



January 9, 2024

Dear Neighbors,

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a relaxing and peaceful holiday season!

The official legislative session started January 3, and like the first day of school, everyone spent the day getting oriented, reconnecting with colleagues, remembering to pack our lunch and not leave our backpacks behind in a meeting or in class (the chamber), as we spun through the many meetings of the day. It's a day when we share our experiences over the last 6 months doing our deep-dives within our districts as well as sharing our hopes and projections for the session to come. This session is certainly bound to be dynamic with the final congressional map redistricting, an election year primary cycle, a budget deficit, and many pressing needs to address such as housing, climate change, healthcare, childcare, and workforce development. Our communities continue to face challenges as we climb back from the pandemic – filling the many vacant jobs, supporting asylum seekers as they get on their feet, and building back our economy.

This past Saturday we also collectively observed the third anniversary of the January 6 Insurrection when more than 2,000 rioters descended upon the U.S. Capitol and attempted to undermine the peaceful transfer of presidential power. Lives were lost, over 100 law enforcement officers were injured, and many of us saw, maybe for the first time, how fragile our democracy can be if we don't protect it collectively. Every year this anniversary inspires both deep reflection and reaffirmation of our democratic values, the rule of law, and the critical need to protect voting rights for everyone.

In the last legislative session here in New York, we championed policies to ensure voting access, making it easier for residents to exercise their voting rights and have their voices heard at the polls. This will be the first year of statewide elections in this new context. Together, let's honor the lives lost and injured by upholding democracy, even with the smallest action – help someone get registered to vote or to navigate the process so they feel empowered, informed, and engaged. Imagine what it would mean for democracy if each one of us supported even just one person. Our elections will truly represent all our collective voices.

As we move into the new year, I recognize that we will not always agree, but I will uphold each community member's right to peacefully voice their concerns and exercise their right to vote. These are the foundations of our democracy. I look forward to your civic engagement in the democratic process throughout the year!

# Legislative Update

**State of the State Address and 2024 Priorities**

Governor Kathy Hochul will give her State of the State address today, **Tuesday, Jan. 9 at 1 pm**. If you are interested in viewing it live, you can watch from the [Governor's website](#). The State of the State lays out the Governor's policy priorities for the upcoming year, and I will provide highlights of the address in next week's newsletter.

New York is anticipating a budget deficit in 2024. How we spend and invest the resources we have is critically important so that we ensure New Yorkers can afford to live and work in the State, that children can thrive, and that we take steps to protect our environment for future generations. I will keep you regularly updated in the coming months on the State Budget process, the Assembly priorities, and the budget items I will be championing.

*City & State New York* published "[The issues most likely to dominate the 2024 New York legislative session](#)," highlighting a range of issues including housing, health care, cannabis reform and the environment. The [PFAS Disclosure Act](#) that I sponsor with Senator May was highlighted as an environmental priority. I look forward to this bill and several others I sponsor moving forward this session!



Around the District

## **Utility Assistance Public Open House Events**

New Yorkers' budgets are stretched, and affording utility costs can be difficult for individuals and families, especially during winter months and especially in the face of the increased NYSEG rates. While we work to transition New York State to renewable energy infrastructure which will help reduce the cost burden on rate payers, we must also provide economic relief now for struggling households. I am proud to co-host two in-district events with Senator Lea Webb and the Public Utility Law Project that will connect residents to local, state and federal programs they may be eligible for to reduce their utility bills. Thank you to our county agencies that will also be in attendance to assist with application completion.

All residents are welcome to attend! Attendees should plan to bring: 1) Your utility bill; 2) A form of identification; 3) Copy of benefits award letter from HEAP, SNAP, SSI or other public assistance (if you have one); and 4) Proof of income (paystubs, bank statements) if you have not yet applied for HEAP or SNAP.

### **Cortland County**

Thursday, January 18 from 4 - 7 pm

SUNY Cortland Student Life Center

8 Pashley Drive, Cortland

### **Tompkins County**

Thursday, January 25 from 4 - 7 pm

Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)

301 W. Court St, Ithaca

\*In case of inclement weather, the open houses will be rescheduled to the following week. The Cortland County event would be rescheduled to Jan. 24, and the Tompkins County event would be rescheduled to Feb. 1. We will communicate any cancellations through email and social media.

