

Don't tax the homeowners: Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program

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When a county program for the public good is challenged or adversely targeted by the federal government, the job of our local congressman is to step up and defend us. Rep. Tom Suozzi (NY-3)

SUFFOLK COUNTY

seems to understand. Rep. Lee Zeldin (NY-1) does not. At least that is the case with the IRS decision to tax homeowners who participate in Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program (SIP).

Suffolk County has a water crisis. We must do all we can to control our nitrogen waste to protect our drinking water, our soil, our rivers and bays. The county and many of our towns have initiated rebate programs to encourage homeowners to install clean, nitrogen removing septic systems. Suffolk County's SIP has become a political football, and it's the public and the environment that are the losers. It should be viewed as a public good. Both federal and local policy should be supporting it, and one must wonder why they are not?

SIP directs county payments directly to contractors, bypassing individual participants. By design, there is no income flowing to the homeowner. Suffolk County's tax counsel delivered an opinion to the county attorney ruling that 1099 forms from SIP should go to contractors, and not to consumers. This should have been the end of the story. However, Suffolk County Com-

troller John Kennedy, while engaged in a campaign against County Executive Steve Bellone during the elections last year, disagreed with the tax opinion and inquired of the IRS if county payments might be taxable to homeowners? The IRS, in the last 30 days, ignored protestations from the county and Sen. Chuck Schumer and issued a letter telling Suffolk County to report personal income to the homeowners. Unsuspecting homeowners are now receiving 1099 forms reporting unforeseen additional taxable personal income. The new tax will diminish participation in the program, and we all lose.

What can be done? Bellone and his administration are working to come up with alternative structures for the SIP program. Perhaps more can be done to clarify that transactions are between the county and the contractors to satisfy the IRS? Or perhaps an offsetting tax rebate can be legislated? Rep. Suozzi (NY-3) has written a letter to the IRS demanding they reconsider the decision. But Rep. Zeldin remains silent. Instead of joining Suozzi, Zeldin seems to support his fellow Republican John Kennedy and once again ignores ways to save money for his constituents.

Does this surprise you? It should not, given Zeldin's poor record historically on environmental and financial matters. Or that Zeldin has recently worked against New Yorkers on the repeal of the SALT cap and on Trump's retaliation against the state by suspending New York applications

to the Trusted Traveler program. Zeldin's Twitter feed offers perpetual praise of the president, attacks on our governor, but not a word on the septic taxation issue (or on the harmful SALT cap for that matter).

Long Island needs representatives who will work for us — who have our back when the federal government takes shots at us. Zeldin doesn't fight for us. We have a chance in November to show him how wrong that is.



Meet LI Community Hospital's newest executive officers

Long Island Community Hospital's new executive officers of the advisory council were sworn in last week. Pictured from left to right are James Space, first vice president; Linda Tabatchnik, president; Eleanor Eckman, second vice president; Louise Ebert, secretary; and Rachel Schnabl, vice president of development.

Courtesy photo