



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE BETSY GOTBAUM



Improving Access to City Services  
Annual Report 2008





# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

Dear New Yorker,

Throughout my life, I have been passionate about helping New Yorkers. I've served as an educator, an advocate, an executive, and an elected official in an effort to improve people's lives. No position has been as rewarding or as challenging as my current one.

My job as Public Advocate is to help New Yorkers get access to the services they need: public housing for a domestic violence survivor, food stamps for a senior, special education services for a child in need. These are the services we deliver to New Yorkers every day. This year, more than 12,000 individuals were helped by my office.

I don't just solve individual complaints – I also work to fix citywide problems. This past year, I helped improve access to emergency contraception and birth control in clinics; pushed for the clean-up of environmental hazards at parks and schools; provided about 10,000 low-income New Yorkers with basic and important information on banking; exposed the Department of Education's (DOE) failure to meet state requirements for physical education and arts instruction; and introduced legislation to protect residents' health by forcing landlords to remediate mold and pest infestations in city apartments.

My office also initiated, in partnership with the mayor's office, the largest survey ever conducted to assess New Yorkers' satisfaction with city services. I also convened an independent commission at the request of the state legislature to make recommendations on reauthorizing mayoral control of schools.

This annual report expands upon some of the ways I have helped New Yorkers during the past year. It provides testimony from people I helped and information on investigations my office conducted and legislation I introduced.

This is the type of work I plan to continue in the next year. As long as there are New Yorkers who need help, my office will continue to serve them.

Thank you,

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum



Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum



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### About Betsy Gotbaum

For the past three decades, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum has had a distinguished career in New York City's public and private sectors. She has worked as an adviser to three mayors, executive director of the New York City Police Foundation, commissioner of the city Department of Parks & Recreation, and president of the New-York Historical Society.

As executive director of the Police Foundation, Betsy secured bulletproof vests for every city police officer. She developed an innovative citywide health screening and work-site hypertension program for police officers and facilitated an intensive training program for 911 operators.

In 1990, Mayor David Dinkins appointed Betsy Gotbaum the first female city Parks Commissioner. In that capacity, she expanded the Parks workforce through an innovative welfare-to-work training program. She also established the City Parks Foundation, which brought in millions of dollars for park restoration, maintenance and recreation

programs. She successfully argued for a change in city policy allowing the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) and other organizations to use Central Park for fundraising events.

In June 1994, Betsy became president of The New-York Historical Society, New York's oldest museum and home to one of the nation's most extensive research libraries. When she took over, the museum was closed to the public and on the verge of bankruptcy. Betsy rescued it from financial collapse, renovated its landmark building and recalled its collections from warehouses.

Betsy Gotbaum was elected Public Advocate for the City of New York in 2001 and was re-elected in 2005. She is the third woman elected to a citywide post in city history.

Betsy has worked tirelessly as Public Advocate. With a long-standing determination to help New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable, Betsy Gotbaum has fought for New York's most underserved populations. Her leadership has helped increase access to healthcare, strengthened child and senior welfare services, and helped improve education.

### Protecting Children

Throughout her tenure as Public Advocate, Betsy Gotbaum has made child welfare a top priority.

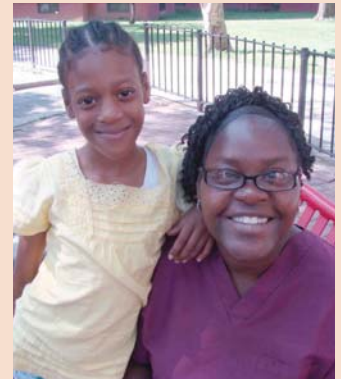
During 2007-2008, Betsy Gotbaum held the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) accountable for its mistakes. She investigated a spike in child fatalities at city homeless shelters, demanding that ACS create a new shelter division to respond to reports of abuse. She renewed her call for ACS to strengthen efforts to encourage early reporting of suspected child abuse.

Public Advocate Gotbaum also exposed the dangers of potentially toxic playground turf for children, prompting the city to investigate problems with artificial turf and to begin testing turf fields around the city. And, after several children were burned by hot rubber playground mats last May, she successfully persuaded the city to post signs in playgrounds warning parents of the dangers of these mats.

Public Advocate Gotbaum also conducted a citywide Summer Wellness Tour, along with the Community Healthcare Network, which provided free health screenings to thousands of kids and raised awareness of childhood obesity.

*I contacted the Office of the Public Advocate last year about an emergency safety transfer from my apartment in the Bronx. My daughter and I had been victims of domestic violence, and I needed to get her out of there.*

*But when I called the New York City Housing Authority to request the transfer, they told me I didn't qualify, and there was nothing they could do for me.*



*I don't know what we would have done without the Office of the Public Advocate. They helped protect my little girl from a very bad situation, helping me find a new home when I needed it most.*

*– Mildred and her daughter,  
South Bronx*

### **Betsy: Watch for Kid Abuse**

*New York Post, December 10, 2007*

*“Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum yesterday urged New Yorkers to report any suspected cases of child abuse in the wake of the death of Tkai Marcelle, 3.”*



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## Helping Parents and Students

Betsy Gotbaum is holding the city Department of Education (DOE) accountable to parents and students. This year she exposed DOE's failure to meet state requirements for physical education and arts instruction in city schools, demanded that DOE provide basic support for and services to parents of children with special needs, rallied around the Keep the Promises campaign for more money in the classroom, opposed excessive testing in schools and fought on behalf of parents to correct problems in the Pre-Kindergarten enrollment system.

