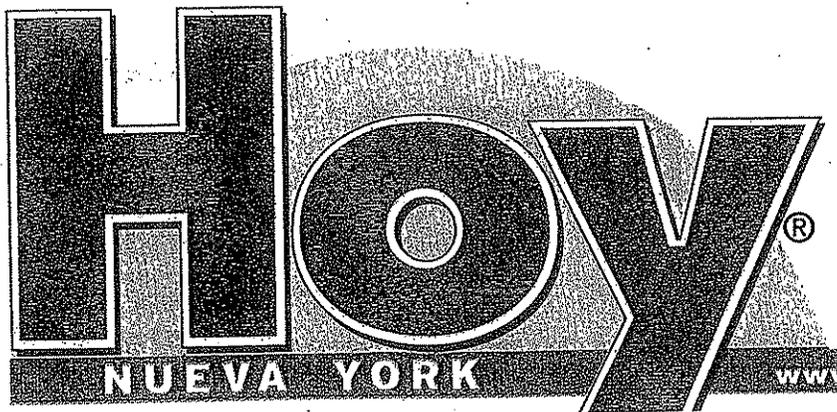
About 10,000 U-visas will be made available to victims nationwide each year.

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APRIL 3, 2008

» **Inmigración**

## Promueven visas tipo U

**Hoy Nueva York**

NUEVA YORK

La defensora pública Betsy Gotbaum urgió ayer a los inmigrantes que han sido víctimas de crímenes, a solicitar un tipo de visa temporal.

La visa, conocida como tipo U, está diseñada para proteger a los inmigrantes que cooperan con las au-

toridades para esclarecer algunos tipos de crímenes, incluyendo, el tráfico humano. Las visas son temporales y duran hasta cuatro años.

Gotbaum dijo que las visas están disponibles bajo el Acta de Protección para las Víctimas de Tráfico humano y Violencia. El Congreso aprobó la ley el año 2000, sin

embargo, pero no fueron establecidas hasta octubre del año pasado.

"Los inmigrantes víctimas de crímenes están temerosos de acercarse a las autoridades para denunciar estos hechos porque temen que van a ser deportados y, por lo tanto, muchos sufren en silencio y no denunciarán a la policía o a la Agencia de Servicios para Niños algunos crímenes que han sido cometidos", dijo Gotbaum.

Una de las normas establecidas para optar a la visa U señala que solo el jefe de ciertas agencias gubernamentales pueden certificar la aplicación a la visa U.

Gotbaum urgió a las agencias más relevantes a designar a jefes adicionales para certificar las solicitudes.

Alrededor de 10 mil visas tipo U están disponibles para las víctimas a nivel nacional cada año.

# EL DIARIO

APRIL 3, 2008

## Urgen completar proceso para las Visas U

JUDITH TORREA/EDLP

**NUEVA YORK** — En cuatro años, la indocumentada Yaneli pasó de estar a punto de morir a manos de su esposo y vivir con la incertidumbre de poder ser deportada a gozar de un estatus interino, con permiso de trabajo incluido, gracias a la visa U destinada a las víctimas de violencia y tráfico humano.

“A veces uno por miedo no denuncia pero no hay que tener miedo porque la vida puede darnos otra oportunidad”, dijo la dominicana Yaneli, de 29 años.

Sin embargo, si Yaneli como otros mil inmigrantes en Nueva York no envían para el 11 de abril su solicitud per-

manente para la visa U podrían perder sus beneficios y correr el riesgo de la deportación.

“Tememos que muchas personas que pudieron obtener un permiso interino no conozcan las nuevas regulaciones de esta ley (*Victims of Trafficking and Violence Act*) que se aprobó por el Congreso en el 2000 pero que hasta octubre del 2007 no especificó los reglamentos específicos para obtener las visas U”, advirtió Carolien Hardenbol, codirectora de *Sanctuary for Families*.

Ayer la defensora del pueblo Besty Gotbaum no sólo urgió a los inmigrantes con este estatus interino a que soliciten el siguiente paso para obtener la visa U,

### AYUDA GRATUITA

- Sanctuary for Families: 212 349 6009, ext. 246. Hablan español.
- City Bar Justice Center: 212 382 4711. Hablan español.

sino que pidió que la Policía y la Administración de Servicios para Niños (ACS) designen personal específico para que se puedan certificar los casos de violencia.

“Estamos esperando una calificación de inmigración (CIS) para ver cómo podemos certificar estos casos”, indicó Sheila Stainback, portavoz del ACS.

*Judith.torrea@eldiariomj.com*

# NYC Public School Parents

Independent voices of New York City public school parents

Friday, April 4, 2008

## Bloomberg Expands Congestion Pricing Plan to Schools

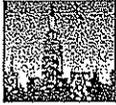
**April 4, 2008 (GBN News):** With his congestion pricing plan facing an uncertain future in the State Legislature, Mayor Bloomberg today introduced a proposal to tie the embattled traffic plan to a new scheme which he said would also satisfy critics who have been demanding a reduction of congestion in the city's public school classrooms. Under the Mayor's plan, students who enter classrooms in the city's most overcrowded schools will be charged a daily fee of \$8. This will give students an incentive to attend less crowded private schools in order to avoid the extra charge, and thus reduce class size in the public schools. Revenue raised through this fee, Mr. Bloomberg said, will benefit the city's public school children through the development of four additional interim assessments per year as well as a \$16 million upgrade to the Education Department's ARIS computer system.



A source at the DOE told GBN News that the Mayor feels many of the critics of his traffic plan are what he terms "the very same malcontents" who persistently criticize overcrowding in the city schools. Mr. Bloomberg is said to have concluded that if he can mollify these detractors by reducing class size through classroom congestion pricing, they will in return drop their objections to the Mayor's traffic plan.

The new proposal came under immediate attack from Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, who called the plan a "mockery of the concept of free public education." Mayor Bloomberg responded by saying, "The education is still free. We're just charging them to get into the classroom."

Posted by Gary Babad at 4/04/2008 11:07:00 PM



## Gangs in the Classroom

April 4th, 2008

A teacher for only two years, Mr. History (not his real name) struggles over whether or not to engage a gang leader in his classroom in order to gain the cooperation of the whole class.

"Do we as teachers cater to the hierarchy created by the gang culture in our schools in order to gain a net positive benefit from our relationship with certain gang members, or do we vehemently reject the hierarchy and politics of gang culture on principle despite the subsequent inevitable difficulties such an approach would bring us?" he asked on the EdWize blog.

Although Mr. History teaches at a school serving mostly court-involved youth, he may not be alone in his dilemma dealing with gangs.

Students all over the city say they see a lot of gangs in school, and more of them.

A quarter of students surveyed by the Education Department said there was gang activity in their school most or all of the time. And two-thirds of students surveyed by the Public Advocate's office said there are more gangs than there used to be.

Overall gang presence in New York City may be very low compared to many other cities, but it has risen sharply in the past couple years. The 713 gang motivated incidences last year was a rise of 37 percent over the 520 incidences that occurred in 2005, according to the Mayor's Management Report.

To help teachers understand gangs, some school districts offer gang training. For example, in Ottawa County, Michigan, teachers are taught how to decipher gang symbols. Some state lawmakers in New York would like to see that happen here. A bill introduced by Long Island Assembly Member Rob Walker would require that teachers receive gang awareness training in order to receive certification.

Indeed, in attempting to deal with Mr. History's student, understanding the gang they are a member of matters greatly, along with their personal background. "Some gangs are pro-education and don't fit the stereotype, others are more anti-social and anti-school and others are in between," says David Brotherton, coauthor of "The Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation: Street Politics and the Transformation of a New York Gang."

