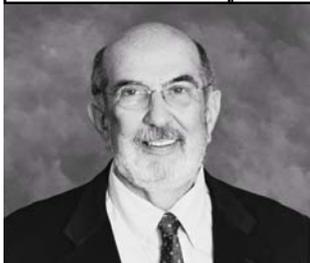




# Rockland County Legislator John Murphy District 16 Newsletter

*Serving the Communities of Pearl River, Tappan, Blauvelt, Sparkill, Orangeburg*  
Summer 2015



Dear Constituents,

This is the next-to-last newsletter you will receive from me. I am not seeking re-election as your County Legislator. By the end of this

December, when my current term of office expires, I will have served you for 44 years. Although I love being your representative on the County Legislature, it is time to begin a transition. However, until then, I am doing my due diligence and wish to let you know some of the things I am working on and the status of the County.

## Some Rockland County Facts

Let's start with some interesting statistics.

First, our Community College (RCC):

- Current enrollment: 7,800
- Enrollment 2004: 5,800
- Enrollment 1975: 8,200

70% of RCC graduates transfer to 4-year colleges and universities each year. Of the 30 SUNY community colleges, RCC is among the top 3 in both retention and completion/graduation rates.

Second, in 1991, there were 3,127 County Employees. Today, there are 2,021 - over 1,000 less.

## Our Current Fiscal Status

Standard and Poor's (S&P) Rating Services upgraded its long-term and underlying rating to "BBB" with a Positive Outlook from "BBB-" with a Stable Outlook on the County of Rockland's general obligation debt. This is the first S&P rating upgrade for Rockland County since 2002 and the County's second upgrade since January 2014.

Last July, Moody's Investors Service upgraded Rockland County's general obligation bonds one notch to "Baa2" from "Baa3" and changed the outlook on the "Baa2" rating to "Positive" from "Stable." S&P issued its credit upgrade based on "improved financial

performance expected for 2014 and mitigation of a significant portion of its general fund deficit, with further improvement likely." Additionally, S&P assigned a "BBB" long-term rating to the County's series 2015 general obligation refunding bonds. The outlook on all the ratings is positive.

Both credit rating agencies have cited the County's significant improvement in management and budgeting practices for the improved ratings and outlooks and suggested additional rating upgrades are possible if current trends continue.

## Our Nursing Home and Hospital

I am happy to report that progress continues toward the turnover of Summit Park Nursing Care Center and its 57-bed Long Term Acute Care Hospital to selected purchaser Summit Park Acquisition Group. Applications for the transfer of both facilities are now pending before the New York State Department of Health, who must review and approve all

such transactions. The purchaser is a highly qualified provider who has ambitious plans for upgrading our facility, providing innovative new services, and attracting more customers. The "new and improved" Summit Park will be a huge asset for the elderly and seriously ill in our County and for the families who care for them.

## Our Social Services Department

The Department of Social Services is responsible for the administration of federal and state assistance programs for the County. According to DSS about 95,000 Rockland residents are currently receiving one or more of its services--ranging from Supplementary Nutrition Assistance, Medicaid, HEAP, child care subsidies, housing and homeless help, child

support collection, foster care and adoption, child protection services and care for adults who need protection. Residents are encouraged to check out the county's website ([www.rocklandgov.com](http://www.rocklandgov.com)) or to call InfoRock at 845-364-2020 and find out more about services all over the County that they or a member of their family may need .

## Behavioral Health Response Team and Addressing Mental Health Issues

For years, I envisioned a Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis Unit, with the mission of answering all calls from people with brain-based issues in crisis. It was my vision to avoid using the police and maybe even hospital emergency rooms with long waits and staff members that were not trained to handle psychiatric issues. I was driven by the number of people with brain-based issues now living in Supported Apartments in the community without 24-hour supervision. My dream has come true. The unit is now a reality! It is now called the "Behavioral Health Response Team" and has been in operation since the end of March, 2015.

The Rockland Paramedic Services, Inc. Behavioral Health Response Team (BHRT) is comprised of licensed social workers, psychiatric nurses, emergency medical technicians, and psychiatric technicians. Each two member team works 12-hour shifts and the service is operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Teams provide both phone and in-person support to individuals and families in the Rockland County community who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing behavioral, emotional, or mental health crises. BHRT services are available to individuals of all ages and are free of charge. The team has reached out to schools, programs, and community residences, as well as private homes. The goal of the team is to de-escalate situations and arrange emergency psychiatric evaluations at Nyack Hospital for individuals in need of inpatient hospitalization.

Furthermore, as you know, meeting the needs of our residents who suffer from brain related disabilities is a subject near and dear to my heart as a County Legislator, as a Rockland resident, and as a human being. Over the past year, I have been part of a new initiative designed to re-build the behavioral healthcare system in Rockland County. As a member of the Executive Committee of the County Executive's Commission on Community Behavioral Health, it has been my shared responsibility to oversee the first comprehensive needs assessment ever done in Rockland County concerning the needs of individuals and families with mental health, developmental disability, and alcohol/substance abuse issues. Since the fall of 2014, we have interviewed hundreds of community members, providers of services, and consumers, as well as conducting surveys with nearly 1,400 County residents. The Commission's report, due to be released over the summer of 2015, contains nearly 200 recommendations for the transformation of our system of care into one that truly meets the needs of our County. Rockland County once was the model of behavioral healthcare for every other county in New York State, and even for the country. It is my intention, through implementing the recommendations of the Commission, to once again have Rockland stand as an

example of how communities should, and must, treat their most vulnerable members.

Subsequent to the above, I referred a proposed initiative that has great significance to me because it relates to the national crisis of our mentally ill sisters and bothers who are finding their way into jails/prisons, which are now functioning as the new State Psychiatric Hospitals. My proposal is in support of "Stepping Up: A National Initiative To Reduce The Number Of People With Mental Illnesses and Developmental Disabilities In Jails," brought by the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation, to reduce the number of people with mental illnesses in the Rockland County Jail." The case has been made for many years by many people in many venues and media.

Over the past 50 years, since I began my public/community service, which coincided with the State's transformation policy of deinstitutionalization, which reduces beds in State operated mega facilities, I have labored as a County Legislator, long time Member of the "County Board of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Alcoholism Services/Community Service Board" and as a Co-Founder/President of Loeb House, to fill in the gaps that deinstitutionalization created which was a prelude to the heightened migration of our mentally ill into our jails and prisons. My previous initiatives included the Mental Health Mobile Crisis Unit previously mentioned as well as a Mental Health Court, and a separate Mental Health unit in our County jail, neither of which gained traction.

However, this initiative that I am now promoting has a "timing" implication. Besides the fact that my term is ending in only 7 months, (two of which are summer months), the initiative is being introduced at a time when our District Attorney is implementing some very innovative tools and enlightened strategies to prevent incarceration of both MH and IDD victims and Marion Edna Breland will be implementing the recommendations of the County Executive's Commission on Community Behavioral Health, and my proposal must be interwoven with these.

In the face of these facts, I have suggested that our District Attorney be empowered to become the "steward" of my initiative and "DRIVE THE BUS" or "QUARTERBACK" the initiative's way through the process so there is coordination, cooperation, continuity and communication. Since the accent/core goal of the initiative is to prevent incarceration, we should look to our County's chief prosecutor to oversee the project.

### Legislator John Murphy

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