The Office of the Public Advocate conducted several investigations to assess DOE's chronic unresponsiveness to parent concerns. Five years after its first random survey of DOE Parent Coordinators, Gotbaum's office found that the majority of Parent Coordinators are more difficult to reach and less likely to return calls than before. Investigations also found that 311 operators give inconsistent information to parents with questions about special education -- despite DOE directing parents to 311 for their educational concerns.

Last fall, Public Advocate Gotbaum's annual Parent's Education Hotline (212-669-7250) provided support to parents during the particularly stressful back-to-school period. She solved parent problems with child enrollment, school transfers, special education and transportation.



*"Betsy Gotbaum is a strong advocate for parents of children with disabilities in New York City. Her work has brought to light barriers that families face as they try to secure an appropriate education for their children."*

*- Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children New York*

### **Gotbaum Hits Special Ed Hangups**

*New York Daily News  
September 14, 2007*

"About half of the 45 calls made to the city offices designed to assist parents of kids with special needs were not answered or returned, according to a report released by Gotbaum's office. Parents of special-education kids echoed the complaints in the report."

### Ensuring Services for Women

As the only citywide female elected official, Betsy Gotbaum is committed to ensuring that women have access to public benefits and city programs.

After releasing a report that demonstrated that the city failed to help sufficient numbers of Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprises (M/WBEs) reach certification, Public Advocate Gotbaum called on the city to increase the number of procurement counselors and streamline the certification process.

Betsy Gotbaum found that none of the 44 city hospitals offering labor and delivery services were providing legally-mandated maternity information. Her advocacy resulted in 100 percent of city hospitals preparing this information. Her office also helped improve access to emergency contraception and birth control in city clinics by asking that the city expand reproductive health education



initiatives, and she now is working with the city Health and Hospitals Corporation on this effort. She also urged immigrant crime and domestic violence victims to apply for U-visas, and she exposed DOE for short-changing female students at Career and Technical Education (CTE) high schools.

### **Gotbaum Seeks To Make Cesarean Rates Public**

*New York Sun, August 1, 2008*

“The public advocate, Betsy Gotbaum acknowledged the agency’s previous reluctance to display maternity information on its site ...is asking the city’s health department to publicize Cesarean rates at New York City’s hospitals.”



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*Last spring, my daughter and I needed to move into a homeless shelter because of a bad situation. When I got there, the room we got was filthy, didn't*



*have a lock on the door, had a rodent problem and unwashed bathrooms.*

*After one night there, my daughter's asthma was triggered so badly by the chemicals that*

*she ended up in the emergency room. The Public Advocate's Office helped me and my daughter get an immediate transfer to another shelter. I don't know what I would've done without their help!*

*– Yvonne Killebrew and her fiancée  
Charles, Queens*



## Improving Access to Public Benefits

Every day, the Office of the Public Advocate works to cut through government red tape and provide New Yorkers with better access to public benefits.

This year, Betsy Gotbaum continued to fight for the Ready Access to Assistance Act, a common sense bill that would allow advocates to set up help desks in public benefits offices. She successfully obtained the support of 34 Councilmembers and many advocates for this bill.

Public Advocate Gotbaum also pushed for better benefits for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts by introducing a resolution to provide them with partial tax exemptions. Gotbaum's office pointed out several problems with the city's new ACCESS NYC program, an online tool for determining public benefit qualifications, and recommended the city take steps to help users access information more easily.

## Public Advocate Promotes Temporary Visas

*NY1 News, April 2, 2008*

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



### Supporting Seniors

New York's growing senior population is increasingly in need of public benefits and city services. This year, Betsy Gotbaum addressed the city's affordable housing crisis and problem of housing insecurity among seniors. She released a detailed report about alternative housing options.

The Public Advocate's report recommends that the city take immediate action to develop and expand the NORC (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) Supportive Service Program model. The report also challenges the city to develop a public information campaign to educate seniors about the benefits of shared housing and also the under-used Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE).

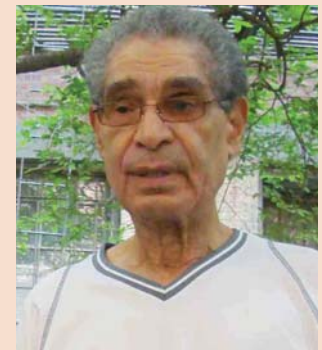
### Gotbaum Plans To Educate Seniors on Affordable Housing

NY1, March 25, 2008

"Public Advocate Gotbaum said the city is not doing enough to educate seniors on their affordable housing options."

*I am a senior citizen, and I rely on food stamps to get by. Last year I found out I was going to lose my food stamps for no reason.*

*First, I tried to appeal the decision. All day long I tried to appeal it by calling the number I'd been given, but every time I called the line was busy. One call to your office, however, and I was able*



*to get through to someone right away. Heather Francis found that I needed to mail a form to the food stamp office, and once I did that I was able to continue getting them. I am so grateful someone was there to pick up the phone.*

*— Charles Kelly, Manhattan*



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## Reports Titles and Summaries

### **The Public Advocate's Guide to the Summer Meals Program in New York City—July, 2007**

The Summer Meals Program is a federally funded, locally run program that provides hundreds of thousands of meals to hungry children during the summer while school is on break. This guide is an easy-to-use reference to the Summer Meals Program in New York City and includes a list of sites open to all children.