It also "depends what kind of gang leader he or she is," Brotherton goes on. "Some can be easily engaged and are agile thinkers and not at all the stereotypical thug, while others are more guarded and difficult."

"It is important to see the person as a human being and not as a cardboard cut out of evil incarnate."

Pulling the student aside and asking him to play a role in the classroom could empower Mr. History's student, suggests Lianne Archer, a vice president at the New York Gang Investigators Association. "Kids like to feel important."

"But set boundaries," says Archer, who teaches training classes on gangs in schools. Let the student know, "I will give you respect and I expect respect in return."

As a report on gangs from the Justice Policy Institute says, "The objective should not be to eradicate gangs - an impossible task - but rather to promote community safety."

By Mike Muller on April 4, 2008, 3:32 pm

# DAILY NEWS

APRIL 8, 2008

## Public will now pay to train principals

FIVE YEARS AFTER Mayor Bloomberg announced a privately funded effort to train principals to run public schools, and two years after taxpayers stepped in to offset some major costs to the program, the public will now be picking up the full tab — roughly \$17 million a year.

The mayor yesterday announced he was seeking proposals from colleges or other organizations that could train new principals and support them once they're on the job.

Even the Leadership Academy, which the mayor created for the task in 2003 and has operated essentially as an arm of the Education Department, will have to compete with other bidders to keep the gig.

Schools Chancellor Joel Klein resigned from the Leadership Academy board last week so as not to create a conflict of interest.

The Leadership Academy has been harshly criticized by teachers and pols as expensive and ineffective.

"The [Education Department] should not just look at the successes of the Leadership Academy, it must also look at its shortcomings before using public funds, which are limited," said Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum.

Erin Eschorn

# The NEW YORK Sun



## Quinn Says Bloomberg Should Slow Down on Senior Centers

BY BENJAMIN SARLIN - Special to the Sun  
April 9, 2008  
URL: <http://www2.nysun.com/article/74365>

Breaking with Mayor Bloomberg, the City Council speaker is asking that a proposed reorganization of the city's senior centers be revised and its implementation delayed. "We are worried and have urged the Department for the Aging to slow this process down," Speaker Christine Quinn, a likely candidate for mayor in 2009, told a crowd of elderly New Yorkers at a downtown Manhattan senior center yesterday.

Mr. Bloomberg announced a plan in January to charge senior centers with a more expansive set of responsibilities than providing

meals, including running health and wellness programs, such as screening for illness or depression. The city says 44% of its 325 senior centers are underutilized, meaning they do not serve all their allotted meals, and that by consolidating them into hubs for a variety of senior services, rather than just food, they could attract more users.

Elected officials and senior advocacy groups have criticized the plan, saying the changes are too rapid and far-reaching for senior centers and senior citizens to adjust in time. Comptroller

William Thompson Jr., a possible mayoral candidate in 2009, said last month that he had "strong concerns" about the planned changes, and asked the mayor to take "a more thorough and considered approach." The city's public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum, has also voiced her opposition to the plan, as have several council members. Ms. Quinn said yesterday that the DFTA should provide technical assistance for community groups currently serving the elderly so that they could more easily make the transition to the new requirements for senior centers. She added that a job bank should be created so that senior center workers would be able to find new employers if their current positions were eliminated through the restructuring.

A spokesman for the DFTA, Christopher Miller, said yesterday that the plan's implementation was being negotiated and its schedule has yet to be determined. "We've obviously been in conversation with the City Council and all the stakeholders involved," Mr. Miller said.

# DAILY NEWS

APRIL 11, 2008

## Bloomy feels seniors' heat on meal plan

### 300 swoop on City Hall to fight frozen food

BY FRANK LOMBARDI  
DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

MORE THAN 300 seniors rallied yesterday on the steps of City Hall to give the Bronx cheer to Mayor Bloomberg's hot-potato plan to restructure senior citizens' centers and the delivery of meals to homebound elderly.

The seniors brandished protest placards, including one stating: "Homebound seniors need fresh hot meals daily, not weekly frozen meals."

Among the elected officials siding with the seniors were Controller William Thompson and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, who continued to have reservations about the restructuring plan, despite the announcement Wednesday by mayoral aides that it would be slowed down and done in stages. Both also knocked the meals-delivery changes.

Currently, scores of senior centers have contracts to deliver hot meals on weekdays to homebound seniors in their communities. The Department for the Aging intends to consolidate those delivery contracts, with an emphasis on periodically delivering a supply of frozen meals rather than daily deliveries of hot meals.

The Bronx already has such a system

in place, where only two vendors, with three consolidated contracts, took over the previous 17 contracts. The Bronx system is to be extended to the other four boroughs, which are now served by 93 separate contracts.

Thompson said the meals-delivery consolidation ignores the fact that "one size doesn't fit all" when it comes to the city's seniors, who come from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

"All of the Bronx eats meatloaf on the same day; does that make any sense to you?" Bobbie Sackman of the Council of Senior Centers and Services shouted at the seniors.

Sackman's group represents most senior centers, many of which would lose their meal-delivery contracts under the consolidation.

City officials have praised the Bronx program as an example that the consolidated program works.

Seniors can still opt for a hot meal delivered daily, but it consists of a frozen meal that is heated up prior to delivery, critics contend.

Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz (D-Bronx) drew cheers at the rally by saying, "We don't want to see the other four boroughs victimized the way they victimized the people in the Bronx."

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**'Homebound seniors need fresh hot meals daily, not weekly frozen meals.'**

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» Comunidad

## Lanzan guía para educar sobre bancos

Hoy Nueva York

NUEVA YORK

Con la intención de motivar a más personas a que abran cuentas de banco en Nueva York y educarlos sobre cómo manejarlas, ayer la defensora del Pueblo, Betsy Gotbaum y la Sociedad de Servicios Comunitarios presentaron una guía útil para los neoyorquinos.

“La idea es que la gente sepa cómo hacer las cosas en una cuenta de banco y así poder crear una conciencia de ahorro a corto y largo plazo”, dijo la defensora.

En la guía, los lectores aprenderán conceptos básicos sobre el manejo de las entidades financieras y los servicios que ellas prestan.

Los interesados sobre la nueva herramienta, impresa en inglés y español, pueden llamar al (212) 669-7250.

APRIL 15, 2008

# DAILY NEWS

APRIL 16, 2008

## Bill to make landlords strike mold

**EXCLUSIVE**

**BY JORDAN LITE**  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

LANDLORDS WOULD be required to clean up moldy apartments if their tenants have asthma or other breathing problems, under legislation set to be introduced today in the City Council.

The bill, co-sponsored by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and Councilwoman Rosie Mendez (D-Manhattan), would set a standard level at which landlords would be forced to get rid of mold, which can make people with allergies and other conditions get sicker.

Mold complaints to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development increased from 8,288 in 2001 to 21,121 in 2006, Gotbaum said.

While the housing code requires landlords to keep their properties in good repair, that standard is vague and inconsistently enforced by city agencies, she contends.

"If we're concerned about the health of New Yorkers, it's important that we do something about it," Gotbaum said.

Jill de Domenico, 26, says the bill would help her breathe easier. She said her landlord insists that painting and plastering over water stains on the ceiling, walls and floorboards of her Harlem apartment is enough.

The management company, Manhattan North, has done nothing to rid it of mold, she said.

"It's affecting my health," de Domenico added, saying she suffers from seasonal allergies and has developed bronchial asthma and other infections since water began leaking into the apartment two years ago.

"I know that has to do with the apartment," she said.

Her building, 1890 Adam Clayton Powell Blvd., was found to have "higher than normal amounts" of mold spores in the air, including strains of penicillium/aspergillus, according to a report by an air-testing company she hired to inspect in February. De Domenico said she is allergic to penicillin.

