



Assemblymember Anna Kelles



REPORTS TO THE PEOPLE • FALL 2024

Dear Neighbor:

With the 2023-2024 Legislative Session in Albany behind us, I want to share some important legislative and community highlights as well as updates on the final budget with you. There are some hard-fought wins to celebrate that will benefit our district, especially around education and aid to municipalities. The legislature also took decisive action to protect tenants, lower costs for working families, improve our infrastructure and combat the climate crisis. I am particularly proud of efforts I championed this year to ban CO2 fracking, save the Ithaca Carshare, implement Electric Vehicle Charging infrastructure, increase funding for child care centers and workers, support the growth of municipal and rural broadband, increase funding for EMS providers and ensure ultra-wealthy corporations pay their fair share of taxes. In sum, there was good and necessary work undertaken in Albany this session, and it's important to me to share with you how our efforts will impact our community.

Since the end of session in June, I have been enjoying connecting with constituents in the district, attending events, listening to your concerns and needs, and planning for the future. Thank you for your continued engagement with my office. As always, I am deeply honored to serve this community in Albany, and I look forward to continuing to hear about your priorities and needs heading into the next session.

In good health,

Anna R. Kelles
125th Assembly District

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

One of the highlights of representing the 125th District is being able to help bring to life the area's rich history and support our community-focused organizations that collectively make our district a wonderful place to live. Here are just a few highlights from this year:

Investing in Our Communities

Stewart Park is one of these critically important treasures, opening the southern shores of Cayuga Lake to the public with all the wildlife and outdoor beauty it offers. In early July I attended the ribbon cutting of the newly completed **splash pad** with fellow collaborators from the City of Ithaca, Friends of Stewart Park, and the Wharton Studio Museum, which is now fully accessible to all. I was honored to help provide \$500,000 in state capital funds to make this project possible and look forward to seeing kids and adults alike playing in the water in the summer heat for years to come.



Access to affordable child care is critical for parents to participate in the workforce and is a central factor in the stability of both families and our economy. Tompkins County has had one of the lowest rates of child care availability in the state with spots enough for 30% of all children under 6 years old. This year I helped **award \$4.2 million in state funding for Coddington Road Community Center** to add a second building and double the capacity of their child care services including four additional classrooms, a commercial kitchen and a full gymnasium, a project that is expected to be open by December 2024. I helped **award \$100,000 in state funding for the Child Development Council of CNY** - which provides both training and technical support to local child care agencies.



Over the last few years I have worked closely with my friend and colleague Senator Rachel May to secure the right to build and bond for community broadband. I was honored to **help facilitate and secure a \$9 million grant from the NYS ConnectALL** office to capitalize on this legislation

and significantly **expand the local Dryden Fiber network**, one of the only existing community broadband networks in the state. This funding will bring expanded internet service to **thousands of households across the towns of Dryden and Caroline.**



In partnership with my colleague and fellow champion Senator Lea Webb, I also championed for crucial funding in the district, such as **Aid and Incentives to Municipalities (AIM)** that we celebrated with community leaders at the AIM Higher Press Conference at the Cortland Fire Department. **The city of Cortland will receive just over \$2.2 million and the city of Ithaca nearly \$3 million**, which is an increase of more than 7%, the first raise in over a decade.



After two years of advocacy, in partnership with Senator Lea Webb and Legislative Agriculture committee chairs Assemblymember Donna Lupardo and Senator Michelle Hinchey, **\$19.4 million was added to the Agriculture & Markets capital budget this year for funding to renovate and expand the NYS Veterinary Diagnostic Lab at the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine.** This Veterinary Lab is part of Cornell's federal land grant responsibility serving New York and beyond, to combat emerging diseases in wild and domestic



animals protecting our State's food supply and public health and providing a rapid response for high consequence disease outbreaks, beyond animal health, including COVID-19. The laboratory is currently playing a central role in addressing the highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak afflicting thousands of dairy cattle across

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

the country and investigating the canine respiratory disease outbreak. The laboratory serves veterinary practices, dairy producers, pet owners, zoos, wildlife, and law enforcement handling animal cruelty and neglect cases.

