



Dear neighbors and community,

Here is a smattering of legislative and district updates I thought might be helpful to share. Out of an interest to start shortening these emails I plan to do budget updates as separate emails over the next few months.



Creating a moratorium on the use of PFAS-contaminated Biosolids as a fertilizer for farmland

Earlier this month I introduced [A06192](#), a bill that establishes a moratorium on the use of biosolids as farmland fertilizer, while implementing a comprehensive assessment of PFAS levels on farmland where biosolids spreading has occurred as well as testing at sites of biosolids production. Biosolids is a term used for the solid byproducts from water treatment at municipal wastewater treatment facilities. While these solids have high levels of organic compounds found in commercial fertilizers, they also often have high levels of toxic chemicals including phthalates (plasticizers that make plastics more flexible, durable, and harder to break), heavy metals, and Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), a group of human-made chemicals used in various industrial and consumer products for their resistance to heat, water, and oil. PFAS are particularly concerning because they do not naturally decompose for thousands of years and are often referred to as “forever chemicals”. They can be found in non-stick cookware, plastic and compostable paper containers, utensils, and dishes, food packaging, toilet paper, dental floss, and waterproof clothing, just to name a few items. PFAS build up in

human tissue and have been linked to serious health outcomes such as cancer, reproductive and developmental issues, immunological dysregulation, obesity and metabolic disorder, hormonal disruption and liver damage. Despite these risks, 21% of all biosolids produced by wastewater treatment facilities in New York are currently spread on farmland as fertilizer. The most recent DEC solid waste management plan recommends increasing this to 56% to divert biosolids from landfills.

This bill would create an immediate 5-year moratorium on new biosolids spreading and provide a window of time to: require testing of farmland soil, groundwater and biosolids at treatment facilities to identify PFAS sources and contamination levels; create a public database of regional soil and water contamination sites; establish a PFAS agricultural response program and fund to support affected farmers; and, form a biosolids taskforce to identify safe disposal methods, evaluate emerging technologies for PFAS breakdown, and design a system to prevent future soil and water contamination. You can read the full text of the bill [here](#).

Former DOCCS Commissioner Supports Key Criminal Justice Reforms



A recent opinion piece in the Buffalo News - written by a former Commissioner of the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) - highlights three critical bills aimed at creating a fairer and more effective criminal justice system in New York. One of those bills is the Earned Time Act, which I sponsor in the NY Assembly.

The Earned Time Act ([A1085](#)) expands opportunities for incarcerated individuals to reduce their sentences through good behavior, educational programs, and positive contributions to the prison community. Instead of relying solely on punitive measures like solitary confinement that increase mental health issues and tension and conflict in prisons, this bill incentivizes rehabilitation, helping people successfully transition back into society, reducing recidivism rates. The former DOCCS Commissioner, with his deep understanding of the current system of corrections, emphasizes that policies like the earned time act, reduce crime rates, promote public safety, and ultimately foster more robust and healthy communities.

The article also discusses two other critical bills:

The Fair and Timely Parole Act ([A127](#)) ensures parole eligibility decisions are based on an individual's rehabilitation, current behaviors, and readiness for reentry and not exclusively on an individual's original crime. This bill is designed to ensure that parole decisions are fair, reduce racial disparities, and enhance community safety.

The Second Look Act ([A1283](#)), which allows courts to review long sentences and consider adjustments for individuals who have demonstrated personal growth and rehabilitation. The Act empowers judges to revisit and adjust sentences, so that punishments remain appropriate over time. Research indicates that individuals often age out of criminal behavior. Allowing re-evaluation of sentences for those who no longer pose a threat can enhance public safety and allocate resources more effectively.

These reforms are not about being “soft on crime”—they are about being smart on justice. When we prioritize rehabilitation, we reduce reoffending, lower incarceration costs, and create safer communities. This is why criminal justice experts, including this former DOCCS commissioner, support these measures.