The report, obtained by the Daily News, recommends sealing the floors with polyurethane and removing sections of the walls and ceiling to professionally rid them of mold.

It suggests that de Domenico move until the problem is fixed.

An attorney for the building's owner would not comment specifically on de Domenico's apartment, though he did say, "The owners have already performed and are continuing to perform substantial work to remediate the building violations."

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# EL

# DIARIO

## Proponen reglas más estrictas contra el moho

LORENZO MORALES/EDLP

NUEVA YORK- Elizabeth Mendoza vive en el sótano de una vieja edificación de Sunset Park en Brooklyn. Cuando hace frío, su pequeña sobrina de siete años y su hija de quince tienen que ponerse una mascarilla que les inyecta oxígeno a sus pulmones.

Ambas niñas padecen de asma y sin embargo tienen que vivir en un apartamento donde el moho —un hongo negro que crece en las humedades y cuyas esporas viajan por el aire— empeora su condición.

"Me rompe el corazón cada vez que veo que no pueden respirar", dijo Mendoza quien además vive allí con su hijo de dos años.

Por eso la Defensora Pública de la ciudad, Hetsy Gotbaum, anunció ayer que presentará un proyecto de ley ante el Concejo para obligar a los propietarios y al Departamento de Vivienda (HPD) a

Las quejas ante el Departamento de Salud e Higiene Mental por moho crecieron la exorbitante cifra de 1.800 por ciento

ser más estrictos en el control del moho y otros agentes que pueden poner en riesgo a los residentes asmáticos.

"El moho no desaparece tapándolo provisionalmente con un poco de pintura como he visto que hacen los propietarios en muchas viviendas. La

ciudad no tiene estándares para lidiar con este problema y eso tiene que cambiar", dijo Gotbaum quien anunció la iniciativa acompañada por varios concejales que apoyan al proyecto.

En Nueva York se calcula que una de cada ocho personas sufre de asma, entre ellos 300 mil niños.

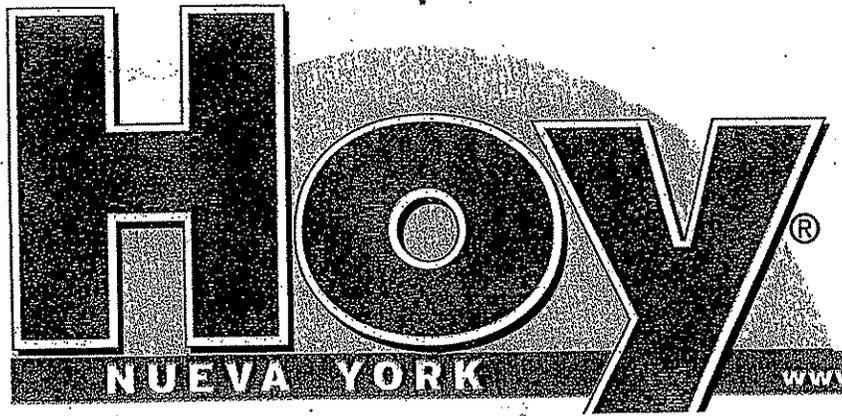
En los últimos años las denuncias ante la ciudad por la presencia de moho han crecido de forma dramática según evidencian datos de varias agencias de la ciudad.

Entre 2001 y 2007 las denuncias por invasión de este hongo ante HPD casi se triplicaron pasando de 8.288 a 21.022. En apenas cinco años, entre 1999 y 2004, las quejas ante el Departamento de Salud e Higiene Mental (DOHMH) por este mismo concepto crecieron la exorbitante cifra de 1.800 por ciento.

"No sirve de nada que tratemos en los hospitales a los enfermos de asma si no podemos estar seguros que cuando vuelvan a casa tendrán un ambiente sano", dijo el doctor Lester Blair, uno de los directores de la Asociación Americana del Pulmón en Nueva York.

Las viviendas más afectadas por la presencia de este hongo se encuentran en general en los barrios más pobres de la ciudad. De los nueve distritos que presentaron quejas por moho entre 1993 y 2004 ante DOHMH, siete de ellos tiene los mayores índices de familias viviendo por debajo del índice de pobreza, incluidos East Tremont en El Bronx y Washington Heights e Inwood en Manhattan.

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» Salud

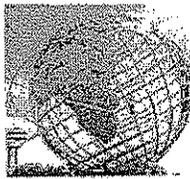
# Ley para erradicar el asma

Hoy Nueva York

NUEVA YORK

La defensora pública Betsy Gotbaum presentó ayer un proyecto de ley para reducir la contaminación en el interior de los apartamentos de la Ciudad y evitar el asma, especialmente, erradicando el moho y las plagas.

La iniciativa, co patrocinada por la concejal Rosie Méndez y por la Coalición Hogares Libres de Asma, enmienda el Código de Mantenimiento de Viviendas (HMC) y requerirá a las agencias que establezcan un mínimo estándar de limpieza para prevenir y reducir el asma en los hogares. Obligará a dueños de apartamentos, donde vivan personas con problemas respiratorios, a eliminar los riesgos que pudieran aumentar el asma.



# The Queens Gazette

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The Weekly Community Publication Dedicated To Bringing Our Readers A Vital Locally-Oriented View Of The News

APRIL 23, 2008

## On the brief side...

### Maltese Hails New Discount Rx Card



Standing in front of Queensbridge Houses, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, along with Community Service Society (CSS) of New York released a Guide to Banking in New York City, a nine-page, how-to guide on personal banking.

Persons aged 50 to 64 will receive significant discounts on prescription drugs purchased with a new discount card that will be issued by the state Health Department soon, state Senator Serphin Maltese announced.

Discounts could be 30 percent on brand name drugs and 60 percent off generic drugs, Maltese (R- C Middle Village) said.

Eligibility for the new pharmacy card, Maltese said, is limited to individuals 50 to 64 who earn less than \$35,000 a year and married couples who have annual incomes of less than \$50,000. People of any age who are disabled are also eligible to receive the cards. There is no fee involved, Maltese said,

and those who have insurance can also apply for the new cards.

The program was developed after an AARP survey found that 19 percent of people in the 50 to 64 age bracket were not buying prescription drugs because they couldn't afford them. About 11 percent of those surveyed said they had no insurance and were forced to pay full price for drugs, and 14 percent said they had to cut back on food, fuel and electricity to pay for prescriptions.

Maltese explained that the program, administered by the Health Department, will get huge discounts in purchasing drugs from pharmaceutical companies by leveraging the buying power of about 400,000 persons who will be eligible for the program. 'Guide To Banking' Released

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum released a "Guide to Banking" last week for New Yorkers who, like others around the country, are struggling to make ends meet, Gotbaum said.

"The guide helps New Yorkers at a time when we desperately need to get the most out of the money we earn," Gotbaum said in announcing the new "how to" guide on personal banking assistance.

The guide, published in English and Spanish, is available by contacting Gotbaum's office at 212- 669-7250.

Gotbaum's release describing and announcing the availability of the guide was issued during the income tax filing season as people were getting ready to file tax returns and receive economic stimulus rebates and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) checks.

Gotbaum said the new guide could help people to find ways to "put that money directly into an account, earn interest, and avoid fees from check cashing centers or Refund Anticipation Loans (RAL)". Marshall Marks Queens Diversity

Using music and dance and a keynote address by the city Commissioner of Immigrant Affairs to celebrate the borough's diversity, Queens Borough President Helen Marshall recently marked Immigrant Heritage Week at the Queens Museum of Art.

