



Dear community,

From an intense end to the legislative session, to Pride Month, tree climbing competitions, expanding access to arts and culture, and more, June was full of rich experiences and community engagement. It is so good to be back in the community!

Before I share updates, I'm excited to announce that my office is now on Substack where I'll be publishing in-depth updates on legislation, the state budget, and the issues affecting our community. Many issues deserve more context than fits in my standard newsletter, and this will give me the space to take a deeper dive while keeping these newsletters focused on shorter, concise updates.

Some of you may have noticed that several recent newsletters, particularly those covering the state budget, climate, and energy affordability, were much more in-depth than usual. Those articles have now been published on the Substack as part of its launch. Going forward, the Substack will be the home for deeper policy and technical explainers for those who want to explore a single topic in greater depth. These newsletters will return to highlighting a broader range of topics from across our community and the work happening in Albany.

You can read the Substack and subscribe to receive future news here: <https://substack.com/@assemblymemberannakelles>.

I hope you have a wonderful Fourth of July weekend with family, friends, and a chance to enjoy everything that makes summer special. As our country marks its 250th year, I'm grateful to be part of a community that keeps showing up for one another and believes our democracy is something we build together, one conversation, one act of kindness, one act of inclusion and protection, and one generation at a time. May we keep striving to do better, be better, and leave a stronger, more welcoming democracy for those who come after us. Happy Fourth of July!

Legislative Update

Here are a few key pieces of environmental legislation that I championed this session that passed both houses of the Legislature and are now awaiting the Governor's signature to become law:



[Making It Easier to Reuse Building Materials](#)

Construction and demolition debris is one of the largest sources of waste sent to landfills, even though many building materials remain in excellent condition. [A3029](#) establishes building code standards for safely reusing structural lumber recovered through deconstruction, making it easier to salvage and reuse wood from existing buildings instead of throwing it away. By creating a practical pathway for reclaimed lumber to be used in new construction, this bill helps reduce landfill waste, conserves natural resources, and supports the transition to a more circular economy where valuable building materials are reused rather than discarded.

[Disclosure of 'Forever Chemicals' into New York's Waterways \(A5832\)](#)

PFAS are a class of highly persistent chemicals used in products and industrial processes because they are highly heat resistant and repel water and oils. They do not readily break down in the environment and can accumulate in waterways, wildlife, and people. Exposure to PFAS has been linked to for example, certain cancer, a reduced immune response, particularly in children, elevated cholesterol, pregnancy complications, and reduced fertility. While New York has established drinking water standards for some PFAS, we still have major gaps in understanding where these chemicals are entering our waterways.

[A5832](#) helps close this gap by requiring targeted PFAS monitoring and public disclosure from industrial facilities that discharge directly into waterways as well as the wastewater from businesses that send their waste to municipal water treatment plants. Because conventional wastewater treatment plants are not designed to remove PFAS, these chemicals can pass through treatment systems and be discharged into rivers and lakes. To ensure a full picture of PFAS discharged into New York's waterways, this law requires monitoring and reporting from municipal treatment plants as well. The bill requires DEC to make monitoring results publicly available, providing communities and regulators with better information about where PFAS pollution is occurring and helping inform future efforts to reduce contamination at its source.

State Budget

Changes to the Essential Plan Healthcare Coverage Starting this Month



The Essential Plan is New York's version of the Affordable Care Act's Basic Health Program. It provides low-cost health insurance to lower-income working adults who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but still need help affording coverage. Before the recent federal changes, about 1.7 million New Yorkers were enrolled.

The Affordable Care Act gives states the option of creating a Basic Health Program to provide low-cost health insurance for lower-income residents. New York chose that option by creating the Essential Plan. Instead of receiving financial assistance through Marketplace insurance, eligible New Yorkers receive coverage through the Essential Plan, which is financed largely with federal funding.



Federal funding cuts have impacted New York's Essential Plan program. Governor Hochul has taken steps to protect Essential Plan coverage for most enrollees, but there are changes that will impact some enrollees starting July 1, 2026.

Who is affected?

- Enrollees with incomes between 200% and 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), (\$31,920 - \$39,900 annual income) will no longer be eligible for the Essential Plan starting July 1, 2026.
- This impacts 450,000 individuals.
- There are no changes for the 1.3 million enrollees with income below 200% FPL (income below \$31,920).

What is changing and when?

- Federal funding cuts mean New York State can no longer offer expanded Essential Plan eligibility after June 30, 2026.
- Enrollees whose eligibility is ending received a notice from NY State of Health on April 1, 2026.
- We will send another notice in early May with information about new coverage options.