Celebrating the Rich Culture of Our Communities

Another privilege I experience as a public servant is to attend community events and honor their importance with ceremony and celebration.

This spring I was invited to join in the painting of a community mural facilitated by Ithaca Murals, lead by artist Shawn Dunwoody, and hosted at Photosynthesis Production on Tioga St. in downtown Ithaca to celebrate the soul, courage, and life of equity and justice champion Dorothy Cotton. I also spoke at a celebration of Firebrand Books, one of the first feminist and lesbian publishing companies that operated on The Commons from 1985-2000 and continues to this day to champion the art of authors whose work has been marginalized.



After passing a state law directing the Rte. 34B bridge in Lansing, NY, to be named the Peter Wheeler Bridge (A.4914-B), I was honored to attend and speak at the celebration marking the naming. Wheeler's story serves as a testament to the strength and resilience of people who were enslaved in the U.S. He was taken from his mother soon after birth by a family that sold him at age 11. Wheeler ultimately escaped enslavement at age 17 and went on to travel the world as a sailor and later settled in Spencertown, NY. His 1839 autobiography, Chains and Freedom detailed the hardships and atrocities that those enslaved around the country, including here in Tompkins County, experienced. The book is still in print today.



This year, the Ithaca Farmer's Market celebrated 50 years providing access to local healthy foods, produce direct from farmers and local crafts with the release of a Farmer's Market cookbook with recipes designed to feature farm products available at the market and written by our very own local author Michael Turback.

From celebrating 150 years of mechanical engineering at Cornell with Bill Nye the Science Guy, to beautiful book readings with elementary classrooms, to celebrating the reopening and birthday of Ithaca Carshare, to honoring the brilliant volunteers at the Varna Fire Department, to celebrating a well deserved business award for Doug's Fish Fry in Cortland, this year has spanned the brilliant gamut of who we are as a district and a people.



I had the honor of joining the Loaves & Fishes of Tompkins County staff for the 40th anniversary celebration of the organization and presenting them with a citation recognizing their important contributions to our community. The event highlighted the many ways Loaves has helped to alleviate community hunger, one meal at a time since 1983. More than 1.5 million meals have been served five days a week since then, helping to fill a need that is more pressing than ever.



Legislative Accomplishments

I am proud to report the passage of the following legislation that I championed in this year's 2024 session, including 11 of my bills during the policy season and two through the state budget:

Protecting Our Environment

- **Establishing a Ban on Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) Fracking (A.8866):** Supercritical CO₂ is a dangerous semi-gaseous/semi-aqueous high-pressure solution that is highly corrosive when combined with tiny amounts of water and can rupture transportation pipelines and demineralize and destabilize rockbed. Recent action by a Texas-based company to obtain leases throughout the Southern Tier to use supercritical CO₂ for the purposes of fracking inspired this bill to prevent the use of this corrosive chemical for the purposes of fracking for fossil-fuel based natural gas in the Marcellus shale. The bill passed both houses in March.
- **Expanding Electric Vehicle Charging Station Infrastructure (A.4871-B):** This legislation requires the installation of EV charging stations in state-owned parking facilities. The number of electric vehicles on the road continues to grow, a trend expected to escalate as EV technology advances and the state must do its part to ensure sufficient charging infrastructure to meet this growing demand.



- **Preserving NY Native Plant Seed Supply (A.9043):** Native plants play a pivotal role in maintaining biodiversity and overall ecologic health. The current inadequacy of native seed supply leads to the substitution of nonnative varieties, compromising restoration efforts. This legislation will make native seeds more accessible in New York State and create a market demand, requiring their use in state land management wherever possible and encouraging New Yorkers to do the same.

Supporting Our Emergency Service Providers

- **Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Treatment in Place & Transportation to Alternate Destinations (A.9102):** Provides Medicaid reimbursement for EMS providers when treating in place (TIP), which currently isn't reimbursed and totals almost 40% of the total EMS services statewide. The bill also enables transportation to a location when appropriate other than a hospital like a rehabilitation facility or urgent care, which will significantly reduce the average wait time for patients to be served and expedite getting EMS vehicles back out into the community.