Besides the keynote address by Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares, the program, focusing attention on the contributions of immigrants to America's most diverse county, also featured Queens Poet Laureate Julio Marzen.

"Queens today looks like the United Nations," Marshall said in opening the event. The borough president stated proudly, "We are the most multiethnic county and our population consists of longtime residents and recent immigrants."

Fittingly, the Queens Museum of Art in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park was the building where the United Nations General Assembly met for the first time.

Entertainment included a performance by students of the Niall O'Leary School of Irish Dance, the largest school of its kind in New York City, veteran dancer and performer Mala De Sai, who performed a dance dating back to the second century, and by Ballet Folklorico, an organization run by the Father Billini Association of Corona.

Approximately 150 Immigration Heritage Week events took place throughout the city from April 14 to 20. Sexual Assault Awareness Seminar

A free seminar to educate Flushing and nearby communities on sexual assault prevention and protection will be held by Assemblywoman Ellen Young this Saturday, at 11 a.m. at the YWCA of Queens, 42-07 Parsons Blvd. in Flushing.

Young said sexual assault is too often a silent crime which affects more than 20 million people in the U.S. and can include one in six women and one in 33 men in the U.S. at one point in their lives.

The seminar will launch Sexual Assault and Prevention Month at the Y. Participants will hear from Queens law enforcement officials about prevention measures before wrapping up with a self defense class, Young said. Padavan Sponsors Cellphone Recycle Drive

From now to Wednesday, April 30, state Senator Frank Padavan will be conducting a drive to collect used cellphones, batteries and accessories that will be recycled for use by victims of domestic violence

Padavan (R- C Bellerose) said the phones can be dropped off at either of his district offices, 89- 39 Gettysburg St., Bellerose, or 150-26 14th Ave., Whitestone. Both offices are open from Monday through Friday- in Bellerose from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and in Whitestone from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

At the conclusion of the drive, Padavan said, the recycled phones will be donated to Verizon Wireless for use in its Hopeline® wireless phone recycling program. The recycled phones are sold and the proceeds are donated to domestic violence advocacy groups or are used to purchase wireless phones and service for domestic violence survivors.

# Bursting at the Seams

## The overcrowding battle heats up in District 2 schools

By Lisa Rogal



Imagine a windowless room. Fluorescent lighting and sparse furnishings decorate the small space. This is not a jail cell. It is not an army barracks or even the most depressing subplot in New York City. This is the supply closet at P.S. 116, on East 33rd Street. It's a closet that used to be storage for musical instruments and chess sets: a closet that is now a classroom.

P.S. 116 is one of many District 2 schools forced to resort to unappealing solutions to address overcrowding. The issue of too many students and not enough seats has long been debated on the East Side, but this past week tensions came to a head. First came a report from Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, blasting education officials for not adding enough elementary and middle school seats to keep up with the building boom. Soon after, local elected officials demanded a meeting with School Chancellor Joel Klein to talk about overcrowding. Then discussions about a charter school moving into an East 25th Street building turned nasty, taking on racial overtones. It all added up to one of the East Side's most heated discussions about school space in recent memory.

new family-friendly condominiums on East 86th Street, envisioning all the new students who will accompany this construction.

Although the Department of Education has planned to add 4,300 seats throughout the borough over the next five years—a number that was recently bumped up by more than 1,000—many elected officials say this is not sufficient to keep pace with future growth.

"We need to start planning for new development as it happens," Stringer said, "rather than waiting for it to overtake us."

The overcrowding report appears to have pressed the department to add new seats, as outlined in statement released last week: "We are aware of the need for seats in District 2 and have reviewed demographics. As a result, we have increased the number of new seats for the district in our current Capital Plan from 1,890 to 3,150 seats."

The department also said that it will mother of a 5th grader at P.S. 116. "And they were yelling and pointing at each other."

"I'm sorry," she added. "[The building] is just too close to us and we need it."

Posimato tears up when she talks about the possibility of P.S. 116 turning their science labs, dance studio, art room, and gymnasium into classrooms.

But Ross students need space, too.

The

revisit the increased need for seats, including in District 2, in the next Capital Plan, which is slated for release in November.

Debra Wexler, press secretary for the department, added that although citywide enrollment has been declining in recent years, "There are 'pockets' in the city where enrollment trends are headed in the opposite direction."

Using Stringer's report as a springboard, a large group of elected officials, including Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr. and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, made a public overture to Schools Chancellor Joel Klein asking him to meet about the "severe" school is currently housed in the basement of the department's headquarters at Tweed Courthouse—space that was granted after failed efforts to squeeze Ross into NEST+M, in Lower Manhattan, following parent protests.

Ross has only two rooms that are divided into classrooms using partitions. Students use the lunch room as an art room—they do not have a gymnasium.

"We are a District 2 school," said Ross principal Stephanie Clagnaz, in response to parents' claims that Ross should look elsewhere for space.

Ross uses a lottery system to determine acceptance, and although students come from all over the city, the school must give preference to District 2 children. Ross parents wonder why other

overcrowding in District 2.

Although District 2 has the second-highest enrollment projections in the city, the officials pointed out in the letter, the entire borough of Manhattan was allocated only 5 percent of the total school capital funding budget dedicated to new capacity.

Other officials who signed on to the April 16 letter included State Sens. Liz Krueger and Tom Duane; Assembly Members

Jonathan Bing, Micah Kellner, Brian Kavanagh and Richard Gottfried; and Council Members Dan Garodnick, Jessica Lappin and Rosie Mendez.

At press time, the department had not yet responded to the request for a meeting with Klein. Local parents don't want the school, which also serves the district, to have the space.

"It's easy to say it's not about race when you're among your own," said Ross parent Ian Pearce, who is African-American and lives in Brooklyn. "Minorities are being phased out all over the city. It's easy not to be racist when the economy can do it for you."

Citing a long list of reasons why they opposed the charter's move, the district's community education council ultimately voted against Ross taking the space and urged the department to give the building to a district elementary or middle school.

Maloney and Stringer both expressed disappointment that the Ross debate has turned parents against each other. But Ross parents question who these elected officials are really fighting for. Granville Leo Stevens, who attended the meeting as a supporter of the charter school, wondered why politicians fighting so adamantly for District 2 schools were mysteriously absent when it came to finding space for children in District 1.

"They are," parent Pearce said of elected officials, "pandering to their voters."

**"It was literally all the white parents on one side of the room and all the black parents on the other," said Laurie Posimato, a mother of a 5th grader at P.S. 116. "And they were yelling and pointing at each other."**

OUR TOWN

Stringer's report, released April 14, showed a current deficit of 3,900 seats for students citywide. On the Upper East Side alone, the city approved enough new buildings between 2000 and 2007 to add roughly 350 to 500 new students, yet no new seats in local schools were added. Parents warily eye projects like Sheldon Solow's 9.8-acre development south of the United Nations and two

Parents also became deeply embroiled in the crowding controversy, as evidenced by a hearing convened last week by the District 2 Community Education Council. At issue was the Ross Global Academy Charter School, a mostly African-American and Hispanic school that is looking to move into the School for the Physical City, on East 25th Street. The school is being phased out and the building's lease is up.

Parents from nearby P.S. 116, however—which is 44 percent white and also needs space—argued that their school should take precedence because of its proximity. While the focus of the meeting was overcrowding in general, the racial overtones and hostility between parents were difficult to ignore, according to attendees.