What new coverage is available?

- Most people affected by these changes can enroll in a Qualified Health Plan (QHP), with financial assistance.
- QHPs have monthly premiums and other costs that differ from the Essential Plan. The average silver plan costs \$220 per month after tax credits.
- The enrollment window opens on May 16, 2026. Impacted enrollees will have until August 30, 2026, to enroll in new coverage without a gap in coverage.

What help is available to consumers?

- Free in-person assistance from enrollment assistors: info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/findassistor
- Customer Service Center: 1-855-355-5777
- Web chat at nystateofhealth.ny.gov

Pregnant Individuals

- All pregnant enrollees will stay continuously enrolled in coverage.
- Pregnant enrollees whose due date is before January 1, 2027 will remain enrolled in the Essential Plan.
- Pregnant enrollees whose due date is after January 1, 2027 will be transitioned to Medicaid on July 1, 2026.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

- DACA recipients with incomes at or below 138% FPL will move to Medicaid on July 1, 2026.
- Higher-income DACA recipients who are pregnant will move to Medicaid on July 1, 2026.
- Under federal rules, higher-income DACA recipients who are not pregnant will no longer qualify for any NY State of Health program after July 1, 2026.

Stay Connected to NY State of Health for more information and resources



H.R. 1 did not eliminate the Essential Plan, but it significantly reduced the federal funding that helps finance it. The largest change made many categories of lawfully present immigrants ineligible for the federal premium tax credits that help fund the program, reducing the federal funding New York receives. Other changes, including the expiration of enhanced premium tax credits and stricter Marketplace enrollment rules, added further financial pressure. Altogether, New York estimates these changes will reduce Essential Plan funding by approximately \$7.5 billion each year.

Faced with that loss of federal funding, the Governor, through the 2027 state budget, returned the Essential Plan to its original eligibility rules. Beginning July 1, 2026, eligibility is limited to people with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level instead of 250 percent. As a result, enrollment is expected to fall from about 1.7 million to roughly 1.3 million New Yorkers. Approximately 450,000 to 470,000 people will lose Essential Plan eligibility.

This NYFocus article titled, “What To Do If You’re Impacted By Changes to the Essential Plan” is a great resource for anyone who has received notification that as of July 1st they are losing their Essential Plan coverage. Community Health Advocates (CHA) is a fantastic resource that offers free, unbiased assistance:

Here's How CHA Helps

1. CHA helps consumers understand insurance coverage
2. CHA teaches consumers insurance rules so health care is covered
3. CHA helps consumers access care by:
 - Disputing coverage denials
 - Finding low-cost care
 - Troubleshooting prescription issues
 - Researching in-network providers
4. CHA helps consumers afford the cost of their health care:
 - Resolve medical billing issues
 - Apply for hospital financial assistance
 - Negotiate medical debt
 - Find solutions to reduce premiums, co-pays and prescription costs
5. CHA helps consumers get insurance coverage:
 - Access or keep non-Marketplace coverage
 - Get supplemental Medicare coverage

Call Our FREE Helpline

888-614-5400



VISIT US in Person

CHA services are available locally in all 62 NYS counties

CommunityHealthAdvocates.org

or scan the QR code below to search for a CHA Advocate near you.

Scan Here



All CHA services are free-of-charge and confidential.

