

NEWS FROM Legislator

Lou D'Amaro



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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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LEGISLATURE SHEDS SOME “LIGHT” ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT PASSES BILL ENHANCING TRANSPARENCY

(HUNTINGTON STATION, NY...June 14, 2010) – Seeking to make County government more transparent and accountable to the public, the Suffolk County Legislature recently approved a bill sponsored by Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-Huntington Station) that appropriates funding to implement a new County-based website that will allow Suffolk residents easy access to information about elected officials, County government and its various departments and divisions.

Specifically, Introductory Resolution 1003-2010, “Appropriating Funds in Connection with the Implementation of a County Database for Taxpayer Access,” was approved during the June 8th meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature and now goes before County Executive Steve Levy, who is expected to sign the bill into law. The comprehensive website, which was originally proposed by former Legislator Brian Beedenbender, is modeled after New York State Attorney General Andrew Cuomo’s innovative “Project Sunlight” program, a highly touted web-based tool that has been praised by good government watchdog organizations throughout the State, including the Suffolk chapter of the League of Women Voters.

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“The underlying policy goal is simple,” said Legislator D’Amaro. “Transparency in government leads to accountability, which, in turn, leads to responsible practices. When legislators are held accountable, it forces a closer examination of priorities. This will reduce waste and promote efficiency since legislators will have to stand behind and justify their actions to the public.”

“The League of Women Voters (LWV) of Suffolk County applauds the Suffolk County Legislature for implementing a County Database for Taxpayer Access,” said Judie Gorenstein, Director of Voter Services for the LWV of Suffolk County. “The LWV supports transparency and encourages active and informed participation in government. When Suffolk County became the first county in New York to pass legislation approving an independent, nonpartisan redistricting commission, we were pleased that rather than the elected officials being able to choose their voters, the voters will be able to choose their elected officials. Now these same voters will be able to have a website where they can easily access factual information about their County government and elected representatives. Thank you Legislator D’Amaro for sponsoring this bill.”

The name “Project Sunlight” was developed by the State Attorney General’s Office to symbolize the transparent nature of the website. The site will include information about County services, contracts, legislation, campaign finances, lobbyists and other areas of interest to Suffolk residents. For example, the public will have access to campaign contributions with the ability to cross-reference donors with any legislation that may have affected them. The site is also expected to attach lawmakers’ names to their respective member items.

“The public has a right to know what their government is doing and where it is spending their money,” former Legislator Beedenbender said. “This website will help to create the open and transparent government they deserve.”

The bill’s passage will now enable the Suffolk County Department of Information Technology to purchase the initial start-up software and equipment needed to build the website. Once completed, the site will be managed and maintained by existing County personnel at no additional cost to taxpayers.

(more)

County Approves Project Sunlight
3-3-3-3
6/14/10

“The voters put their trust in us to ‘watch over the store’ and we, as public servants, must effectively respond in kind,” said D’Amaro. “Project Sunlight will ensure that all interested parties have open access to information that is imperative to governmental decision-making. It will soon be a lot easier for people to peel away the layers of bureaucracy and eliminate any perceived shrouds of secrecy. I applaud my colleagues for supporting our efforts to make Suffolk County government more open and accessible.”

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Suffolk County Legislator Lou D’Amaro (D-Huntington Station) represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes parts of Huntington Station, Huntington, South Huntington, Dix Hills, Melville, West Hills, Deer Park and North Babylon. He is Chairman of the Ways and Means committee, Vice-Chairman of the Budget & Finance committee and Vice-Chairman of the Environment, Planning and Agriculture committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.