# Beacon

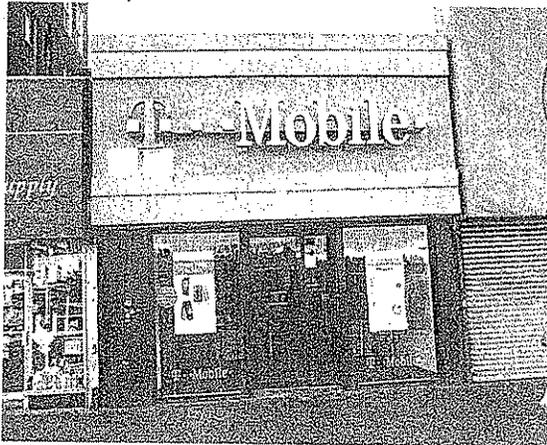
APRIL 24, 2008

## City Council, Public Advocate hold hearing on cell phone bill of rights

The New York City Council's Committee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by Council Member Leroy Comrie, along with Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, conducted their first hearing at City Hall on Introductory Bill #483, which would require notices relating to the rights of mobile phone customers. Testifying at the hearing were representatives of the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs and consumer advocate groups.

The proposed bill would require disclosures by stores that sell wireless phones that would distinguish whether the store is an "authorized dealership, which is not owned or managed by a specific wireless service provider and offers a variety of wireless plans and phones—and a "wireless provider store"—which is managed by a specific wireless provider and only sells its own product.

Every wireless store would be required to post a notice stating whether it is an authorized dealership or a wireless provider; if they charge any store specific fees and if so, the amounts and



Which is managed by a specific wireless provider and only sells its own product.

terms of such fees; of any corporate discounts that may be available; the customer's right to change wireless service providers within the same local area and retain the same phone number; and, list any additional government taxes, fees and sur-

charges that may increase their monthly phone bill beyond the amount quoted by the store.

The final section of the proposed bill would impose civil liabilities on those found in violation of the bill's provisions, noting however, that no more than one violation may be issued to a wireless store per day.

Groups such as the Better Business Bureau have, for years, been receiving complaints about cell phones and rate issues, particularly from customers who were unaware of certain fees when they initially signed up for a cell phone service plan.

Specifically, customers are purchasing cell phone plans from "authorized dealerships" who may be featuring advertisements of popular wireless providers, leading the customer to believe they are purchasing plans solely from that provider. However, customers then unexpectedly encounter additional, exorbitant rates and fees that they weren't made aware of when they initially purchased the service.

"Several of the major players in the mobile phone industry have taken admirable steps to increase transparency with respect to the costs of owning a cell phone," stated Council Member Comrie. "Unfortunately, smaller players—such as these authorized

(From page 6)

dealerships (some of whom tack on up to \$400 to the service providers' early termination fees)—have not been as forthcoming.

"The purpose of this bill is not to bully the mobile phone industry but rather to protect mobile phone consumers and improve the transaction process. Those businesses that are acting in an and restocking fees and other costs. We are pleased to work with the Department of Consumer Affairs to strengthen the provisions of this bill in order to ensure consumers can make informed decisions from the start."

The co-sponsors of this bill are Public Advocate Gotbaum and Council Members Comrie, John Liu, Gale Brewer, Lew Fidler, Vincent Gentile, Alan Gerson, Letitia James, Oliver Koppell, Miguel Martinez, Michael Nelson, Annabel Palma, James Sanders Jr., David Weprin and Thomas White Jr.

The number of subscribers of cellular phone services is now 255.4 million, accounting for approximately 84 percent of the U.S. population. The mobile phone market has an equally firm grip in New York City, where nearly 70 percent of the population subscribes to a wireless telephone service. The huge popularity of cell phones creates a myriad of options for consumers seeking to purchase phones and services in New

open, honest manner will suffer little, if any inconvenience as a result of this bill, and the end result will be a better-informed client base."

Public Advocate Gotbaum added, "We all know what it feels like to come across a complex, confusing contract. Many times, fee information is not clearly provided. This bill will eliminate the secrecy surrounding cancellation

York City. A 2005 report issued by the office of Public Advocate Gotbaum identified six different methods for acquiring a cellular phone in the City, including visiting a store operated by the actual wireless service provider; visiting an authorized retailer; ordering from a provider's website; ordering from an authorized online retailer; purchasing from a general electronics retailer; or, ordering over the phone with an existing service provider.

However, despite the popularity of cellular phones, the wireless telecommunications industry is not without its detractors. In 2007, for example, the Better Business Bureau ranked complaints against the telecommunications industry among the top ten complaint categories. At a 2006 hearing with the New York State Assembly on the wireless telephone industry, the Consumer Protection Board testified that approximately two-thirds of their consumer complaints from cellular phone users concerned billing or rate issues.

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs has a long history of monitoring the cell phone industry to protect consumers from deceptive cell phone advertising. In July 2005, for example, the Department pursued claims against AT&T Wireless, Cingular Wireless and Verizon Wireless for deceptive advertising. Those companies settled and agreed to fully comply with the CPL in their marketing efforts. Suits were also filed against Nextel Communications, Sprint Spectrum and T-Mobile USA for pitching cell phones and services in deceptive advertisements that misled consumers.

"We're glad that the Council is addressing concerns in this market," testified Marla Tepper, general counsel for the Department of Consumer Affairs. "We encourage the Committee to consider forging a more comprehensive approach to effectively address the entire range of issues consumers confront when entering into contracts for cell phones and cell phone services, and would look forward to working together on such an initiative."

(Continued on page 33)



The New York City Council's Committee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by Council Member Leroy Comrie (right), along with Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum (left), conducted their first hearing at City Hall today on Introductory Bill #483, which would require notices relating to the rights of mobile phone customers. The proposed bill would require disclosures by stores that sell wireless phones that would distinguish whether the store is an "authorized dealership"

## They might be labeled parent (un)coordinators

BY CARRIE MELAGO  
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

TOO MANY PARENT coordinators don't bother returning parents' phone calls, one of their main duties, according to a survey by the city public advocate's office.

More than 70% of messages left for parent coordinators — who are responsible for parent outreach at each city school — weren't returned within five days, the survey showed.

And worse, 13% of the 100 parent coordinators who were called in February had ei-

ther full or nonfunctioning voice-mail boxes, or nonworking numbers.

Public Advocate Betsey Gotbaum said the results of the survey were "mind boggling" and showed that coordinators, who make on average \$38,138 annually, were less responsive than they were when surveyed four years ago.

"The [Education Department] has done nothing to improve the responsiveness of parent coordinators," Gotbaum said.

The surveyors presented themselves as parents of prospective students interested in enrollment or other information.

An Ed Department spokeswoman questioned the survey's methodology and what callers said in their voice-mail messages. She pointed out that many parent coordinators are very responsive to parents.

"During the last three months of 2007, parent coordinators responded to over 670,000 parent phone calls, a 17.6% increase over the same period during the prior year," Maibe Gonzalez-Fuentes said in a statement.

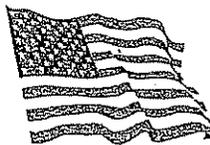
A parent coordinator from Brooklyn said she was disappointed to hear the results but didn't think they were representative of all 1,200 coordinators.

"The parent coordinators I know and deal with are very responsible about getting messages and calling people," she said. "That's a shame."