### **More Hassle Than It's Worth: Problems with the City M/WBE Program—July, 2007**

To encourage Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises' (M/WBEs) participation in city procurement, the city Department of Small Business Services (SBS) administers a M/WBE program. The Office of the Public Advocate found that the SBS M/WBE program is not effective in certifying M/WBEs or helping them gain more opportunities to compete for city contracts. The report outlines several recommendations for SBS.

### **Limited Access: Problems with ACCESS NYC—August, 2007**

The Office of the Public Advocate found that although ACCESS NYC—the city's program to help New Yorkers determine if they may be eligible for public benefits—is useful overall, it fails to provide residents with information about state and city tax credits, links to application forms and detailed information about benefits in languages other than English. The report urges the city to take immediate steps to improve ACCESS NYC, including adding application forms, adding more benefit programs and ensuring that information is available in languages other than English.

### **Unintended Consequences: Problems with Contraception Access at City Clinics—September, 2007**

The Office of the Public Advocate initiated an investigation to assess whether the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Sexually Transmitted Disease clinics, District Public Health Offices and the city Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) teen health clinics provide

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emergency contraception (EC) and other services to patients. Investigators found that the majority of HHC teen health clinics did not have EC ready for same-day pickup and that only one provided an advance prescription of EC. This is despite a city announcement in 2005 that all HHC facilities would provide these prescriptions.

*Update: Since this report was issued, the Office of the Public Advocate released a follow-up report which found that one-third of city clinics were not providing same-day emergency contraception. HHC responded by creating a new policy that greatly expands access to EC.*

### **Old Problem, New Eyes: Youth Insights on Gangs in New York City—November, 2007**

The Office of the Public Advocate surveyed youth about gangs in New York City.

While two-thirds of young people surveyed believe there are more gangs today, few believe the city should expand the use of law enforcement in its response to gang activity. The Office of the Public Advocate sees this survey as a step toward practical recommendations for addressing the gang problem.

### **Analysis of Child Fatalities in the New York City Shelter System—November, 2007**

The Office of the Public Advocate found that children in the shelter system are dying at an alarming rate. The analysis shows that 20 children died in suspicious circumstances while living with their families in city shelters between 2004 and 2006. This includes a 300 percent increase in child fatalities from 2005 to 2006. A closer look at these fatalities

reveals that the vast majority involved families that had had past contact with the child welfare system. The report outlines recommendations for the Administration for Children's Services to strengthen the system to prevent child fatalities.

### **Blue School, Pink School: Gender Imbalance in New York City CTE High Schools—January, 2008**

Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs provide students with work-based skills while promoting academic achievement. The Public Advocate's report shows that young women are not equally represented in the city's 18 CTE high schools, including programs related to the high-growth industries of aviation and automotive maintenance. The report outlines recommendations for the Department of Education to achieve greater gender balance in its CTE schools.

### **Sharing Old Age: Alternative Senior Housing Options—March, 2008**

The Office of the Public Advocate initiated a review of the problem of housing insecurity among seniors and the availability of alternatives to traditional senior housing. These include shared housing and programs to support naturally-occurring retirement communities. The report found that, with a growing number of seniors, increased senior poverty and a shrinking stock of affordable housing, the city is not doing enough to provide seniors with information about and access to alternative housing.



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### **Get More for Your Money: Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and the Community Service Society's Guide to Banking in New York City—April, 2008**

This how-to guide on personal banking encourages New Yorkers to open bank accounts to increase their short- and long-term savings. The guide provides information about different types of banks, savings accounts, checking accounts and such services as international wire transfers, money orders and overdraft protection.

### **Is Anybody Listening? Follow-up Survey of New York City Department of Education Parent Coordinators—April, 2008**

Five years after the Office of the Public Advocate first surveyed DOE's school-based Parent Coordinators, and four years after the initial follow-up, the majority of Parent Coordinators surveyed are more difficult to reach than ever. They also are less likely to respond to parent calls.

### **The High Cost of Leasing Schools: The Loophole in the Public Authorities Law—May, 2008**

This report details a loophole in the Public Authorities Law that allows the School Construction Authority (SCA) to open schools on potentially toxic sites, thereby posing a possible health threat to schoolchildren. The loophole also allows SCA to lease sites for new schools without community notification, environmental review or City Council oversight.

### **State of Play: A Four-Year Follow-up Survey of NYC Students' Access to Physical Education—May, 2008**

This survey, a follow-up to a 2004 report conducted by the Office of the Public Advocate, found that, despite a growing obesity crisis, the DOE still fails to provide students with the legally-mandated amount of physical education (P.E.). The survey found that while small improvements in access to P.E. have been made, only 4 percent of third graders participate in P.E. class every day, as mandated by state law.

### **Guide to Senior Services in New York City—June, 2008**

This guide provides seniors with information about how to access vital city services. It provides contact information for resources pertaining to housing, utilities, health, transportation, legal help, continuing education, employment, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, and emergency preparedness.

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### **Out of Tune: A Survey of Students' Access to Arts Education—June, 2008**

In January 2008, the Office of the Public Advocate surveyed 100 randomly selected public elementary schools and 50 randomly selected public middle schools about arts education classes provided to third, fourth and sixth graders. The report found that only 7 percent of elementary schools and 27 percent of middle schools surveyed offer instruction in all four arts disciplines—music, visual arts, dance and theater—as required by state regulations.

