

PRESS RELEASE FROM  
PRESIDING OFFICER DUWAYNE GREGORY



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CONTACT: KATIE BAKER  
Office: 631-853-4857  
Cell: 740-485-1125  
[Katie.Baker@suffolkcountyny.gov](mailto:Katie.Baker@suffolkcountyny.gov)

## *Statement from Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory*

Bipartisanship, fiscal responsibility, and a commitment to making Long Island a better place to live were the driving forces behind the Suffolk County Legislature's work in 2015.

Passing a [fiscally responsible operating budget](#) that maintains critical services without raising the General Fund property tax was the Legislature's single most important accomplishment this year. The 2016 budget was the product of weeks of collaboration between a bipartisan working group of legislators, who were supported by the Legislature's nonpartisan Budget Review Office. Highlights of the budget include a provision providing for the [sale of the former John J. Foley Nursing Home](#), an effort spearheaded by **3rd District Legislator Kate Browning** that will save Suffolk taxpayers more than half a million dollars per year in operating costs. The Legislature also voted this year to [expedite the merger of the county comptroller's and county treasurer's offices](#), a consolidation that will save Suffolk taxpayers an estimated \$1.5 million per year.

Looking to Long Island's future, the Legislature adopted the county's [first attempt at a master planning document](#) in more than four decades. By identifying key priorities such as environmental protection and accessible transportation, "[Framework for the Future – Suffolk County Comprehensive Master Plan 2035](#)" recognizes the interdependent relationship between the economy and all other factors that contribute to our quality of life here on Long Island. Much of our work this year, including our acceptance of a [Climate Action Plan](#), aligns with the goals of the master plan. Furthermore, the Legislature passed **8th District Legislator William J. Lindsay III's** [bill to create regional planning alliances](#), which will facilitate coordination between municipalities as we work to implement the master plan and support regionally-important development projects. Additionally, an important step was taken toward improving Long Island's infrastructure when, after eight years of work by **Legislator Browning**, \$200 million was secured to sewer the area surrounding the Forge River.

Curbing Long Island's brain drain has also been one of our key priorities this year. To that end, the Legislature has supported [downtown revitalization plans](#) and affordable housing projects such as [Copiague Commons](#) that aim to replicate the success of similar efforts in Patchogue, which have attracted young people to the community. Suffolk County's [Landbank program](#), a substantial revitalization effort created by legislation I introduced, has also seen a successful year. As of last month, five zombie properties had been purchased by the landbank, with six

more in the process of being purchased. Renovations on all 11 properties are expected to be completed by the end of 2016, at which point they will be converted to affordable housing and sold to income-eligible homebuyers. In addition to securing grant funding for environmental assessments of brownfield properties, the landbank has recouped more than \$4.5 million in property taxes since the program's inception.

Expanding access to quality higher education is also critical to keeping young people on Long Island. This spring, **6th District Legislator and Chair of the Legislature's Education & Information Technology Committee Sarah Anker** and I held two public forums that [examined the impact that a proposed cut to Pell Grants](#), a federal form of financial aid benefiting low-income students, would have on Long Island. The findings from these hearings, which were held in partnership with the Long Island Regional Advisory Council on Higher Education, were released in a [July report](#). **Legislator Anker** also successfully [passed her bill](#) to create a pilot program that will offer graduating high school and college students the opportunity to tour Suffolk County's One-Stop Employment Center.

In another effort to keep college affordable, the Legislature [passed my bill to create a budget committee](#) to create a five-year plan to stabilize tuition at Suffolk County Community College (SCCC). However, affordable education need not come at the cost of quality facilities, and earlier this year, my fellow legislators and I celebrated groundbreaking at a [new learning center](#) and [STEM building](#), both on SCCC's Brentwood campus, as well [a new health and wellness center](#) on its Eastern Campus.

The Legislature also made great strides this year to protect both the environment and public health, passing **9th District Legislator Monica Martinez's** [legislation to ban smoking in common areas of apartment buildings](#) and **5th District Legislator Kara Hahn's** [bill to ban the sale of personal care products containing microbeads](#). **Legislator Hahn's** [bill to ban the sale of toys containing certain toxic chemicals](#) also passed this year, and my legislation to ban the sale of powdered caffeine to minors took effect in January, making Suffolk the [first municipality in the nation](#) to enact such a law. Additionally, **1st District Legislator Al Krupski** formed the [East End Wildlife Task Force](#) to address the regional problem of deer overpopulation, which is directly related to the high incidence of tick-borne illnesses. A dedicated advocate of preserving open space and protecting our shorelines, **Legislator Krupski** also sponsored [legislation to preserve 35 acres of open space](#) in Riverhead and co-sponsored [legislation to preserve 22 acres of prime farmland](#) in Riverhead's Sound Avenue scenic and historic corridor.