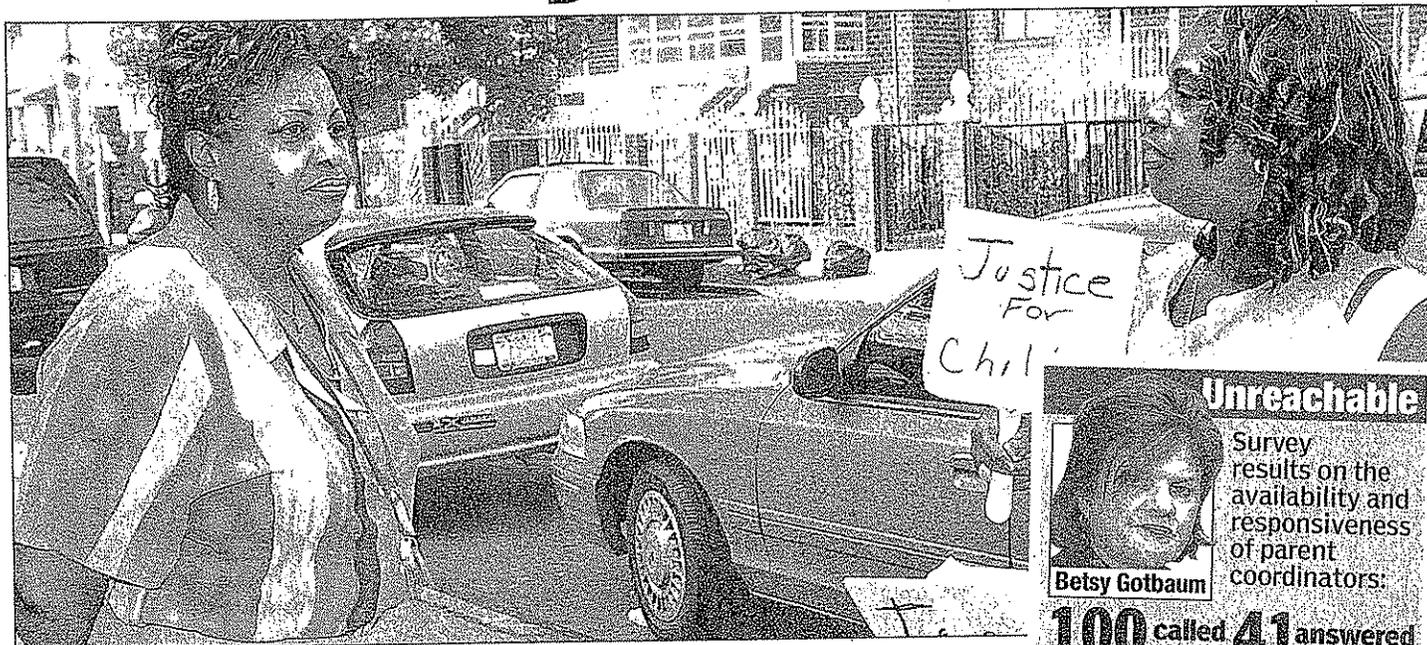
The parent coordinator job was created in 2003 as a school-based position to help parents better maneuver the school system and to support parent organizations.

[cmelago@nydailynews.com](mailto:cmelago@nydailynews.com)

APRIL 24, 2008



# Phone-y advocates



**WHO YA GONNA CALL?** School parent coordinator Dawn Thomas (left) makes herself available in Brooklyn, but many others aren't returning phone calls, a survey found.

## School aides off-line: Betsy

By YOAV GONEN  
Education Reporter

The people paid to serve as the link between parents and their children's schools are habitually playing hooky, a new report has found.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's office found that the city's more than 1,400 parent coordinators — who are issued cell phones and paid an average of nearly \$40,000 a year to assist parents — are more difficult to reach than ever.

Out of 100 phone calls made to randomly selected parent coordinators in each borough, 78 went unanswered — including 13 whose voice-mail boxes would not accept messages.

Of the 65 messages left by staffers posing as prospective parents, 46 — or 71 percent — were not

responded to within five business days.

That figure was 51 percent in a 2003 study, which Gotbaum's office conducted shortly after the parent-coordinator position was first created.

"Despite several reports from my office that found that many parent coordinators are basically unreachable, the [Department of Education] has done nothing to improve the responsiveness of parent coordinators," said Gotbaum. Her latest report showed that parent coordinators in Brooklyn and Queens were the least likely to answer their phones, while those in Brooklyn and The Bronx were least likely to return messages.

Parent coordinators at middle and high schools were also much less likely to respond to calls than those at elementary schools,

according to the data.

"You talk to a lot of answering machines when you deal with the DOE," said Hector Nazario, president of District 4's Community Education Council, who has conducted a similar survey of parent coordinators in East Harlem. "No return calls, no pick-up calls — it's true," he said.

DOE officials dismissed the study's methodology and said the availability of parent coordinators after school — when the phone calls were made — varied from school to school.

In the final three months of 2007, parent coordinators responded to more than 670,000 parent phone calls — a 17.6 percent increase from the prior year, education officials said.

**Unreachable**

Survey results on the availability and responsiveness of parent coordinators:

**Betsy Gotbaum**

**100** called **41** answered

■ **78%** did not answer the call after 5 p.m.

■ **13%** could not accept a voice message.

■ **Of 65** voice messages left, **46** were not responded to within a week.

■ **Brooklyn coordinators** were the least reachable (**90%**).

■ **Bronx coordinators** were the least responsive (**89%**).

Source: Office of Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum

But parents argued that availability was just one of many failings of the pricey initiative — which costs taxpayers about \$70 million per year. They said parent coordinators too often serve the principals who hired them rather than the parents who need help — sometimes to the point of doing a principal's administrative work.

Parents also complained that the coordinators often don't post or distribute vital information.

yoav.gonen@nypost.com

Million Signman Walters

# Caribbean Life

email: [carib@counlife.net](mailto:carib@counlife.net)

Brooklyn/Staten Island Edition

## Hearing on cell phone bill of rights

NEW YORK, NY- The New York City Council's Committee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by Council Member Leroy Comrie, along with Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, conducted their first hearing at City Hall today on Introductory Bill No. 483, which would require notices relating to the rights of mobile phone customers. Testifying at the hearing were representatives of the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs and consumer advocate groups.

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amount quoted by the store.

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"Several of the major players in the mobile phone industry have taken admirable steps to increase transparency with respect to the costs of owning a cell phone," stated Comrie. "Unfortunately, smaller players - such as these authorized dealerships (some of whom tack on up to \$400 to the service providers' early termination fees) - have not been as forthcoming.

"The purpose of this bill is not to bully the mobile phone industry but rather to protect mobile phone con-

sumers and improve the transaction process. Those businesses that are acting in an open, honest manner will suffer little, if any, inconvenience as a result of this bill, and the end result will be a better-informed client base."

Gotbaum added, "We all know what it feels like to come across a complex, confusing contract. Many times, fee information is not clearly provided. This bill will eliminate the secrecy surrounding cancellation and restocking fees and other costs. We are pleased to work with the Department of Consumer Affairs to strengthen the provisions of this bill in order to ensure consumers can make informed decisions from the start."

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APRIL 24, 2008

» Educación

# Coordinadores de padres se queman

Estudio revela que el 78% de los coordinadores no son localizados después de la 5:00 p.m.

Hoy Nueva York

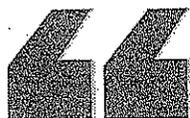
NUEVA YORK

Los coordinadores de padres en las escuelas de Nueva York no están cumpliendo bien su labor a la hora de comunicarse con los padres de los estudiantes.

Así lo muestra un estudio de la oficina de la Defensora Pública, Betsy Gotbaum, presentado ayer, en el que se advierte que el 78 por ciento de los coordinadores encuestados no responden a llamadas de los padres después de las 5:00 de la tarde, cuando la mayoría desea comunicarse con ellos.

"El 71 por ciento de los coordinadores a los que se les dejan mensajes tampoco regresan las llamadas", dijo la defensora, explicando que el estudio encontró un aumen-

to negativo en ese sentido, comparado con el 2004 cuando se halló que el 67 por ciento no cumplía con esa responsabilidad.