Protecting Civil Liberties

- **Establishing a Permanent New York State LGBTQ+ Advisory Board (A.1273):** This formalizes the board to ensure that LGBTQ+ New Yorkers continue to have a permanent voice in Albany so the state can remain a leader in inclusion at a time when members of the LGBTQ community are facing legislative attacks nationwide.



Legislative Accomplishments (continued)

Ensuring Access to Housing

- **Expanding Affordable Housing Outside of New York City (A.9680):** Establishes two local tax exemption programs to incentivize the creation of affordable housing multi-family buildings with at least 10 housing units. Municipalities outside of New York City will be able to opt-in to participate in one, or both, of the affordable housing development incentive programs created by this legislation with options for 25 percent or 100 percent affordable housing. In each, the municipality can set affordability levels so that affordable units are available to households with a weighted average income between a range of 60-80% of the area median income (AMI), adjusted for family size. The aim is to set standards up front through local laws so housing developers have clearly outlined requirements for affordability and can plan accordingly, ultimately helping communities achieve their affordable housing goals.
- **A Study and Plan to Allow for the Development of Single Stair Buildings (A.7322):** Single stair buildings up to six stories are allowed under New York City's building code and can be a great asset for communities throughout New York State, allowing for a variety of housing types, increased housing affordability, higher quality units with significantly more window access per unit while retaining safety. This legislation directs the State Fire Prevention and Building Code Council to complete a study of municipal code in the state and identify best practices for single stair construction ensuring both safety and accessibility.



Supporting District-Specific Needs

- **Cortland Hotel Tax (A.10014):** Authorizes the City of Cortland to establish hotel and motel taxes of up to 3%. Rather than requiring state reauthorization every three years, this bill allows for local renewal.
- **Varna Volunteer Fire Department (A.9345):** Exempts the Varna Volunteer Fire Company, Inc., within the town of Dryden, Tompkins county from the forty-five percent limit on non-resident members, which will support recruitment and retention efforts for the Department to ensure a full company.
- **Establishing the Peter Wheeler Bridge (A.4914B):** Designates the bridge in Lansing that crosses Salmon Creek as the Peter Wheeler Memorial Bridge.
- **Supporting The Rook in Ithaca (A.10376):** Provides authorization for the restaurant, The Rook, to serve wine, beer, and spirits on site with full support from the First Presbyterian Church of Ithaca, located just under the standard 200 foot limit.
- **Extending the Use of a Rifle in Big Game Hunting in Tompkins County (A.10482):** Extends the state provision to hunt big game by rifle to 2026, which reduces the instances where animals are injured only, causing immeasurable suffering to wildlife in Tompkins County.
- **Expanding the Search for Cayuga Heights Village Justice (A.8090):** Expands residency requirements for village justice of Cayuga Heights increasing the likelihood of filling a long-open vacancy.



2024-2025 Budget Highlights

Ensuring High-Quality Education for Students

Educating our youth is one of the most important tasks of our state, and I am proud of what we accomplished for education in the final budget, ensuring that Foundation Aid was protected and critical services were funded. This year's state budget also provides SUNY and CUNY campuses with critical operating funds. Some highlights for education include:

- \$35.9 billion in funding to the **General Support for Public Schools (GSPS)** fund
- To ensure families have financial information on higher education, school districts will verify for all graduating seniors that they either filled out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (**FAFSA**) or, if applicable, the Jose Peralta New York State DREAM Act application.



One of the biggest wins in this year's budget is a solid and long overdue increase in funds to the **Tuition Assistance Program (TAP)**. This year's budget:

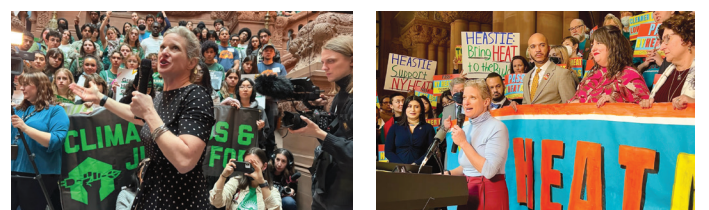
- **Raises the minimum TAP award** from \$500 to \$1,000
- Adds \$55.7 million in funding to increase the TAP income eligibility thresholds:

- From \$80,000 to \$125,000 for dependent students
- From \$40,000 to \$60,000 for independent married students
- From \$10,000 to \$30,000 for independent students
- Increases funding for financial opportunity programs like the **Equal Opportunity Program (EOP)** for a total of \$206 million
- Increases funding to **SUNY** for a total of \$1.3 billion

Investing in Our Environment

To meet our statewide goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), we will need to make year over year investments to reduce carbon emissions and to reach our electrification targets. This budget falls short in taking the bold action needed, but I am proud of our investments in clean water projects and the Environmental Protection Fund.