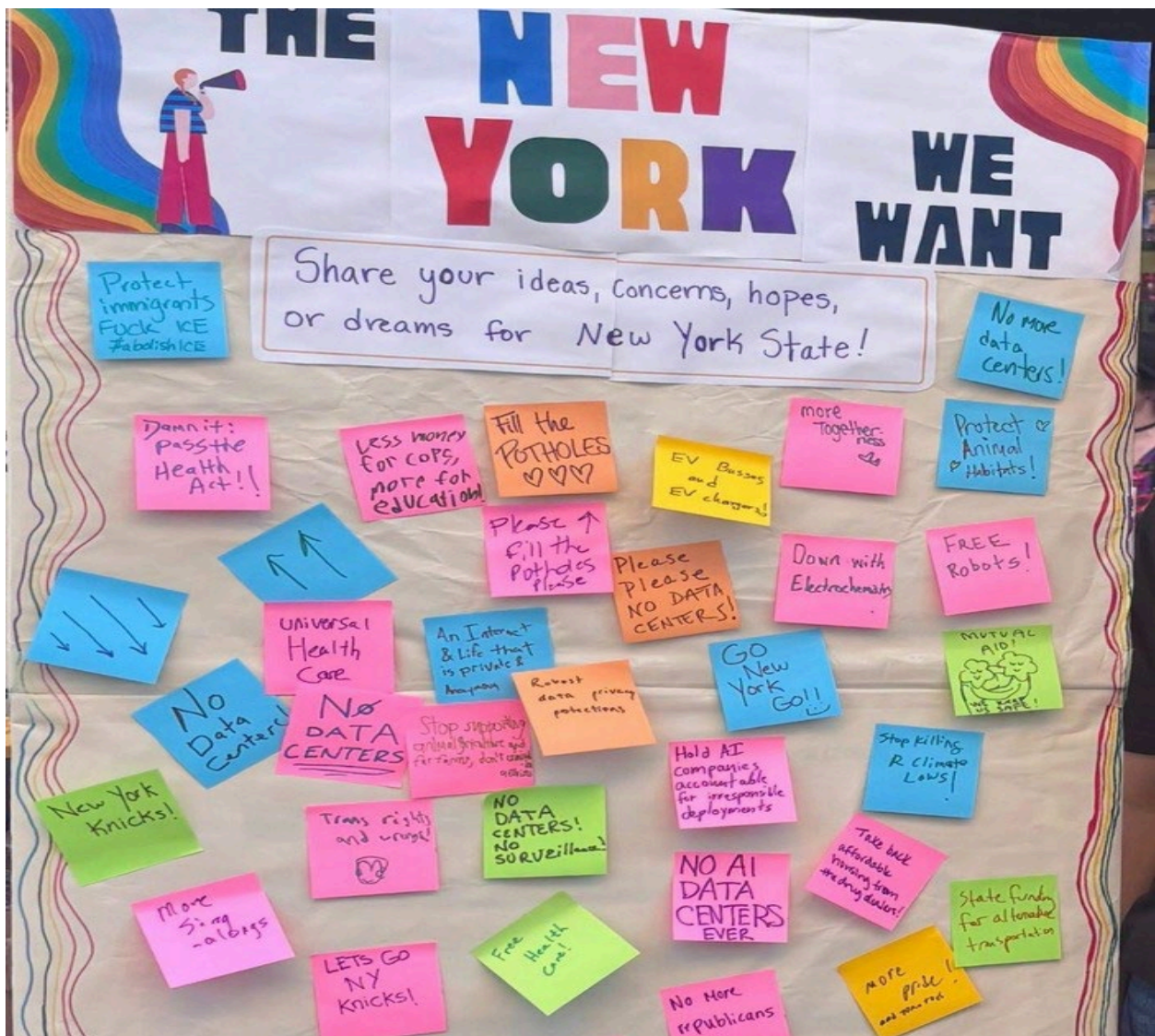


But please if you have any questions or concerns you can reach out to my office as well as the 211 hotline. For a more detailed explanation of these changes, including why they occurred and what they mean for New Yorkers: [you can read more on my substack](#).

Around the District

Here are a few of the June highlights:

Ithaca Pride



At the Ithaca Pride Festival Opening Ceremony, my office invited community members to share their hopes for “The New York We Want.” Throughout the day, our board filled with colorful sticky notes expressing dreams both lighthearted and deeply meaningful, from “Knicks in 5!” to hopes for healthcare, acceptance, safety, belonging, and a healthier environment. Reading through everyone’s ideas was a wonderful reminder that Pride is not only a celebration of identity, but also of the shared vision we have for a more welcoming, inclusive, and compassionate New York.

Juneteenth celebration

“Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won. You earn it and win it in every generation.” — Coretta Scott King



I was honored to join Juneteenth celebrations in both Cortland and Tompkins County this year, to listen, learn, and celebrate alongside our community. Juneteenth commemorates the day the Emancipation Proclamation was finally enforced in the farthest reaches of the former Confederacy in 1865, two years after it was signed by President Lincoln. As we approach our nation’s 250th anniversary, it serves as a powerful reminder that freedom declared is not always freedom realized. The story of Juneteenth asks each generation what we will do with the freedoms we inherit and how we will ensure that opportunity, dignity, and justice are available to everyone. Thank you to Bernice

Cooper and the Cortland County Community of Color (C4), and to everyone who organized these meaningful celebrations and created space for our communities to come together in reflection, learning, and joy.

NYS Tree Climbing Championships



I had the privilege of attending the New York State Tree Climbing Championship, hosted by the New York State Arborists Association. Watching these professional arborists climb was incredible. The strength, coordination, focus, and technical skill required are hard to appreciate until you see them in person. Their work demands not only athleticism, but also an extraordinary understanding of tree anatomy, ecosystem health, and the nuanced safety skills and precision needed to prevent damage to both themselves and the trees.