### **Mixed Signals: 311 Fails to Provide Consistent Information to Parents of Children with Special Needs— June, 2008**

The survey reveals that 311 operators give inconsistent information to parents with questions about special education despite DOE directing parents to 311 for their educational concerns. Operators' answers often point parents in the wrong direction and cause delays in accessing vital special education services for their children. 311 operators rarely refer parents to DOE's new unlisted Special Education Call Center.

### **Calling in Abuse: How Domestic Violence Perpetrators are Using the Child Welfare System to Continue Their Abuse— July, 2008**

In response to the growing concern from the domestic violence community, the Office of the Public Advocate designed and implemented a survey to measure the extent that batterers use false reports of child abuse and neglect to continue their abuse. The survey also solicited practical solutions to deter false reports by domestic violence abusers.

### **What New Yorkers Are Saying**

*Dear Ms. Gotbaum,*

*I am writing to say thank you for the effective work your staff put in to fix a problem I was having with the New York City Department of Buildings. I believe that this result would have not been possible without the help of your office, and in particular, Mr. Ralph Perfetto in Ombuds. First, he actually listened to my problem. Then he asked for proof, the same proof that I had sent to everyone else with no result, with the difference being that he cared enough to read all the proof and then to believe me. The letters that he sent to the city agencies finally worked.*

*I read in the newspaper several months ago that some politician, I don't remember who, said that the Public Advocate's office was superfluous and should be abolished. He couldn't be more wrong. It is, I feel, the only functioning city agency, that I have dealt with, that actually works and does what it should do. Congratulations on the good work of your agency. You have my deepest gratitude for helping me out of a bureaucratic nightmare.*

*Sincerely,*

*M.B.*

*Public Advocate Staff Member,*

*I want to let you know that your office has done more for us than any office that was supposed to be helping in our situation. Again, we thank you.*

*J. H.*



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### Legislation

As Public Advocate, Betsy Gotbaum has the power to introduce and co-sponsor legislation.

Bills introduced offer solutions to important yet unaddressed problems that affect New Yorkers, including allowing advocates to help New Yorkers cut through red tape by setting up help desks in public benefit offices, reduce hazardous mold and pest infestations in apartments, protect caregivers from workplace discrimination, and more.

#### New York City Asthma-Free Housing Act

*Int. No. 750 – in relation to requiring owners of multiple dwellings, where a susceptible person resides, to take action to prevent the occurrence of an indoor allergen hazard and to expeditiously remediate any such hazard. Introduced 4/16/2008*

The proposed legislation resulted in part from a report that the Office of the Public Advocate issued in 2006, “Unhealthy Exposure: Mold in New York City Homes.” Betsy Gotbaum was concerned that the response by building owners and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to indoor allergen hazards had not been consistent, nor guided by appropriate standards and believed that it was imperative to the health of adults and children across the city that such allergen hazards be specifically addressed in the Housing Maintenance Code (HMC).

The bill, drafted with the Coalition for Asthma-Free Homes, would amend the HMC to require agencies to establish a minimum standard for the prevention and remediation of mold hazards and pest infestations, in order to reduce asthma attacks and other related health complications. This bill would especially help to protect those populations most susceptible to these types of health complications, such as people already diagnosed with asthma, chronic pulmonary obstructive disease, or lung cancer.

*“There are thousands of New Yorkers whose health depends on how the City responds to this growing problem. There are simple but effective steps to control the indoor mold and pest hazards in the city. The important thing is to get help to the tenants that need it now, as well as keep future tenants from endangering their health.”*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

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### Ready Access to Assistance Act (REAACT)

*Int. No. 359 – in relation to access to the public areas of offices at which the city administers public benefits programs. Introduced 5/24/06*

Introduced in 2006, this bill would allow advocates to set up help desks in city public benefit offices to ensure that New Yorkers have better access to the benefits to which they are entitled. Since introduction, the bill has gained the support of 36 Council Members and 20 prominent city-wide advocacy organizations. The office continues to seek Administration support, and it has worked closely with the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, which drafted REAACT, and its partner organizations in advocating for the bill's passage.

In February 2008, the Brennan Center Strategic Fund prepared a report, "Improving New York City's Public Benefit System: A Key Role for Help Desks." The report highlights how, without spending taxpayer dollars, the city could reduce confusion about agency policies and procedures, ensure accuracy of agency records, assist clients in obtaining required documents, improve communication between caseworkers and clients, limit the problems resulting from computer errors, and lend much-needed support to people with limited proficiency in English or other special needs.

*"I've heard from many frustrated New Yorkers who call my office at their wit's end because they're struggling to overcome needless obstacles to receiving benefits they're entitled to. Whether*

*you're applying for public assistance, facing tenancy termination proceedings, or just trying to navigate the City bureaucracy, advocates should be on the premises to help you. This bill does that."*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

### Workplace Anti-Discrimination Protection for Caregivers

*Int. No. 565 – in relation to prohibiting employment discrimination based on an individual's actual or perceived status as a caregiver.*

Introduced in 2007, this bill would amend the New York City Human Rights Law to prohibit employment discrimination against caregivers and require employers to provide reasonable accommodation to such employees. The Council's Committee on General Welfare, chaired by Council Member Bill de Blasio, held a December 2007 hearing at which prominent unions, the New York Women's Chamber of Commerce, A Better Balance and other advocacy organizations testified in support of the bill.

The caregiver anti-discrimination bill has received attention from across the country by workplace anti-discrimination organizations for its potential landmark legislative impact. The Office of the Public Advocate continues to work to create awareness and support for this important legislation.

