

## Four Queens Council Members Score High

By Brian M. Rafferty

Four City Council members from Queens earned top-10 ratings from the Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center last week on the date of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



(from l. to r.) Tony Avella, David Weprin, Leroy Comrie, Hiram Monserrate

The declaration, made in the temporary home of the United Nations in 1948 – the New York

City Building from the 1939 World's Fair, now home to the Queens Museum of Art – was a response to the genocide of World War II and an international statement of the basic rights of people to live their lives without fear, own their property and enjoy the personal liberties all humans should experience.

“New York City has a long history of protecting the human rights of New Yorkers, but it has started to slow down,” said Ejim Dike, Director of the Human Rights Project at the Urban Justice Center. “We hope this report card will be a reawakening for the City,” she stated.

“The bread and butter issues that New Yorkers deal with everyday are all human rights concerns. Health, food, housing, education, work, freedom of expression, and freedom from discrimination are just some of the human rights that the New York City government has a duty to respect, protect and advance,” Dike added.

In Queens, Tony Avella (D-Bayside) placed third overall with his fellow Council members Hiram Monserrate (D-Jackson Heights) sixth, John Liu (D-Flushing) eighth and David Weprin (D-Little Bellerose) ninth.

Legislation reviewed for the Human Rights Report Card touches on environmental justice, health, housing, workers' rights, democracy and advancing equality. The report card does not review legislation on education, criminal justice, juvenile justice, and child welfare, as these issues are dictated significantly by legislation at the state and federal levels.

The Human Rights Report Card finds the City Council scored some commendable points for passing legislation that advanced the equal enjoyment of rights for vulnerable groups including youth, women, immigrants, LGBTQ New Yorkers, people of color, and the elderly – an average of 76 percent. The Council scored much lower when its record on advancing democracy was assessed – an average of 35 percent

In the category of democracy, one of the most defining human rights issues of the year was the term limits vote, for which the Human Rights Report Card assigns 29 Council Members an F for their vote in favor of extending the maximum number of terms that elected officials can run for office from two to three.