



Dear Friends,

Yesterday, **Kathy Hochul took office as New York's 57th Governor, and the first woman to hold that office.** For those of you who may not know very much about our new Governor, I thought I would begin today's newsletter with a short discussion of her background.

I also wanted to touch on the recent I-684/I-84 corridor study, the results of which were just released. Many in my district, particularly those up in the northern portion of the district, know how bad the traffic can be on the stretch of I-684 around its merge with the Saw Mill River Parkway, as well as further up by the interchange with I-84. Hopefully, the completion of this study – with its accompanying recommendations – is a solid step towards improving these stretches of road.

For those who may be affected, I also will be touching on upcoming changes to unemployment benefits due to the expiration of federal unemployment assistance. Finally, I have some observations regarding the Excluded Workers Fund, and what more the state must do to improve this program.

### **[Getting to Know Governor Kathy Hochul](#)**

Born and raised in Buffalo, Governor Hochul graduated from Syracuse University and earned her law degree at Catholic University in Washington, DC. She shortly thereafter began her career in government, working for U.S. Representative John LaFalce, U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and for the New York State Assembly. From 1994-2007, she served as a member of the Hamburg Town Board, and from 2003-2007 she served as Erie's Deputy County Clerk, before becoming the County Clerk from 2007-2011. From 2011-2013 the Governor served as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from the 26th District, and beginning in 2014, became New York's 77th Lieutenant Governor.

During her tenure as Lt. Governor, Kathy Hochul chaired 10 Regional Economic Councils across the state, which awarded almost \$7 billion in economic development projects through a very competitive process. She also co-chaired the Heroin and Opioid Abuse Task Force and spearheaded the Enough is Enough campaign to combat sexual assault on college campuses.

She and her husband have two children.

Many have asked my thoughts about our new Governor, who I was honored to have swear me into office at a virtual ceremony earlier this year. I have very high regard for Governor Hochul's capabilities, character and demeanor. As a member of the legislature, I look forward to working with her and her staff. Moving forward, I anticipate a much more collaborative working relationship

between the executive and the legislature – and others involved in the development of policy – than we have seen in recent years. As demonstrated above, she is highly accomplished, with a deep well of experience at all levels of government. I believe she will do a great job as governor, leading our state through a difficult time.

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## **I-684 & I-84 Transportation Corridor Study Completed**

I am delighted that the NYS Department of Transportation (DOT) recently completed its corridor study and [issued a report on the findings](#). The study, which elected representatives and other stakeholders requested many years ago, covers the 12-mile segment of I-684 from Bedford to I-84, and the 3-mile segment of I-84 east to the Connecticut line. Prior to joining the Assembly, as Bedford Supervisor I worked with other supervisors and mayors in the development of the study.



**The purpose of the study was to identify strategies to address the significant increase in traffic along the corridor resulting in bottlenecks, traffic spilling onto local roads, and adverse environmental impacts.** Among the two most severe problems are the congestion at the interchange of the Saw Mill River Parkway, I-684 and Route 35 (overpass) in Katonah, and the interchange at I-684 and I-84

**As anticipated, the study concludes that – absent ameliorative action – population growth will lead to worsening congestion along the corridor.** Among the strategies for relieving congestion:

- Add a third travel lane on I-84 from I-684 to the Connecticut line.
- Add a fourth travel lane on I-684.

- Reconfiguring the intersection of I-84 and I-684, including additional lanes on the access and exit ramps.
- Greater use of mass transportation comprised of Metro North's Harlem Line running parallel to I-684, Metro North's Danbury branch running parallel to I-84, and the Westchester County Bee-Line running nearby.
- Related to the point above, the study recommends 1) a replacement to the bridge spanning the NYC reservoir running between NYS Route 35 and the commuter lot in Katonah, to help funnel more commuters onto the train and 2) a parking garage at the north end of the parking lot to accommodate increased traffic.
- Expanded and additional park and ride lots.
- Exploring regional transportation alternative plans, including intermodal stations, express bus services and new or enhanced local jitney services.

The impressive study is the outcome of an extensive public outreach effort, including public workshops, extended and numerous meetings with stakeholder groups, and review and incorporation of comments from all involved. I wish to thank DOT's Sandra Jobson for her outstanding job leading her team, as well as the DOT's consultants, Stantec.

The next steps include seeking funding from the federal and state governments to cover the cost of executing a number of these suggestions. **I'll be hard at work on just that.**

## Federal Unemployment Benefit to Expire September 5th



For those who are receiving unemployment, **please note that on September 5th, a number of federal unemployment benefit programs will expire.**

- **Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)** (*for those who are self-employed, seeking part-time employment, or who otherwise would not qualify for regular unemployment compensation*)
- **Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)** (*which provides up to an additional 53 weeks of benefits for those who qualify*)
- **Extended Benefits (EB)** (*which provides up to an additional 20 weeks [later reduced to 13 weeks] of unemployment for those who qualify*)
- **\$300 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)** (*an additional \$300 on top of the benefit provided by New York Unemployment Insurance*)
- **\$100 Mixed Earner Unemployment Compensation (MEUC)** (*an additional benefit for those who qualify for Unemployment Insurance, but who also earn \$5,000+ per year from self-employment*)

Eligible claimants can still file for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits. To be considered eligible for UI after September 5, 2021, a claimant must be unemployed **and** in their first 26 weeks of benefits. Please note after September 5th, eligible claimants will no longer receive the additional \$300 FPUC. Instead, they will receive only the benefit available to them under the state's UI Program (maximum benefit is \$504).

To learn more about the changes to the program, [please click here](#).

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## **The Excluded Workers Fund Must Be Disbursed Faster**

Federal pandemic relief dollars to NYS have taken many forms, including a [\\$2.1 billion pandemic relief program](#) for essential workers who do not have access to unemployment benefits, federal stimulus funds or other pandemic assistance. New York was the first in the nation to provide such a robust relief program for these excluded workers.

**Just as with the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which I discussed in [last week's newsletter](#), the state needs to do a better job in getting these funds disbursed.** Primarily benefiting undocumented immigrants, these workers are facing significant barriers to receiving this assistance due to complex documentation requirements. This needs to change.

Without a doubt, funds only should be disbursed to those who are eligible to receive them; however, the process needs to be simplified and reasonable alternative proofs should be accepted, such as affidavits from co-habitants as proof of residency. Further, the Department of Labor (DOL) – which administers the fund – needs to provide more consistent, reliable support, particularly for those applying without an advocate.

Last week I reached out to (then incoming) Governor Hochul, and asked for her assistance in getting [the program](#) on track. It is my hope that she will be able to do just that. In the meantime, the DOL should provide regular updates to the public on its progress.

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As always, if there are any issues that you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at [burdickc@nyassembly.gov](mailto:burdickc@nyassembly.gov) (or simply reply to this email). **Please also follow me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for the most up-to-date information.**

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Sincerely yours,



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