

NEWS FROM Legislator

Lou D'Amaro



SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE

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LEGISLATURE OPENS THE DOOR TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

NEW 'OPEN ACCESS' WEBSITE TO BE REGULARLY UPDATED

(HUNTINGTON STATION, NY... August 5, 2013) – 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 mandates frequent updates of the County's new "Open Access" website.

Specifically, Introductory Resolution 1545-2013, "Ensuring Timely Updates of Suffolk County's Open Access Website," was approved during the July 30th meeting of the Suffolk County Legislature and now goes before County Executive Steve Bellone, who is expected to sign the bill into law. The comprehensive website is modeled after the New York State Attorney General'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. The site allows Suffolk residents easy access to information about elected officials, County government and its various departments and divisions.

"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 site helps reduce waste and promote efficiency since legislators have to stand behind and justify their actions to the public."

(more)

The site, which is accessible at <http://openaccess.suffolkcountyny.gov/>, includes information about County services, contracts, legislation, budgets, campaign finances, lobbyists and other areas of interest to Suffolk residents. For example, the public has access to campaign contributions with the ability to cross-reference donors with any legislation that may have affected them. The site also attaches lawmakers' names to their respective member items.

"The public has a right to know what their government is doing and where their money is being spent," D'Amaro added. "This website helps foster the open and transparent government they deserve."

The bill authorizes the Suffolk County Department of Information Technology to maintain all of the requisite information on the website and to update this information at a minimum of once every four months. The Department will manage and maintain the site using existing County personnel at no additional cost to taxpayers.

"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. "The County's Open Access website ensures that all interested parties can view information that is imperative to governmental decision-making. It is now 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 these efforts to make Suffolk County government more open and accessible."

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Suffolk County Legislator Lou D'Amaro represents the 17th Legislative District, which includes parts of Huntington, Huntington Station, South Huntington, Melville, West Hills, Cold Spring Hills, Dix Hills, Deer Park, North Babylon and West Babylon. He is chairman of the Ways & Means committee and vice chairman of both the Parks & Recreation and Economic Development & Energy committees of the Suffolk County Legislature.