Water quality in particular has been a major concern for **18th District Legislator William Spencer, M.D.** In part due to **Legislator Spencer's** efforts, the Centerport Yacht Club Beach, which had been closed for seven years due to water quality concerns, [re-opened this summer](#). **Legislator Spencer** also hosted a [special hearing](#) on the fish kills and brown tide that plagued our waters this year, and our 2016 operating budget provides for the investment of more than \$180,000 in a fund for clean drinking water projects.

Suffolk County has a long history of passing progressive legislation at the vanguard of public safety, and we continued that trend in 2015 with the passage of **4th District Legislator Tom Muratore's** [bill that institutes a permitting process for the use of drones in county-owned parks](#).

By beginning to lay ground rules that protect our residents without prohibiting the use of drones, we've struck a reasonable balance that promotes the safe enjoyment of this relatively new innovation. The Federal Aviation Administration [followed suit this month](#), unveiling a database in which owners of recreational drones will be required to register their machines.

Long Island's rising tide of drug addiction demands our continued and aggressive attention. In October, the Legislature passed **Majority Leader Rob Calarco's** [bill authorizing the county to initiate litigation](#) against opioid manufacturers whose negligence has contributed to the scourge of drug addiction. In December, I [called a press conference](#) drawing attention to the alarming increase in the number of Suffolk babies born addicted to opiates, at which I called upon Nassau County to join us in our effort to fight the heroin epidemic.

Although crime in Suffolk County is down overall, a spate of shootings this year was a sobering reminder that several of our communities are still ravaged by violence. In our continued efforts to help law enforcement fight crime, we expanded the gunshot detection system ShotSpotter to 8 square miles and swore in the [biggest class of police recruits since 2006](#). **Minority Leader Kevin McCaffrey's** bill to examine the feasibility of [expedited training for police officers](#) was passed in April, and, thanks to the leadership of **Legislator Spencer**, we [established a plant DNA pilot program](#) to reduce property crime in Huntington Station.

The county also instituted a [Domestic Violence Monitoring Pilot Program](#) that provides "proximity detectors" that track offenders through GPS technology. Born from a bill sponsored by **Legislator Hahn**, the program alerts victims if their offenders are nearby. In January, I will host a summit in which community leaders will come together with law enforcement to discuss innovative ways to fight gang violence, and the Legislature and I will work in partnership with the new police commissioner to restore confidence in the department.

Suffolk County is home to more veterans [than any other county in the state](#), and this year we reaffirmed our commitment to those who have served. Thanks to the "Housing Our Homeless Heroes Act," sponsored by **16th District Legislator and Chair of the Veterans and Seniors Committee Steve Stern**, [eight tax-defaulted properties have been approved for conversion into affordable housing for veterans](#). Additionally, the Legislature unanimously [passed a bill](#) sponsored by **10th District Legislator Tom Cilmi** that directs the Department of Social Services to create an "HOV (Helping Our Veterans) Lane" program to expedite veterans' applications for assistance. The proceeds of Suffolk County's inaugural marathon, which a [bipartisan team of legislators](#) ran as a relay, will also benefit veterans.

In my role as Presiding Officer, my top initiative has been to make government more transparent and accessible to the citizens it serves, and the Legislature's newly appointed clerk, [Jason Richberg](#), shares those goals. This year, the county instituted an Open Data program, thanks to legislation sponsored by **Majority Leader Calarco**, that [puts more public records online](#). The Legislature also passed **Legislator Cilmi's** [bill that promotes accessibility by creating a mobile app](#) for the public to report potholes, graffiti and other issues requiring government attention. Additionally, thanks to a bill sponsored by **Legislator Lindsay**, the [county strengthened its reporting requirements](#) for lobbyists. We also welcomed more than 80 high school and college students to learn about government firsthand through our inaugural [Page Program](#) and [Student](#)

Days, the latter of which were held in conjunction with the League of Women Voters of Suffolk County.

While we worked hard this year for Suffolk's future, we also continued to honor its past. This summer, my colleagues and I paid tribute to our late Presiding Officer Bill Lindsay, who passed away in office in 2013, by breaking ground on a memorial in front of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building and re-naming our Hauppauge county complex in his honor.

As we look to the challenges of 2016, we bid a bittersweet farewell to **2nd District Legislator Jay Schneiderman**, who has been termed out after 12 years of service with the Legislature. He has been a tireless advocate for his district and dedicated public servant to all Suffolk residents since he was first elected. We will miss him dearly and wish him the best as he takes on his new role as Southampton's Town Supervisor. We also look forward to welcoming his recently elected successor, **Bridget Fleming**.

As proud as I am of the Legislature's accomplishments this year, I am humbled by the challenges that remain ahead. My colleagues and I look forward to our continued efforts toward building a stronger Suffolk in 2016.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DuWayne Gregory', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

DuWayne Gregory, Presiding Officer  
Suffolk County Legislature

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