To read the full article, [click here](#). (Note: This article is behind a paywall.)

the Food Safety and Chemical Disclosure Act



A primary bill I am championing this year is the Food Safety and Chemical Disclosure Act ([A1556](#)). This bill aims to make our food supply safer by banning harmful food additives and dyes, while also ensuring greater transparency from food companies about the ingredients they use.

Currently, there's a major loophole in how food additives are regulated. In 1958, a pre-market review process was created for food additives in the U.S. to prove they were safe before use. However, there's an exception for additives considered “Generally Recognized as Safe” (GRAS). Originally, this was meant for common, everyday ingredients like salt, vinegar, and baking soda—substances with a long history of safe use. But over time, this exemption has been used for most chemical additives, allowing companies to bypass the more rigorous safety approval process.

In 1997, the FDA made this process even more lenient by making the GRAS process a voluntary notification system. By 2016, this rule was finalized, allowing companies to self-determine if an additive is safe without notifying the FDA. As a result, the exact number of additives in our food is unknown, though it's estimated to be over 10,000. Despite this, companies argue their self-regulation is thorough enough to ensure safety.

This bill takes a straightforward approach: if companies already have safety research for these additives, they must share that information in a publicly accessible database to continue selling their products in New York. This ensures transparency and helps consumers make informed choices.

The bill also targets specific harmful additives. For example, potassium bromate and propylparaben—banned in Europe and California due to links to cancer, hormonal disruption, and fetal development issues— which are still allowed in New York. Similarly, certain food dyes linked to hyperactivity and ADHD, already banned in California and NYC schools, are still being used in school foods across the rest of NY state. This legislation would ban these dangerous additives and dyes from all schools throughout the state.

This is a common-sense, good-government bill that prioritizes public health and transparency. It's one of the most important pieces of legislation I'm championing this session.

Fighting for the Working Families Tax Credit

At a recent press conference, I stood alongside fellow legislators and advocates to push for the **Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC)** ([Bill A3474](#)). This legislation has been added to both the Senate and Assembly one house budget proposals to be phased in over three years and is now officially part of the budget negotiation with the governor's more modest proposal to expand the Empire State Child Tax Credit.

Key Provisions of the Working Families Tax Credit Bill include:

1. Consolidation of Existing Credits: the state's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Empire State Child Tax Credit to streamline and ensure more families receive the support they need.
2. Increased Financial Support: Under the WFTC, eligible families can receive up to \$1,600 per child annually. The bill also guarantees a minimum credit of \$100 per child, ensuring that all qualifying families receive some level of assistance.
3. Quarterly Payments: To provide more timely financial support, the credit would be distributed quarterly rather than as a lump sum during tax season.
4. Inflation Adjustment: The credit amounts are designed to adjust with inflation, ensuring that the support provided maintains its value over time and continues to meet the evolving needs of families.
5. Inclusivity: The WFTC aims to be more inclusive by extending benefits to families with children under the age of four, a group previously excluded from certain tax credits. Additionally, the proposal seeks to eliminate the cap on the number of

eligible children per family, allowing larger families to receive appropriate support.

Anna in the News



Expanding Utility Bill Assistance for Central NY Residents

Earlier this month, I partnered with Senator Lea Webb and the [Public Utility Law Project \(PULP\)](#) to host a Utility Assistance Clinic at the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC). With rising utility costs continuing to strain household budgets, this event helped residents identify and apply for financial assistance programs, including [HEAP](#) ([Cortland HEAP](#) & [Tompkins HEAP](#)), [NYSEG's Energy Affordability Program](#), and [weatherization initiatives](#). Advocates from [NYSEG](#), [Cornell Cooperative Extension](#), and local agencies provided one-on-one guidance, ensuring that eligible households could access much-needed relief. While we continue working toward long-term energy affordability through renewable infrastructure investments, events like these are essential for providing immediate support. If you missed this event, assistance is still available—please visit [my website](#) or reach out to my office for resources. I look forward to co-hosting another clinic in Cortland this April!

NYSEG offers walk-in hours for customer questions every Monday and Thursday from 9 am - 3 pm (1387 Dryden Rd).