*"New Yorkers caring for loved ones deserve our protection and support. They have enough to worry about – and that shouldn't include losing their job because they care for sick parents or*



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*ill child. This bill will make sure that all New Yorkers are protected from job discrimination and can fulfill family responsibilities.”*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

### Mobile Phone Consumer Protection

*Int. No. 483 – in relation to requiring notices relating to the rights of mobile phone consumers.*

Introduced in 2006, this bill would require all mobile phone merchants to post notices that inform consumers of their rights and costs related to their purchase. The bill ensures that consumers can make well-informed decisions regarding the purchase of mobile phones and their related services.

In April 2008, the New York City Council’s Committee on Consumer Affairs, chaired by Council Member Leroy Comrie, conducted its first hearing on this bill. Representatives of the city Department of Consumer Affairs and consumer advocate groups testified in support of this bill. The Department has been working with the Office of the Public Advocate on amendments to the legislation, and we anticipate that this bill will be enacted by the end of 2008.

*“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 that consumers can make informed decisions from the start.”*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

### Access to Vital Maternity Information

*Int. No. 575 – in relation to requiring the city Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to post on its website in a user-friendly format and disseminate certain information mandated by the Maternity Information Act of 1989 (New York State Public Health Law §2803-j).*

In February 2007, the City Council Committee on Health, chaired by Council Member Joel Rivera, conducted a hearing on this bill. At this hearing, DOHMH Commissioner Deborah Kaplan indicated that the DOHMH, while opposed to the bill, would be open to linking to the state Department of Health (DOH) website. Since then, at the Public Advocate’s request, DOH improved its online access to vital maternity information to help women make informed childbirth decisions. The state’s new online portal provides statistics about hospital maternity procedures, including numbers of C-sections, epidurals and episiotomies.

Following DOH actions, the Public Advocate urged DOHMH to also make this information available through its website, and Commissioner Thomas Frieden established links under several categories to the state’s webpage.

*“Easier access to maternity information will encourage informed discussions between expectant mothers and their providers. With growing concern from health policy experts about rising C-section rates, I am proud to see the state Department of Health and city DOHMH*

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*increasing online access to maternity information and proud of the work my office did to make this happen.”*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

### Pharmacies to Provide Translation Services for Prescriptions

In June 2008, the New York City Council’s Committee on Health, chaired by Council Member Joel Rivera, conducted an oversight hearing on language access in New York City pharmacies. The Public Advocate introduced a bill relating to the translation of prescription medicine labels and directions for non-English speaking customers. It would require city pharmacies to provide accessible language assistance and translation services and to post signage informing limited English proficiency (LEP) individuals of this requirement.

New York City has more than 1.8 million residents with LEP. Pharmacies that do not now offer translation services voluntarily endanger the well-being of LEP New Yorkers. They put their lives at risk by prescribing medications without providing a clear understanding of the directions and warnings associated with their use.

*“Clearly understanding a prescription is a basic right, yet pharmacies all around the city allow New Yorkers to go home with a medication they have no idea how to take. We can’t continue to allow so many New Yorkers to be put in danger every time they fill a prescription. I look forward to continuing to work with the City Council and Make the Road New York and New York Lawyers*

*for the Public Interest on the legislation. Once introduced, I know co-sponsors Rivera and Council Member Eric Gioia and I will work hard to address this wide-spread problem.”*

*– Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum*

### Co-sponsored Legislation:

**Int 0756-2008**

**(Enacted 5/30/08 – Local Law 22)**

*In relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the repeal of Local Law number 55 for the year 2007.*

**Int 0754-2008**

**(Enacted 6/30/2008 – Local Law 29)**

*In relation to requiring the Department of Buildings to post on its website the number of fatalities and accidents at construction sites.*

**Int 0702-2008**

**(Enacted 7/29/08 – Local Law 31)**

*In relation to electronic pay stubs for city employees.*

**Int 0643-2007**

**(Enacted 2/29/08 – Local Law 6)**

*In relation to requiring that all agencies electronically transmit copies of proposed rules in a timely manner.*

**Int 0640-2007**

**(Enacted 1/23/08 – Local Law 1)**

*In relation to requiring a recycling program for plastic carryout bags and film plastic.*



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### **Int 0627-2007**

**(Enacted 3/13/08 – Local Law 7)**

*In relation to the duty of an owner to refrain from harassment of tenants and remedies for the breach of such duty.*

### **Int 0612-2007**

**(Enacted 11/5/07 – Local Law 54)**

*In relation to reporting on pesticide use by city agencies.*

### **Int 0604-2007**

**(Enacted 11/5/07 – Local Law 53)**

*In relation to the powers and duties of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner.*

### **Int 0597-2007**

**(Enacted 12/5/07 – Local Law 59)**

*In relation to tax appeals and the creation of an Office of Administrative Tax Appeals composed of the Tax Commission and the Tax Appeals Tribunal; and to repeal a provision of the charter relating to the Tax Appeals Tribunal.*

### **Int 0581-2007**

**(Enacted 10/9/07 – Local Law 49)**

*In relation to the replacement of priority regulatory signs.*

### **Int 0570-2007**

**(Enacted 9/5/07 – Local Law 43)**

*In relation to payments to city contractors by electronic funds transfer.*

### **Int 0537-2007**

**(Enacted 12/5/07 – Local Law 58)**

*In relation to requiring the Department of Transportation to provide online access to parking restriction information for each city block.*

### **Int 0526-2007**

**(Enacted 12/5/07 – Local Law 57)**

*In relation to exemption from taxation of alterations and improvements to multiple dwellings.*