*El 71% de los coordinadores de padres a los que se les dejan mensajes tampoco regresan las llamadas*

**Betsy Gotbaum**  
Defensora del Pueblo

sible darle crédito a sus conclusiones", aseguró esa ofi-

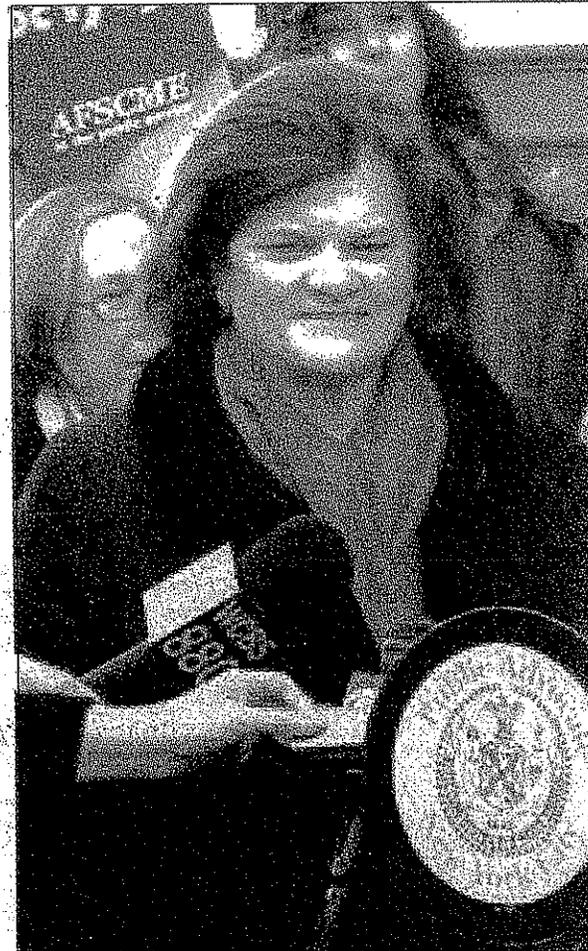
cina, agregando que la disponibilidad de los coordinadores de padres después de sus jornadas varía de una escuela a otra.

"El informe no explica cómo se identificaron las personas que llamaron cuando ellos contactaron a los coordinadores de padres para realizar las inspecciones", agregó el comunicado en el que explicaron que durante los últimos tres meses del 2007, los coordinadores de padres respondieron más de 670,000 llamadas con un aumento del 17.6% sobre el mismo período del 2006.

La figura de los coordinadores de padres fue creada en el 2003 como parte de la reestructuración al sistema educativo de la ciudad de Nueva York.

### » DATOS DEL INFORME

• En Brooklyn los coordinadores son más propensos a no responder las llamadas con 90%, seguidos por Queens con 85%, El Bronx con 75% y Staten Island y Manhattan con 70%.



» Betsy Gotbaum, Defensora Pública. (Foto: Archivo)

# The BRONX BEAT



## Roll call of council members is mixed

By Ben Simon and Ed Forbes  
April 25, 2008

Although two of eight members of the Bronx delegation to the City Council have stellar attendance records, four are in the bottom 10 of that body in terms of attendance at votes, committee meetings and hearings, recent council data shows.

Maria del Carmen Arroyo, a Democrat who represents Hunts Point, Longwood, Mott Haven and Soundview; and James Vacca, a Democrat who represents Throgs Neck, Westchester Square, Morris Park and Allerton, were both top scorers.

Vacca ranks 10th in terms of attendance, with a 91.9 percent rating. He said attendance was essential if members wanted to fulfill their roles in the oversight process.

"I love being in my district, but if you want to be part of the oversight process, you have to have a presence downtown," he said.

He said he tries to fill in for his Bronx colleagues when they're absent from meetings. At a hearing in July 2007, a new prison was proposed for Hunts Point, Vacca said. He was the only member from the Bronx delegation present. Vacca said that although he doesn't represent Hunts Point, he felt it was his responsibility to fight against the prison.

Still, four of the Bronx council members attended less than 75 percent of the Council's meetings, hearings and votes between 2004 and the end of March, according to City Council data released to the media earlier this month following a Freedom of Information Act request by The New York Times.

Annabel Palma, a Democrat representing Soundview, Parkchester and Castle Hill; Helen D. Foster, a Democrat serving Morrisania, Claremont, Melrose, Highbridge and Morris Heights; Larry B. Seabrook, the Democratic member for Co-op City; and Maria Baez, the Democrat representing Fordham and Kingsbridge Heights, each were in the bottom 10.

Joel Rivera, the Democratic City Council majority leader who represents Bathgate, Belmont, Crotona, Fordham, East Tremont and West Farms, had an attendance record of 77.21 percent. G. Oliver Koppel, the Democratic member for Riverdale, had an 84.36 percent attendance rating.

Arroyo came in seventh overall in terms of City Council attendance with a 93.9 percent rating. She credited her record to her enthusiasm for her position.

"I show up for work," she said, adding that she does occasionally miss council meetings because of emergencies. On one occasion, because of a fire in Highbridge where several children died, she decided to miss some council meetings, she said. Absences, Arroyo said, are inevitable.

"I know these are members who are aware of the needs and issues in their district," she said. "I work with these people; I see how hard they work. I don't know if the districts are impacted [by their absence from council meetings]."

When asked to explain why her record was so much better than her Bronx peers, Arroyo said, "How I work is not how other people work. My style is my style, and other people have their own style."

Vacca said he attends council meetings not just to represent his district, but the entire borough.

"I see my responsibility as lobbying for the borough," Vacca said. "If I don't see my colleagues [at a particular committee meeting] I have the capacity to fill in even if I'm not on a certain committee."

Gia Storms, a spokeswoman for Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum's office, which addresses citizen complaints about city government and investigates accountability in city departments and agencies, said, "The public advocate believes that attendance is important."

She added that her office was reluctant to comment on specific council members and absences. "We don't want to point fingers," Storms said.

Susan Lerner, executive director of Common Cause of New York, a government watchdog organization, said attendance at Council meetings is important.

"When council members don't show up," Lerner said, "they're showing disdain for the public process. The council meetings, first and foremost, are public. They're where the public's business is conducted in public."



**New Bills: Allergens to Parade Rules**  
by Courtney Gross  
28 Apr 2008

Though the City Council's budget scandal remains at center stage in City Hall, the legislative process has continued on.

Over the past month, more than a dozen bills have been introduced on the council floor, from fighting asthma triggers to overturning the New York Police Department's parade rules.

Here is a sample of legislation you may have missed.

### **Reducing Asthma Triggers**

New York City is known as having one of the highest asthma rates among children in the country. It is the number one cause for the hospitalization of children under 14. A study by the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in 2000 found kids in New York City were twice as likely to be hospitalized for asthma compared to children nationwide.

While many attribute this staggering rate to an urban environment full of pollution and congestion, there are other culprits, like mice, cockroaches and mold, some city officials said. To nab these allergens, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and Councilmember Rosie Mendez introduced legislation (Intro 750) that requires owners of buildings with multiple units to immediately remove allergens if the building is occupied by an individual with respiratory issues. These allergens would include mold, fungi and pests.

"These problems have serious health consequences and our bill will force landlords and inspectors to take them seriously," said Gotbaum in a prepared statement. "There has never been a consistent or appropriate standard for dealing with mold and pest infestations in New York City, and that needs to change."

Some mold infestations are violations of Department of Housing Preservation and Development's regulations, but there currently is no protocol to deal with most infestations and remediation. The bill, city officials said in a prepared statement, would require a landlord take immediate action.