Around the District

Protecting Federal Research Funding for New York



Research and innovation are essential to our state's economy, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. I participated in a panel discussion last week at Cornell University addressing the risks posed by potential federal research funding cuts. It was emphasized that without robust investment, critical advancements in science, medicine, and technology could be severely impacted. As a state, we must advocate for continued funding at both the state and federal levels to ensure our institutions remain leaders in research, creating jobs and driving progress in clean energy, public health, and infrastructure. [Article here.](#)

Dryden Wins New York Forward Funding



As part of the New York Forward initiative, the Town of Dryden was awarded \$4.5 million, which was allocated for improving infrastructure, supporting local businesses, and enhancing walkability. Created in 2022, the New York Forward program was designed to assist smaller communities that may not qualify for the larger DRI grant but still seek to revitalize their downtown areas. These much-needed funds will play a key role in revitalizing the Village of Dryden's original business section on West Main Street, an area rich with history. By restoring and enhancing this district, the grant will not only preserve the village's heritage, but also foster economic growth by attracting new businesses and visitors to support a vibrant walkable downtown. To read more about this, [here](#).

Building Code Council

Last week, I testified before the New York State Building Code Council to demand stronger, enforceable energy standards that align with our climate goals. While the latest 2024 Building Code update includes important energy provisions, critical climate measures were stripped from enforceable regulations and placed in non-binding appendices, rendering them effectively useless.

Buildings are one of the largest sources of emissions, and the way we heat our homes and water has a direct impact on climate change. Low-income and disadvantaged communities are hit hardest, facing higher energy bills due to outdated, inefficient housing.

The latest draft code fails to enforce key climate-forward strategies, including: electric vehicle readiness for new buildings with parking, solar energy requirements for new buildings, energy storage systems for new construction and clear prioritization of decarbonization in disadvantaged communities.

These omissions violate the intent of New York's Climate Act, which requires agencies to incorporate climate strategies and prioritize environmental justice.

We cannot allow corporate lobbying to weaken our climate laws. New York must lead, not backpedal. The future of our homes, infrastructure, and economy depends on strong, science-based policies that protect both people and the planet.

I will continue fighting for building codes that put New Yorkers first—lowering energy costs, reducing pollution, and ensuring a livable future for all. The code council took public comment through the day and updated final code regulations are expected to be released sometime this summer.

Community Resources

[New Tompkins County Living Wage](#)



On February 26, [Alternatives Federal Credit Union](#) and the [Tompkins County Workers' Center](#) presented the [2025 Living Wage Study](#). The study revealed that the new living wage for Tompkins County is \$24.82 per hour—a figure far beyond what many workers currently earn. 23,000 people in Tompkins County earn below the living wage. Racial

disparities persist: 64.3% of Black workers and other minorities earn below the living wage. Healthcare and service workers are among the lowest-paid, even at major institutions like Cornell University.

Housing costs have skyrocketed—a one-bedroom apartment now averages \$1,489/month, meaning a worker needs to earn \$28,000 annually just to avoid being cost-burdened.

Workers earning below the living wage struggle to afford rent, food, transportation, and healthcare, often facing mental and physical exhaustion just to make ends meet. Many local businesses want to pay a living wage but face financial barriers—especially those dependent on state reimbursements, like Racker.

What can we do? First is advocating for the county and City of Ithaca to raise wages. Encouraging employers to pay a living wage through certifications and incentives and demanding public education to challenge the stigma that low-wage earners don't "deserve" quality housing and food. This is a long-term fight, but we all have a role in ensuring workers are paid fairly. Sign the petition to the county, support businesses that pay a living wage, and continue advocating for policy changes that uplift workers and families in our community.