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### **Int 0525-2007**

**(Enacted 12/5/07 – Local Law 57)**

*In relation to tax exemption and abatement for certain rehabilitated buildings as authorized by section 488-a of the Real Property Tax Law.*

### **Int 0293-2006**

**(Enacted 2/19/08 – Local Law 4)**

*In relation to distributing information on public health insurance options at day care centers.*

### **Int 0110-2006**

**(Enacted 9/5/07 – Local Law 42)**

*In relation to increasing fines for dumping household and commercial refuse into public litter baskets.*

### **Int 0104-2006**

*In relation to the collection for recycling, reuse and safe handling of electronic equipment.*

### **Int 0020-2006**

**(Enacted 12/5/07 – Local Law 55)**

*In relation to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.*

## What New Yorkers Are Saying

*Public Advocate Staff Member,*

*Thank you for helping me with my mother's food stamp case. I've tried to work with the food stamp office since December and was not able to solve the problem. With your assistance, everything was fixed in just one short week.*

*Again, thank you very much.*

*P.Y.*

*Dear Ms. Gotbaum,*

*I'd like to thank you for your assistance in resolving my water bill issue with the DEP [city Department of Environmental Protection]. If your office had not interceded, this matter would have escalated and my credit would have been adversely affected. I have been continually singing the praises of your office to my friends, family, and co-workers. I was very surprised that many citizens are not aware of the excellent services that your office provides to New Yorkers. I am happy to inform the public on your behalf that your agency is one that they can turn to in cases like mine.*

*I thank you for your timely response and diligence in following up on my case.*

*Sincerely,*

*S.R.B*



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM



### Community Affairs

Betsy Gotbaum regularly travels throughout all five boroughs, meeting with parents, community members and civic leaders to hear first-hand the concerns of New York communities. She also frequently visits schools, community and senior centers, and businesses to better understand their challenges and help them address problems.

Among her many visits, Betsy Gotbaum met with the Cypress Hills Block & Tenants Association, which includes business owners, homeowners and renters, to address community concerns such as school overcrowding, sanitation pick-ups, and Highland Park reservoir issues.

She toured the Willets Point section of Queens and met with local business owners to help call for a more thoughtful, well laid-out plan for development that takes into account the needs of local businesses and community members.

Betsy Gotbaum participated in all five of the Tri-Level Legislative Task Force hearings, including the final hearing that took place in Queens. The task force was formed after the shooting of Sean Bell, Trent Benefield, and Joseph Guzman by undercover city police officers. The hearings resulted in recommendations to improve communication between law enforcement officers and community groups.

This year Betsy Gotbaum hosted a five-borough series of community discussions on gang activity to create channels of communication with youth about violence.

She also launched a citywide Healthy Kids Summer Wellness Tour to make sure that parents take early steps to ensure their children are healthy. Joined by the Community Healthcare Network, Betsy Gotbaum toured the five boroughs, providing free health screenings to raise awareness about childhood obesity.

Betsy Gotbaum visited Project Share on Staten Island to tour a home shared by three Staten Island seniors, in efforts to raise awareness of alternative housing arrangement for seniors. The Public Advocate called on the administration to take aggressive steps to prepare for an aging Baby Boomer generation by spreading the word about alternative housing options.

Betsy Gotbaum's Community Affairs staff serves as her eyes and ears in the boroughs, attending community board, City Council, and Community Education Council meetings.

### Improving Government

#### City Services Satisfaction Project

This year, Betsy Gotbaum initiated a program to assess New Yorkers' opinions of city services. The intent is to provide city agencies with information they need to make improvements. In partnership with the Mayor and the Fund for the City of New York, 100,000 New Yorkers were surveyed. This was the largest municipal services survey ever conducted. The survey asked residents for their opinions about important characteristics of the City and services provided by city government, and it gave New Yorkers in all five boroughs an opportunity to voice opinions. It provided a quantitative measure of where the City can continue to improve service delivery.

#### Commission on School Governance

Betsy Gotbaum assembled the Commission on School Governance at the request of the chair of the state Assembly Education Committee to make recommendations about mayoral control of New York City schools. The law that established mayoral control expires in June 2009. The Commission met with more than 100 stakeholders on education around the city, and it issued official Findings and Recommendations in the fall of 2008. The Commission report calls for revisions to check the power of the mayor and to provide for public input into the process.

#### New York City Employee Retirement System

Betsy Gotbaum is a trustee of New York City's largest retirement system, which has more than \$39 billion in assets. She holds one of three full votes. This year, her votes served to retain emerging fund managers, many of whom are women and minority-owned, to oversee pension fund investments and to diversify investments to lower the risks of the pension funds portfolio.

This year Betsy Gotbaum, along with a delegation of trustees from the New York City Pension Funds, attended the U.S.-Northern Ireland Investment Conference to assess an unprecedented \$150 million investment in Northern Ireland. She also visited Israel to assess and support pension investments.

#### Fund for Public Advocacy

Betsy Gotbaum's not-for-profit fund has provided tens of thousands of New Yorkers with important information on banking, emergency preparedness and senior services. The fund helps New Yorkers navigate the school system, including special education, as well as help finance operations at such city agencies as the Administration for Children's Services. This year the fund helped thousands of New Yorkers by producing and distributing the easy-to-use Guide to Banking, funding a Parent's Education hotline, and making it possible for Betsy Gotbaum to organize the Commission on School Governance to assess mayoral control in New York City.



