



NEWS.....

FROM CHRIS HIGGINS

ALBANY COUNTY LEGISLATOR 6TH DISTRICT

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COUNTY LEGISLATOR CHRIS HIGGINS INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO CREATE LETTER GRADING SYSTEM FOR FOOD SERVICE ESTABLISHMENTS IN ALBANY COUNTY

On Monday, County legislator Chris Higgins (D- Center Square) introduced a local law that would allow the Albany County health commissioner to implement a uniform letter grading system for food service establishments in Albany County.

The uniform system would permit the county health commissioner to issue grades of “A”, “B” or “C” to food service establishments in the county based on sanitary conditions as determined by health inspectors. When a grade is given to a food service establishment, it would be required to be posted in a place that is easily visible to customers. This will provide Albany consumers with an easily accessible, plain and logical report of the establishment’s level of sanitation and general cleanliness.

County legislator Higgins stated that, “A clear, concise system of letter grades will make it easier for consumers to make an informed dining decision and allow for more meaningful comparisons. Further, such grading system will encourage all restaurants to upgrade their cleanliness and sanitation standards, which are of the utmost importance to patrons.”

The legislation would follow enactment of Albany County’s calorie posting law, which Higgins also prime sponsored.

Higgins stated, “Whether New Yorkers are dining out for a routine meal or to celebrate a special occasion, their only reservations should be about booking a table. Having a letter grade posted for all diners to see easily and clearly provides a real incentive for restaurants with a 'C' hanging in the doorway to clean up their act.”

He continued, “Residents of Albany County deserve to know in a clear, unambiguous fashion that the places they are eating are meeting standards set by the health department. This legislation will ensure uniformity and clarity in the ratings, protecting consumers from places that do not follow the rules.”

The concept of grading food service establishments by letter has been around for a number of years and is supported by prominent restaurant evaluators such as Tim Zagat, who in the New York Times (3/24/10) endorsed the idea of issuing restaurant grades as a way to encourage restaurants to maintain good sanitary standards.

A similar restaurant grading program was instituted in Los Angeles over 10 years ago. Statistics from L.A. show that those restaurants that received an "A" increased from 40% to over 80% in 2007. This indicates that restaurants take these grades seriously and will beef-up their sanitation and food handling practices to receive a higher rating. In Los Angeles, 92% of all local diners favor the grade posting law.

The local law will be formally introduced at the County Legislature's August meeting and referred to the law committee, which Higgins chairs for consideration.

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