



December 4, 2023

Dear Neighbors,

I hope you all had a warm and peaceful Thanksgiving! The second half of each year when we leave session is the time to connect with the community, attend events, take tours and meetings with nonprofit organizations and local businesses, and this whirlwind of a year did not disappoint! I am so thankful that I've had the opportunity to do deep-dives with so many community members, furthering what will surely be a career-long process of strengthening my knowledge about all that we are and all that we do in the district. As we enter December, I am working with my office to wrap up drafting new legislation and updating existing legislation in preparation for the coming session starting in January. I will continue to share information with you on my legislation and work, and below are some highlights of the previous week!

Legislative Update

Pretrial Services Bill

As a society, we believe that a person is innocent until proven guilty. When an individual is charged with a crime, though, we want to ensure that the person returns to court and goes through the judicial process. Pretrial

services can support a person as they enter the criminal justice system, connecting them to resources such as housing, transportation or substance use treatment, to minimize risk of future criminal activity and to ensure they return to court. In 2019, Bail Reform law required that counties establish an agency to offer pretrial services and collect data but did not establish standards for services offered, training or best practices. My newly introduced bill [A8242](#) establishes the Office of Pretrial Services within the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), shifting oversight from the Office of Court Administration. This office would establish baseline services, offer guidance on best practices and training to providers, and collect and disseminate data in order to increase public health and safety. I recently discussed the bill on The Capitol Pressroom, and you can [listen to my interview](#).



State Budget

Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program

Undoubtedly, we are in a climate crisis. From severe flooding to extreme heat to unexpected frost, these previously rare weather events have become all too frequent, causing extensive damage. Through seven rounds of the Climate Resilient Farming Grant Program, New York has awarded 386 farms nearly \$36 million to address the impacts of climate change.

I am thrilled to announce that in Round 7, Tompkins and Cortland Counties were awarded funding to support infrastructure on local farms to withstand the impacts of climate. Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District was awarded \$901,180 to support two projects. Cortland County Soil and Water Conservation District was awarded over \$1.03 million to support six projects. [View the full list of recipients](#) to learn more about the projects locally and across New York State.

An aerial view of a green tractor with a tillage implement (possibly a chisel plow or similar) working in a vineyard. The tractor is moving through rows of young grapevines, creating a path in the soil. The background shows more rows of vines extending into the distance under a clear sky.

CLIMATE RESILIENT FARMING GRANT PROGRAM

Helping our farmers
confront climate change

Around the District

Varna Fire Department

Before Thanksgiving, I had the pleasure of attending the Varna Fire Department Annual Banquet, and I wanted to highlight the incredible work of this volunteer department. They have made tremendous strides as a department over the last few years, making it as inclusive as possible and growing from 7 to over 60 dedicated volunteer EMTs and firefighters. At the same time, inclusion of college students to the department provides experience for the students and critical service to our community. All volunteers have completed hundreds of hours of training, and their dedication and service is commendable. I was amazed and honored to be part of the evening, honoring new members, swearing in new leadership, as well as recognizing members with decades of service. Truly a night I will never forget.



Cortland Free Library Tour

Thank you to Jen Graney, Director of the Cortland Free Library, for giving me a tour of the library, discussing the library's programs and resources, and describing the accessibility challenges. I'm excited for the additional elevator access that the NYS library construction aid is helping make possible! Libraries are vital to our communities, providing not only educational programming and access to books, but also community access to the internet and at times, shelter from the storms of life. Our communal spaces need to be as accessible as possible to all. Deep gratitude to Director Graney and to the library Board for their dedication to serving the Cortland community.



Rotary Club of Ithaca

I had the honor to speak at the Rotary Club of Ithaca's meeting in November to provide a "Report to the People" of this year's budget and legislative accomplishments, as well as priorities for the upcoming year. Public health and safety continue to be high priorities. Progress in public safety includes continued evaluation and evolution in our corrections systems but also ensuring that all residents have access to safe, affordable housing and Emergency Medical Services (EMS). To ensure public health for all, we need safe drinking water and safe environments where children can play and thrive. These are all areas we targeted with this year's State Budget and that I will continue to champion with my legislation and the legislation I cosponsor.

I am proud that ten of the bills I sponsored were signed into law in 2023, and I look forward to advancing new legislation in the coming year that enhances the safety and vitality of our communities.



Global Textile and Apparel Sustainability Guest Lecture

I had the opportunity to be a guest lecturer in Dr. Margaret Frey's *Global Textile and Apparel Sustainability* undergraduate course at Cornell University's College of Human Ecology. I always enjoy sharing information on my Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act and addressing questions and concerns. As these students become leaders in the fields of sustainability, fiber science, fashion design, and management, it is important that they understand the climate impact of textiles and the fashion industry.

All levels of producers and retailers need to be engaged in the work of sustainability to mitigate the tremendous impact the production of our clothes has on the world's greenhouse gas emissions as well as global human rights for both children and adults.



Photo Credit: Simon Wheeler

Cayuga Nation Press Conference

On November 26, I attended a press event hosted by the Cayuga Nation. The press event highlighted the recently released correspondences between Clint Halftown and representatives of the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), requested years ago through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by lawyers representing the Traditional Haudenosaunee governance, including Clan Mothers and Chiefs of the Nation. Traditional Haudenosaunee governance requires Clan Mothers to select leaders and all decisions to be

made by consensus. This recently released documentation outlines months of internal, behind-the-scenes planning to establish a new form of governance between Clint Halftown, two Nation Chiefs supporting Halftown, and BIA senior staff – excluding several Cayuga Nation Chiefs from the process.