- \$500 million for **clean water infrastructure**
- \$400 million for the **Environmental Protection Fund**, which includes funding for farmland protection, addressing invasive species, parks, municipal recycling, waterfront revitalization and other initiatives



NOTE: In the last days of the legislative session we collectively got the New York Climate Change Superfund Act (A.3351B/S.2129) over the finish line in both houses that establishes a program to recover costs for climate change resilience and adaptation. The program requires oil and gas companies identified as major industrial polluters and contributors of greenhouse gases since 1990, to pay a fee equivalent to their specific emissions contribution, which can be paid in increments for up to 25 years. These funds will be used specifically for capital infrastructure investments to adapt to climate change.

2024-2025 Budget Highlights (continued)

Helping New Yorkers Afford a Place to Live & Call Home

The Legislature fought hard for increased tenant protections, and while some are included, the protections fall short from creating the stability in the rental market that proponents had hoped for. More work will be needed moving forward to improve housing affordability and accessibility, but this budget moves us in the right direction.

- \$150 million to create the **New York Housing for the Future Program**, to provide affordable homeownership and rental opportunities for low and middle income families
- A municipal opt-in program for **accessory dwelling units (ADUs)**
- \$40 million for the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP)
- \$50 million for **Eviction Prevention Legal Services**
- **Tenant Protections:** The law provides that if a landlord chooses to terminate a lease they must document “good cause” for lease non-renewal or when a tenant faces eviction. Landlords can increase rent up to 10% or the rate of inflation plus 5% annually, whichever is lower or higher for capital repairs and investments with documentation. These protections do not stop landlords from evicting tenants who break any agreement as defined in their lease. There is an exemption for new instruction for 30 years backdated to 2009.

Investing in the Health of New Yorkers

- **Medicaid and Health Facilities:** The State will secure approximately \$4 billion of much-needed Medicaid revenue to invest in healthcare for vulnerable populations of low-income, elderly, and disabled individuals
- \$800 million for **financially distressed hospitals**, which will assist with rural hospitals and benefit constituents in our district
- \$400 million to keep **SUNY Downstate Medical Center** operating until 2025 and an advisory board to set long-term plans for the hospital
- \$7.6 million to guarantee continuous Medicaid and Children’s Health

Insurance Program (CHIP) eligibility for children from birth to age 6 regardless of changes of family income

- **Reproductive Freedom and Equity:** codifies the Reproductive Freedom and Equity grant program, providing funding for abortion care providers and non-profit organizations to ensure access to care
- **A 2.84% Cost of Living Adjustments** - a small step in the right direction
- **Early Intervention:** \$19.5 million in funding to support a 5% rate increase for in-person services as well as an additional 4% rate increase for rural areas and underserved communities
- **Support for Individuals with Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System:** \$34.6 million for direct individual care including: court-based mental health navigators as well as transitional and supportive housing

Strengthening Our Families & Communities

- **\$280 million in workforce funding** for the recruitment and retention of child care providers
- **\$120 million in funding for hunger relief** including: the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), the Nutritional Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), additional funding for Nourish NY, and the SNAP Double Up Food Bucks for fruit and vegetables
- **\$103.9 million in aid to public libraries** with an additional \$44 million for library capital improvements

Supporting Our Municipalities & District Needs

In addition to the \$50 million increase in **Aid and Incentives to Municipalities (AIM)** funding to support public works by local governments, I was thrilled to bring home to our district these critical awards:

- \$150,000 to the **Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)**
- \$103,000 to the **State Theatre of Ithaca**
- \$300,000 for the **Tompkins County Rapid Medical Response Program**

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