[Press Conference](#) filmed by Alternatives Federal Credit Union.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES:

1. Sustainable Finger Lakes Neighborhood Mini-Grants

Have an idea to make our community more sustainable, resilient, or inclusive? Apply for the [Sustainable Finger Lakes Neighborhood Mini-Grant](#). Grants from \$150 to \$750 support local projects in areas like food systems, transportation, waste reduction, and energy conservation (previous examples are the Finger Lakes Toy Library & the Freeville Farmers Market among many others). Applications due by April 1, 2025. For more info, visit Sustainable Finger Lakes or call (607) 272-1720 or email sasha@sustainablefingerlakes.org

2. Taste of the Finger Lakes Food Security Grants

Nonprofits working to increase food security can apply for up to \$10,000 in funding through Taste of the Finger Lakes. Proposals due by March 14, 2025. Grants ranging from \$500-\$10,000 are considered. Applicants will be informed in early April. In addition to funding awards, selected beneficiaries will be offered a booth at the Taste of the Finger Lakes event happening on Tuesday, June 10th to engage with patrons about their organizations. Funding award amounts will be announced and disbursed in August 2025.

Funds raised from the June 2025 event will support local food security efforts. For eligibility and more info, visit [Taste of the Finger Lakes Grant](#). Questions can be directed to Emma Hewitt, director@tasteofthefingerlakes.com.

3. Connect Kids to Parks Field Trip Grants

The New York State Parks Connect Kids to Parks Field Trip Grant Program is accepting applications for transportation funding for school trips to state parks. The program provides funding to public and non-public schools, municipalities, libraries and eligible not-for-profits that are physically located in a New York school district that receives Title 1 funding. Grants cover eligible transportation costs (lodging, food, lessons, and equipment are not eligible). Apply six weeks before the trip. For details, visit [Connect Kids to Parks Grant](#) or call 518-474-0456.

4. U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) Requests

The CDS process is an opportunity for Senator Gillibrand to place requests to direct federal funding to support local projects, programs, or initiatives that advance community priorities across New York. State, local, and tribal governments as well as non-profit organizations can apply for federal funds to be set aside for specific projects that would benefit from a one-time allocation. Submit applications by March 31, 2025. For more info, visit [Senator Gillibrand's FY26 CDS Portal](#).

5. Lowe's Foundation Gable Grants for Skilled Trades

The Lowe's Foundation is accepting applications for Gable Grants, supporting community and technical colleges with skilled trades training programs. The application deadline is March 31, 2025. For more info, visit [Gable Grants Eligibility](#).

6. Municipal Parks and Recreation (MPR) Grant Program to fund the development and improvement of municipal parks and recreation sites statewide for the public to enjoy. Funding for this program is provided by the Clean Water, Clean Air, and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act.

The MPR grant funding is available for the construction of recreational facilities and other improvements to municipally owned recreational sites and parks. Examples include playgrounds, courts, playing fields, and facilities for swimming, biking, boating, picnicking, hiking, fishing, camping or other recreational activities. Program guidelines, including how to apply, will be available beginning March 19, 2025, on the [State Parks website](#). The first round of the MPR will award up to \$10 million.

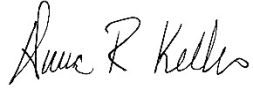
7. Building Decarbonization Fund through the Park Foundation, which provides an equitable funding source for projects in Tompkins County-based non-profit buildings that reduce greenhouse gas emissions or improve resilience. Eligible projects include energy efficiency upgrades, installation of heat pumps and renewable energy, and more. Proposals for round 2 are due by [March 27](#), 2025.

Instructions to apply to the pilot BDF and other necessary details are provided in the BDF Guidelines document: www.parkfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Pilot-Building-Decarbonization-Fund-Guidelines-01-09-25.pdf

More background information about the pilot BDF is included in the press release about the launch: www.parkfoundation.org/local-pilot-fund-for-building-decarbonization

Still have questions? Contact Nick Goldsmith at ng@parkfoundation.org or 607-882-2171.

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

ALBANY OFFICE

LOB 538
Albany, NY 12248
518-455-5444

CORTLAND OFFICE

83 Main St
PO Box 5026
Cortland, NY 13045
607-208-2024

ITHACA OFFICE

130 East State Street
Ithaca, NY 14850
607-277-8030

Assembly District 125 | kellesa@nyassembly.gov