Under the legislation, landlords would be required to inspect a unit that is occupied with an asthmatic person at least once a year. If landlords do not comply, they could be subject to six month imprisonment or a \$500 fine.

The legislation can also apply to apartment units where non-asthmatic residents live, depending on the size of the infestation.

# QUEENS TIMES

*Published for the Borough of Queens*

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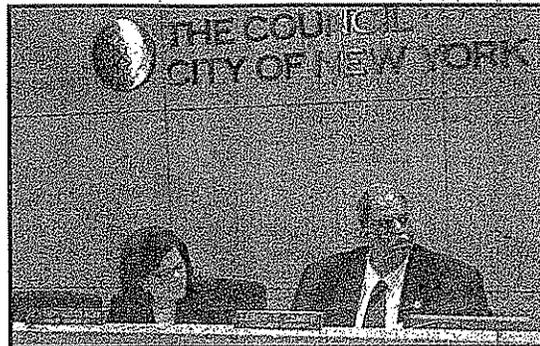
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The New York City Council's Committee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by Council Member Leroy Comrie (right), along with Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum (left), conducted their first hearing at City Hall recently on Introductory Bill #483, which would require notices relating to the rights of mobile phone customers. The proposed bill would require disclosures by stores that sell wireless phones that would distinguish whether the store is an "authorized dealership" (CellHearing2) - which is not owned or managed by a specific wireless service provider and offers a variety of wireless plans and phones—and a "wireless provider store" (CellHearing3) - which is managed by a specific wireless provider and only sells its own product. Photo by Damion Reid.

dealerships (some of whom tack on up to \$400 to the service providers' early termination fees)—have not been as forthcoming.

"The purpose of this bill is not to bully the mobile phone industry but rather to protect mobile phone consumers and improve the transaction process. Those businesses that are acting in an open, honest manner will suffer little, if any inconvenience as a result of this bill, and the end result will be a better-informed client base."

Public Advocate Gotbaum added, "We all know what it feels like to come across a complex, confusing contract. Many times, fee information is not clearly provided. This bill will eliminate the secrecy surrounding cancellation and restocking fees and other costs. We are pleased to work with the Department of Consumer Affairs to strengthen the provisions of this bill in order to ensure consumers can make informed decisions from the start."

The co-sponsors of this bill are Public Advocate Gotbaum and Council Members Comrie, John Liu, Gale Brewer, Lew Fidler, Vincent Gentile, Alan Gerson, Letitia James, Oliver Koppell, Miguel Martinez, Michael Nelson, Annabel Palma, James Sanders Jr., David Weprin and Thomas White Jr.

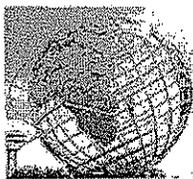
The number of subscribers of cellular phone services is now 255.4 million, accounting for approximately 84% of the U.S. population. The mobile phone market has an equally firm grip in New York City, where nearly 70% of the population subscribes to a wireless telephone service. The huge popularity of cell phones creates a myriad of options for consumers seeking to purchase phones and services in New York City.

A 2005 report issued by the office of Public Advocate Gotbaum identified six different methods for acquiring a cellular phone in the City, including visiting a store operated by the actual wireless service provider; visiting an authorized retailer; ordering from a wireless service provider's website; ordering from an authorized online retailer; purchasing from a general electronics retailer; or, ordering over the phone with an existing service provider.

However, despite the popularity of cellular phones, the wireless telecommunications industry is not without its detractors. In 2007, for example, the Better Business Bureau ranked complaints against the telecommunications industry among the top ten complaint categories. At a 2006 hearing with the New York State Assembly on the wireless telephone industry, the Consumer Protection Board testified that approximately two-thirds of their consumer complaints from cellular phone users concerned billing or rate issues.

The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs has a long history of monitoring the cell phone industry to protect consumers from deceptive cell phone advertising. In July 2005, for example, the Department pursued claims against AT&T Wireless, Cingular Wireless and Verizon Wireless for deceptive advertising. Those companies settled and agreed to fully comply with the CPL in their marketing efforts. Suits were also filed against Nextel Communications, Sprint Spectrum and T-Mobile USA for pitching cell phones and services in deceptive advertisements that misled consumers.

"We're glad that the Council is addressing concerns in this market," testified Marla Tepper, General Counsel for the Department of Consumer Affairs. "We encourage the Committee to consider forging a more comprehensive approach to effectively address the entire range of issues consumers confront when entering into contracts for cell phones and cell phone services, and would look forward to working together on such an initiative."



# Gazette

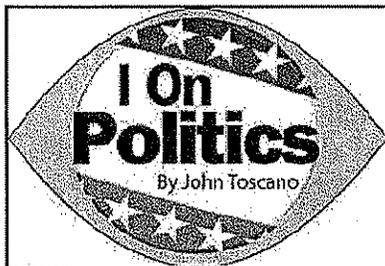
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## Bruno Heads Queens GOP Annual Star-Studded Dinner Bash

APRIL 30, 2008



The most powerful  
Republican in New  
York state, state  
Senate Majority  
Leader Joseph  
Bruno, will journey  
down to Queens on  
May 22 to be  
honored as Man of  
the Year by the  
Queens Republican

organization at its annual dinner.

Philip Ragusa, the Queens party chairman, will also honor two of Bruno's top operatives- state Senators Frank Padavan and Serphin Maltese- who will be running for re-election this year with hopes of winning and returning to Albany continuing as members of the majority party.

Both are being challenged in November, Padavan by City Councilmember James Gennaro, and Maltese by Councilmember Joseph Addabbo Jr.

Another top Albany Republican, Assembly Minority Leader James Tedisco will be the keynote speaker, and radio- TV personality Curtis Sliwa will be a special guest.

Other honorees include Margo Catsimatidis who will be honored as Woman of the Year. She is the wife of tycoon John Catsimatidis, owner, president, chairman, and chief executive officer of the Red Apple Group and Gristedes Foods. The Red Apple Group a subsidiary of United Refining Company has holdings in aviation and real estate interests in New York, Florida, and the U.S Virgin Islands. He owns and operates the *Hellenic Times* newspaper, and is a prospective Republican candidate for mayor in 2009.

Rudy Washington, a deputy mayor in the Rudy Giuliani administration, will be another honoree.

Rounding out the dais will be Anthony Como, the party's choice to win former Councilmember Dennis Gallagher's vacated seat in the June 3 special election; Tom Dooley of Astoria, who is challenging state Senator George Onorato in November; and Tony Nunziato, who's running against Assemblymember Margaret Markey, also in November; and Robert Hornak, who plans to run for the Astoria city council seat in 2009.

Ragusa said he's expecting a big turnout at Douglaston Manor, possibly because the audience expects to hear some interesting comments from Senator Bruno about his battle with former Governor Eliot Spitzer last year. Tickets are \$150 per person.

**OTHER DEM EVENTS:** The Ridgewood Democratic Club, headed by Assemblymember Catherine Nolan, has a huge event, a 100th anniversary dinnerdance on Thursday, June 19, at which a long list of leaders will be honored.

Nolan tops the list as Woman of the Year. Crowley and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum will both receive the Public Service Award. Longtime Ridgewood Dem leader Robert Rothermel is the club's Man of the Year, Gerard Tate gets the Lifetime Achievement Award; Bruce Bendell and Annette Rodriguez- Soriano are Business People of the Year; Alan B. Lubin and Veronica Montgomery Costa Labor Leaders of the Year, and Debbie Egel and Patricia Grayson are Community Service Award recipients.

Mark the date- Thursday, June 19, at Terrace On The Park in Flushing Meadows- Corona Park, cocktails at 6:30 p.m., tickets are \$100 per person, call 718- 229-4201.