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Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman Releases Report on Next Generation of Long Islanders

Research shows government needs to adapt in order to stop the flight of young professionals

Rockville Centre, NY – Nassau County Comptroller Jack Schnirman this week released his Office’s latest report, [*This Is Nassau: The Deal for the Next Generation*](#), which shows since 2000, Nassau County has seen a 9.3% decline in residents aged 20-44. Driving that change for millennials is increasing student debt, lack of affordable housing and insufficient employment opportunities.

The report was released at a public Next Gen forum held at Molloy College, which also featured a panel discussion and testimony from local leaders in the private, nonprofit, government and education sectors.

Participants in the panel discussion were:

- Nassau County Legislator Josh Lafazan
- Professor Errol Pierre of Molloy College
- Association for a Better Long Island Executive Director Kyle Strober
- Jillian’s Circus Founder Jillian Weston
- Director of Policy Planning and Strategic Initiatives for the Comptroller’s Office Marv McMoore Jr.

"For prior generations, the Deal of living of Nassau County became an affordable option for young families with a quality of life based upon our schools, services, beaches, parks and access to New York City," Schnirman said. "Working together, policymakers must recommit to making this deal work for the next generation of Nassau County Residents."

The report was developed by the Office of the Nassau County Comptroller’s Policy & Research Unit with assistance from the Office’s summer college interns. Its primary population change findings showed that within the 35 to 44 age group, the population decreased by a staggering 26.9% or nearly 60,000 residents

The report found that for those age 25-34 who are staying on Long Islander, they are increasingly living with their parents. According to the Office’s analysis, 44% of Long Islanders aged 25-34 live at home, while nationally, this figure is only 16%.

“The report released by County Comptroller Schnirman underscores a stark reality; Long Island is facing a potential demographic catastrophe, which will turn into economic crisis if corrective action isn’t taken soon,” Strober said. “One important step in addressing this threat would be reducing the red tape that currently challenges economic development projects, and coupling that action with a recognition that transit-oriented rental housing needs to be approved to serve this unmet need.”

Long Island’s median rental price of \$1,760 would take 53% of an average millennial’s monthly salary. As a result, young people are choosing to live with their parents or bypass Nassau for lower cost regions. According to the report, Nassau County lost 22% of its affordable housing stock and the price per acre of property has increased 28% during the past decade. The report also notes that transportation options, particularly for north/south communities are lacking in many areas.

“If we had more public transportation, if we didn't have to use our cars as much, of course that would contribute to a more eco-friendly Long Island, which is something that I think a lot of millennials and the Next Generation are very passionate about,” Weston said. “So we're trying to figure out how to get less cars on the road, have a little less stress, maybe help some people that can't get to work any other way, I think it's a win for everybody.”

Impacting young Long Islander’s ability to afford housing is the amount of student debt many of them carry. The average student debt balance for Long Islanders is \$33,900, coupled with the fact that 9.5% percent of Long Islanders with student loan debt are more than 90 days late on payments.

Although unemployment is at record lows, 34% of college graduates are underemployed. While jobs in the gig economy have provided more flexible employment opportunities, lack of health care or long-term career trajectories hamper the ability to build a strong financial base. Building up professional resources for the next generation could help them get started on careers that allow them to stay in this region.

“Young people often feel that asking questions or asking for help is a sign of weakness, because you're admitting that you don't know something,” Lafazan said. “I think it's the surest sign of strength and humility because, you're admitting that you need to know something, because you don't have that life experience.”

The report outlines a number of areas for policy development that could help provide the next generation of Long Islanders with the support needed to prevent them from leaving the region completely.

Potential policy options outlined in the report include:

- Options to reduce the burden of student loan debt and increase financial aid
- Update zoning codes to allow for more transit-oriented development, specifically around LIRR stations.
- Expanding public transportation options that connect the north and south shores
- Increase access to affordable childcare options, such as expanded pre-k

“Our 20th century policies and ideas for developing and sustaining our communities are not meeting the needs of our 21st century population,” Schnirman said. “So when government doesn’t adapt, its population does instead. We have to reimagine how government does business.”