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

### Constituent Complaint Resolution

<i>Cases closed favorably</i>	<i>82%</i>
<i>Cases closed unfavorably</i>	<i>18%</i>

<i>City Totals</i>	<i>10,369</i>
<i>State Totals</i>	<i>1,309</i>
<i>Federal Total</i>	<i>336</i>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>12,014</b>

<i>Written Complaints</i>	<i>810</i>
<i>Verbal Complaints</i>	<i>10,863</i>
<i>In Person Complaints (Walk-ins)</i>	<i>341</i>
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,014</b>

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CITY SERVICES

### New York City Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed unfavorable</i>	<i>Referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
Dept. for the Aging					156
*HEAP	18	0	0	18	
*SCRIE	51	3	1	55	
*Other	74	4	5	83	
Board of Standards and Appeals	10	2	0		12
Borough Presidents	5	0	0		5
Buildings Dept.	268	11	8		287
Center for Animal Care & Control	13	1	1		15
Children Services Administration for					372
*Agency for Child Development	93	6	0	99	
*Foster Care	242	28	3	273	
City Council	18	0	2		20
City Planning Commission	19	1	2		22
City Clerk	11	1	2		14
City Registry	5	0	0		5
City University of New York	20	3	0		23
Citywide Administrative Services, Dept.					41
*Dept. of Personnel	9	2	1	12	
*other	27	0	2	29	
Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB)	14	0	3		17
Civil Service Commission	5	0	0		5
Community Boards	15	2	5		22
Comptroller's Office	61	2	7		70
Conflict of Interest Board	3	0	2		5
County Clerk	1	1			2
Dept. of Corrections	23	0	6		29
Dept. of Consumer Affairs	219	15	17		251
Dept. of Cultural Affairs	2	0	0		2
Design and Construction, Dept.	3	0	0		3
District Attorneys	24	3	4		31
Division of Business Services	4	1	6		11
Economic Development Corp., NYC	4	0	2		6
Board of Education	1,097	84	19		1,200
Board of Election	21	2	0		23
Dept. of Environmental Prot.					496



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

### New York City Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed unfavorable</i>	<i>Referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
*Environmental Control Bd	45	8	2	55	
*Water Meter	77	7	3	87	
*Air	36	2	1	39	
*Basin Cleaning	19	0	0	19	
*DEP Construction	2	0	0	2	
*Hydrant	9	1		10	
*Noise	88	4	1	93	
*Sewer/Basin Repair	103	1	4	108	
*Water Leak	17	2	1	20	
*other	57	2	4	63	
Finance, Dept. of					297
*Parking Violation Bureau	146	31	1	178	
*other	111	6	2	119	
Fire Department					46
*EMS	2	0	0	2	
*Other	41	3	0	44	
Dept. of Health					239
*Vital Records	72	0	3	75	
*Pest Control	50	0	1	51	
*Other	100	7	6	113	
Health & Hospitals Corporation	84	3	9		96
Housing Development Corp	2	1		0	3
Dept. of Housing Preservation & Development					611
*Code	196	13	5	214	
*Landlord	28	0	0	28	
*Legal	16	1	0	17	
*Alternative Program	14	0	0	14	
*No Heat/Hot Water	103	7	0	110	
*Housing	79	6	4	89	
*Rent Housing Maintenance	9	1	0	10	
*Other	110	13	6	129	
NYC Housing Authority					1,497
*Applications	296	50	6	352	
*Maintenance	291	8	1	300	
*Personnel	2	0	2	2	

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CITY SERVICES

### New York City Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed unfavorable</i>	<i>Referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
*Tenant/Mgmt Relations	129	19	0	150	
*Community Relations	0	0	0	0	
*Other	134	12	3	149	
Section 8	486	49	9	544	
Homeless Services	212	17	4		233
Human Resources					1,298
*Income Support	542	90	3	635	
*Division of AIDS Services	26	8	0	34	
*Medicaid	148	15	1	164	
*Food stamps	123	17	0	140	
*Child Support	94	11	2	107	
*CASA	40	3	0	43	
*Protective Services for Adults	74	13	1	88	
*Other	76	8	3	87	
Human Rights. Comm., NYC	27	0	3		30
Info,Tech, and Telecomm, Dept	41	5	3		49
Investigation, Dept of	5	1	13		19
Juvenile Justice Department	3	0	0		3
Labor Relations, Office of	7	1	0		8
Landmarks Preservation Comm.	8	0	1		9
Law Dept, NYC	1	0	0		1
NYC Libraries	38	3	0		41
Loft Board	1	0	0		1
Marshal	10	6	2		18
Mayor's Office	72	1	2		75
Medical Examiner, Office of	7	2	0		9
Mental Health Retardation Alcoholism Services	10	1	0		11
Metropolitan Transportation Authority					209
*Triboro Bridge & Tunnel Authority	0	0	1	1	
*Transit Authority, New York City	131	8	4	143	
*Access-A-Ride	51	14	0	65	
Off Track Betting	4	0	0		4
Parks & Recreation, Dept. of					311
*Forestry	85	11	0	96	
*Parks Maintenance	0	0	0	0	