As is evidenced by a previous lawsuit against a circulated letter drafted during these closed-door meetings and used as an alternative election to secure Halftown as the recognized leader of the Cayuga Nation, there is clearly no consensus in the Nation to recognize Clint Halftown as leader. Lawyers of Halftown have recently filed a gag order lawsuit against the Federal Department of Justice to prevent a full and transparent investigation of these findings. I stand in support of a full and open investigation. We must respect the Cayuga Nation's right for self-governance, to live in peace, and to decide the leaders who represent their interests to the BIA. If there is to be a harmonious resolution to the existing dispute, it must be done honestly, and if there is nothing to hide, then a fully transparent investigation of all actions taken to date can only serve to help lead this process to justice.



Community Resources

Medical Debt Relief for Cortland County Residents

Residents in Cortland County with medical debt may be getting a surprise in the mail! A group of dedicated residents in Tompkins County, led by Judy Jones and supported by the social justice committee of the First Unitarian Church of Ithaca, raised funds and worked with RIP Medical Debt to abolish \$2.5 million of debt in Onondaga and Cortland Counties, focusing on counties of high need. Across the United States, medical debt prevents millions of people from achieving financial stability and causes emotional anguish. RIP Medical Debt is a nonprofit organization that buys debt from collection agencies for pennies on the dollar, and through fundraising campaigns, pays off the debt for individuals. Through this campaign, 149 individuals in Cortland County will have \$112,350 worth of debt abolished. Individuals will be notified via mail over the next three weeks, and the notice will come in a white envelope with the RIP Medical Debt logo in the upper left corner. This is not a scam! No action is required on the part of recipients. The abolished debt will be removed from your credit report and your notice will include *The Survivors Guide to Medical Debt*. If you have any questions, contact my office, and my staff will connect you with project manager Judy Jones.

Students Inside Albany: Opportunity for High School Students

The League of Women Voters is seeking applications from high school students to participate in the 23rd Annual Students Inside Albany Conference, scheduled for May 19-22, 2024. This interactive conference brings together high school students from across the state to learn about New York State government and the process by which citizens can participate in the policy making arena. As part of this program, students tour the Capitol and observe both the Senate and Assembly in action by spending an afternoon shadowing their legislators. All student expenses will be covered, including travel and hotel accommodations in Albany.

This past May I had the pleasure of hosting two Cortland High School students through the program, and I welcome our area youth to apply and join me for a first-hand look at the mechanisms of state government.

For Tompkins County students: Students must be juniors or seniors. Applications can be found on the Tompkins County League of Women Voters Youth Programs website and are due Jan. 25, 2024. For more information contact Charlotte Coffman at 607-351-9722 or LWVtompkins.info@gmail.com.

For Cortland County students: Students in grades 9 -12 may apply, and a recommendation letter is required. The online application form can be found on the Cortland County League of Women Voters website, and applications are due Feb. 3, 2024. For more information contact Jane Hall (oxfordaunt@gmail.com) or Donald Chu (donaldxchu@gmail.com).



“It’s Basic” Documentary Screening

Ithaca City Mayor Laura Lewis will host a film screening of “It’s Basic” at Cinemapolis (120 E. Green St, Ithaca) on Dec. 12 from 6 - 8 pm. The documentary features families from across the country who have participated in Mayors for a Guaranteed Income pilot programs. [Ithaca Guaranteed Income](#) is one of the many pilot programs funded, and following the film, recipients of the guaranteed income cash payment program will share their experiences and discuss the impact the program has had on their lives. To assist in planning, please [RSVP](#) by Monday, Dec. 11.


 MAYORS FOR A GUARANTEED INCOME
 &
 
 COUNTIES FOR A GUARANTEED INCOME
 PRESENT:

GUARANTEED INCOME WORKS NATIONAL TOUR

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12
6:00PM**
**CINEMAPOLIS
120 E GREEN ST.
ITHACA, NY, 14850**

ITHACA, NY
**“IT'S BASIC” DOCUMENTARY
SCREENING HOSTED BY
MAYOR LAURA LEWIS**

**FEATURING ITHACA
GUARANTEED INCOME
RECIPIENTS**





RSVP: GUARANTEEDINCOMEWORCS.ORG

Breast Screening Events with Lourdes Mammogram Van hosted by Sen. Lea Webb

**SENATOR WEBB
IN ASSOCIATION WITH LOURDES
INVITE YOU TO
SHOP & SCREEN EVENTS**

December 11 - 3:00pm to 8:00pm

**Broome County - Town Square Mall
2443 Vestal Parkway East Vestal, NY 13850**

December 12 - 3:00pm to 7:00pm

**Tompkins County The Shops at Ithaca Mall
40 Catherwood Rd, Ithaca, NY 14850**

You are eligible to use the van for breast screening if:

- You are age 40 or older
- You have no history of breast surgery, or you had a biopsy more than 1 year ago
- You have no current breast problems or symptoms with benign results and no further problems

You do not have to be a Lourdes patient. Your results can be sent to the provider of your choice. We welcome insured and uninsured women.

No referral needed.

To find out if you are eligible for low or no cost screenings, please reach out to Lourdes at 607-798-5723 for more information.



SENATOR LEA WEBB

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In good health,

Anna R. Keller

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Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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