Healthy trees are the backbone of both rural and urban ecosystems. They support wildlife biodiversity, help manage stormwater and extreme heat, and improve air quality. One of the coolest things I learned that afternoon was the concept of Compartmentalization of Decay in Trees (CODIT). Trees do not “heal” the way animals do. Instead, they wall off damaged or infected tissue. When arborists prune trees properly, the tree creates protective boundaries around the wound, slowing the spread of decay and preserving its structural integrity. Improper pruning can damage

these natural defense systems and accelerate a tree's decline. The state champions from this competition will next compete in the North American Tree Climbing Championship before advancing to the 50th International Tree Climbing Championship, which will take place this October in St. Louis, Missouri.

The State Leads the Way to Low-Carbon Emissions Infrastructure



I joined the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the New York State Office of General Services (OGS), Senator Lea Webb, and Cortland community partners to celebrate the groundbreaking of a major clean energy renovation at DEC's Cortland sub-office and recognize the dedicated DEC staff who serve our region. Once completed, the project will replace fossil fuel heating and cooling with geothermal energy, add a 97-kilowatt solar array, improve the building's lighting and water systems, and install 38 electric vehicle charging stations. Together, these upgrades are expected to reduce the building's annual energy use by 84%, demonstrating how state facilities can lower operating costs, reduce emissions, and serve as models for the transition to clean energy. Thank you to everyone who helped make this project possible, and

especially to the dedicated DEC staff in Cortland for your commitment to protecting our natural resources and serving our communities.

Trumansburg Conservatory of Fine Arts gets a Make Over



It was a magical experience to attend the grand reopening and ribbon cutting of the beautifully restored Trumansburg Conservatory of Fine Arts. This historic landmark has been revived to its original glory with major structural repairs, restored historic features, improved accessibility, upgraded lighting and acoustics, and a strengthened stage. I was proud to secure \$100,000 in state funding to help make this restoration possible and preserve this community treasure.

With more than 100 community members in attendance, the celebration was a reminder of just how much this space means to Trumansburg. It has been the backdrop for countless performances, lessons, rehearsals, and memories, and now it is ready for countless more. Thank you to everyone who helped make this project a reality, including the New York State Council on the Arts, the Tompkins Chamber, the Conservatory board and supporters, and the many donors,

volunteers, and community members who believed in preserving this remarkable space for future generations.

Family Day at Laughing Goat Farm



Every year Lisa and Gary Furgason open up Laughing Goat Fiber Farm to the community just when the farm is most hopping with baby goats. It's one of my favorite days of the year and one I try never to miss. This year was no exception. You can do goat yoga and be climbed on by baby goats as you breathe in the gorgeous woodsy air, learn from Lisa about different goat breeds and the fibers they produce, and, if you are lucky, maybe even help bottle-feed a baby goat. We live in one of the most fertile farmland areas in the country, but so few of us actually get to spend time on a working farm.

This community day happens every June and I highly recommend it. Baby goats are some of the snuggliest creatures on earth and will fill you with happy vibes.

United Way Day of Action



Our office enjoyed joining volunteers from across Tompkins County for the United Way Day of Action spending the day at [Loaves & Fishes](#) helping prepare and serve meals to members of our community. For more than 40 years, Loaves & Fishes has been a welcoming place where anyone can receive free, nutritious meals in a respectful and caring environment.

One of the best parts of the day was meeting the people who make it all happen. Every person on the team brought something different to the table. Megan somehow kept the kitchen humming while preparing hundreds of meals. Teresa made coordinating dozens of volunteers look effortless. Leslie kept the operation running with impressive precision making sure everyone knew exactly where they needed to be (and that no one left the door open for long!). Shaunessy gave us a peek behind the curtain at the creative work that connects the community to Loaves & Fishes through social media, and Nick quietly kept everything moving behind the scenes with a calm confidence that made the entire operation run seamlessly. Executive Director Kelly Sauve has assembled an incredible team and their shared commitment to treating every guest with dignity and respect was evident throughout the day.

Spending the morning at Loaves & Fishes reinforced why I was proud to support their request for a \$40,000 Legislative Budget Initiative this year. Those funds will help offset rising food costs so the organization can continue providing free, nutritious meals and welcoming anyone who needs them.

If you've ever considered volunteering, I encourage you to learn more. Visit [Loaves & Fishes of Tompkins County](#) for more information about volunteering, donating and the services they provide.



In good health,

Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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