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

### New York City Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed unfavorable</i>	<i>Referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
*Recreation	1	2	0	3	
*Other	198	8	6	212	
Payroll Admin., Office of	13	2	0		15
NYC Pension System					60
*NYCERS	36	1	3	40	
*Fire Pension Fund					
*Board of Education					
*Police	4	1	1	6	
*Teachers	13	0	0	13	
* Transit	1	0	0	1	
Police Department					711
*Housing Bureau					
*Police (Street)	637	17	57	711	
*Transit Bureau					
Probation, Dept of	7	0	2		9
Public Administrator	14	0	1		15
Public Advocate=Report/Inquiries	426	17	35		478
Records and Infor Svc, Dept. of	4	0	3		7
Rent Guidelines Bd.	5	1	1		7
School Construction Authority	4	0	1		5
Sanitation, Dept. of	99	8	1		108
Sheriff's Department	1	0	0		1
Taxi & Limousine Comm.	32	4	1		37
Department of Transportation					246
*Traffic Enforcement	27	0	0	27	
*Other	201	17	1	219	
Trade Waste Commission	5	0	0		5
Unions	18	1	1		20
Utilities	283	27	6		316
Youth & Comm. Development					7
*CDA	5	2	7		
*Youth Services					
Total					10,369

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CITY SERVICES

### New York State Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed Unfavorable</i>	<i>referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
Agriculture, NYS Dept. Of	2	0	0	2	2
Assembly	4	0	1	5	5
Attorney General, NYS	57	2	25	84	84
Banking, NYS Dept. of	64	1	7	72	72
Departmental Disciplinary Committees	18	0	0	18	18
Cemeteries, NYS Division	3	2	0	5	5
Comptroller, NYS					
Consumer Protection	1	0	0	1	1
Children & Family Services	1	0	0	1	1
Crime Victims Board, NYS	2	0	5	7	7
Department of State	6	0	0	6	6
Division of Human Rights, NYS	1	1	0	2	2
Dormitory Authority	1	0	0	1	1
Corrections, Dept. of	2	1	5	8	8
Education, NYS Dept. of		0			18
*Office of Professional Discipline	6	0	4	10	
*Propriety Schools, NYS Bureau of	1	0	0	1	
*Other	6	0	1	7	
Environmental Conservation, Dept. of	1	0	0	1	1
Health, NYS Dept. of					99
*Office of Professional Misconduct	4	0	0	4	
*Other	81	6	8	95	
Higher Ed., Board of	5	1	2	8	8
Housing& Com Renewal, Div of					345
*Code	8	0	0	8	
*Harassment	53	3	9	65	
*Legal/Eviction	36	0	6	42	
Other Code Rent	42	2	11	55	
*Other	159	10	6	175	
Housing Court	7	1	1	9	9
Insurance, Dept. of	78	2	3	83	83
Labor, Dept, of	62	6	8	76	79
Division of Labor Standards	2	0	1	3	
Legal Issues	136	16	114	266	266
Licensing, NYS Div. of	4	0	1	5	5



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

### New York State Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>Closed Unfavorable</i>	<i>referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
Liquor Authority	2	1	3	6	6
Mental Retardation & Devp. Disabilities, Office of	1	0	0	1	1
Metropolitan Transit Authority	28	4	3	35	35
Mental Health, NYS	33	0	0	33	33
Motor Vehicles	31	9	0	41	42
*Repair Shops	1	0	0	1	1
Office of Parks, Recreation	1	0	0	1	1
Division of Parole	1	1	1	3	3
Port Authority of New York & New Jersey	4	0	0	4	4
Public Service Comm.	4	0	1	5	5
State Governor	0	0	1	1	1
State Senate	3	0	0	3	3
Social Services, Dept. of					3
*Visually Handicapped, Comm	3	0	0	3	
Taxation, NYS Dept.of	14	1	3	18	18
Transportation, Dept. of	2	1	1	4	4
Triboro Bridge & Tunnel Authority	0	0	1	1	1
Workers Compensation	20	1	1	22	22
Total					1,309

## IMPROVING ACCESS TO CITY SERVICES

### Federal Agencies

<i>AGENCY</i>	<i>Closed Favorable</i>	<i>closed Unfavorable</i>	<i>referred</i>	<i>Unit Total</i>	<i>Agency Total</i>
Agriculture Dept.	1	0	0	1	1
Census Bureau	2	0	0	2	2
EEOC	2	0	0	2	2
Education Department	1	0	0	1	1
House of Representatives	1	0	1	2	2
Housing & Urban Devp.	24	5	2	31	31
Justice, U.S. Dept.					
*Immigration Services	2	0	2	4	4
*Other					
Postal Service, U.S.	25	1	0	26	26
Commerce Dept.	1	0	0	1	1
Commission on Civil Rts.	2	0	0	2	2
Comptroller Currency	7	2	1	10	10
FAA	10	0	0	10	10
FBI	3	0	1	4	4
FCC	9	0	1	10	10
FDA	1	0	0	1	1
Health Care Financing Admin.	1	0	0	1	1
Homeland Security	2	0	0	2	2
IRS	20	2	4	26	26
Dept. of Labor	2	2	0	4	4
SEC	2	0	0	2	2
Social Security Admin.	90	14	3	107	107
Senate	1	0	0	1	1
Dept. of State		0	0		
*Passports	8	0	1	9	9
*Other	3	0	0	3	3
FTC	42	0	5	47	47
Dept. of Transportation	1	0	1	2	2
US Armed Forces	2	0	1	3	3
Veterans Administration	8	0	0	8	8
Treasury Dept.	1	0	0	1	1
White House	13	0	0	13	13
Total					336



# NEW YORK CITY PUBLIC ADVOCATE

## BETSY GOTBAUM

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