The image shows two identical promotional posters side-by-side. The left poster is for Cortland County and the right is for Tompkins County. Both posters have a white background with a blue header and a yellow date box. The text on each poster reads: 'Cortland County' or 'Tompkins County', 'Utility Debt Relief PUBLIC OPEN HOUSE', the date 'Thursday, January 18' or 'Thursday, January 25', the time '4-7pm', and the location 'SUNY Cortland Student Life Center' or 'Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)'. Below this, it says 'Save money on your utility bills!' and provides details about the service, including a list of items to bring: 'Your utility bill', 'A form of identification', 'A copy of your benefits award letter from HEAP, SNAP, SSI, or other public assistance (if you have one)', and 'Proof of income if not yet applied for HEAP or SNAP'. At the bottom, there are three circular portraits: one of Senator Lee Walsh, one of Assemblymember Anna Kellas, and one of a woman from the Public Utility Law Project. Text below the portraits identifies the sponsors: 'Sponsored by Senator Lee Walsh, Assemblymember Anna Kellas, Public Utility Law Project of New York' and 'with support from Cortland County Dept. of Social Services, Cortland County Office for Aging, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYSED, Public Service Commission' for Cortland County, and 'Tompkins County Dept. of Social Services, Cornell Cooperative Extension, NYSED, Public Service Commission' for Tompkins County.

# New Laws

## Minimum Wage Increases

The movement toward truly living wages got one step closer. On January 1, the minimum wage increased to \$15 an hour in our district and across upstate, while the minimum wage increased to \$16 per hour in New York

City and Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties. This is the first of three scheduled increases before the minimum wage becomes indexed to inflation. Raising the minimum wage is an investment that benefits hardworking New Yorkers and is a significant step toward addressing the cost of living across our state, ensuring workers can afford food, housing, and healthcare.



Workers across our region are set to see the minimum wage reach **\$15 an hour** on Jan. 1, 2024.

### **Consumer Protection Laws**

I will always choose consumers over corporations' profit margins. To protect hardworking families from additional financial stress, I helped pass laws to:

- require companies to clearly post credit card transaction surcharges;

- prohibit medication price gouging to keep health care affordable;
- exclude medical debt from credit reports so patients receive care without facing financial ruin; and
- require businesses to notify consumers about upcoming automatic renewal or continuous service charges (Chaptered bills 723, 725, 727 and 728 of 2023).



## Additional New Laws

Several new laws went into effect in January 2024. You can review the full list of new laws [here](#).

# Community Resources

## Grant Action News



The Assembly publishes the Grant Actions News monthly, compiling great grant opportunities from state, federal and private agencies, and you can now review the [January 2024 edition](#). All not-for-profit applicants applying for state grants must pre-qualify on the [NYS Grants Reform Website](#). Potential not-for-profit applicants are strongly encouraged to begin the process of registering and pre-qualifying immediately, as this is a lengthy process.

## U.S. Department of Agriculture Grant



From the program announcement:

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) today [Jan. 2, 2024] announced that USDA is accepting grant applications for community-driven programs that will help create high-wage jobs and new businesses in underserved rural communities. The [Rural Innovation Stronger Economy \(RISE\)](#) program encourages regional, innovation-driven approaches to economic development by funding job accelerator partnerships in low-income and underserved rural communities.

For fiscal year 2024, the program is making approximately \$2 million available to partnerships of local governments, investors, industry, institutions of higher education, and other public and private entities in rural areas. The funding may be used to support innovation centers and job accelerator programs that improve the ability of distressed rural communities to create high-wage jobs, form new businesses, and identify and maximize local assets.

To learn more, read the full [stakeholder announcement](#).”

### **Free Microcredentials at TC3 for Tompkins County Residents**

Microcredentials are a short, focused set of college classes that prepare you for specific in-demand jobs. They can be an effective way to gain the necessary training and skills to advance in your career - or to begin a new career - in a shorter timeframe than a degree program. Financial aid is available for Tompkins County residents to earn a microcredential from

Tompkins Cortland Community College! Review the [programs available](#), and for more information, email Brent Doane at [doaneb@tompkinscortland.edu](mailto:doaneb@tompkinscortland.edu).

# TOMPKINS CORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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