



March 31, 2023

Dear Neighbors,

The last few weeks have been a whirlwind in the final push before the finalization of the State Budget. I've been devoting my time heavily to supporting and fighting for initiatives, programs and policy that will benefit our state and our local communities. This is a tremendously busy but invigorating time of year!

Combating Misinformation about Bail Reform

I want to give a shout out and a big thank you to Tompkins County District Attorney Matt Van Houten for his [compelling and powerful op-ed](#) outlining fact over fiction for bail reform.

As he notes in his article, state data shows that bail reform is successful in doing the very thing it sets out to do – reducing re-arrest rates of people committing crimes. Although there has been an increase in crime nationally over the last couple of years, the increase in crime in New York State has been lower than national average. Bail reform may have been a contributing factor to this success.

I am deeply dedicated to public safety and particularly committed to countering identified causes of crime including lack of access to affordable housing, jobs, transportation, mental health support and substance use treatment and prevention – factors which were exacerbated during the pandemic.

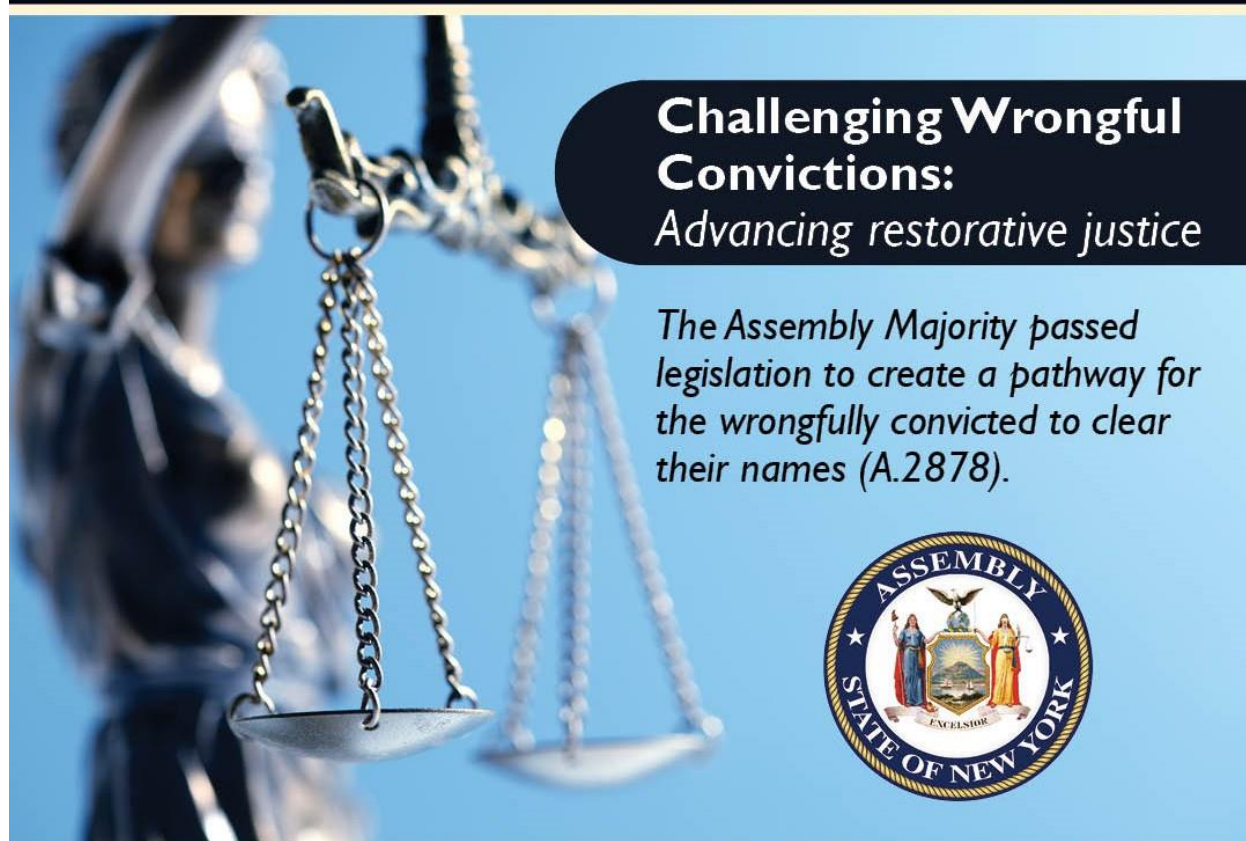
If you're interested in hearing about the data on bail reform directly from the Division of Criminal Justice Services, here is a [link to a legislative hearing on their data findings](#) evaluating bail reform.

Legislative Update

Challenging Wrongful Convictions

New York State currently ranks third in the nation for wrongful convictions. Facing an inordinately long pre-trial period or offered a reduced sentence in return for a guilty plea, thousands of New Yorkers have been coerced into accepting guilt in cases where they were completely innocent.

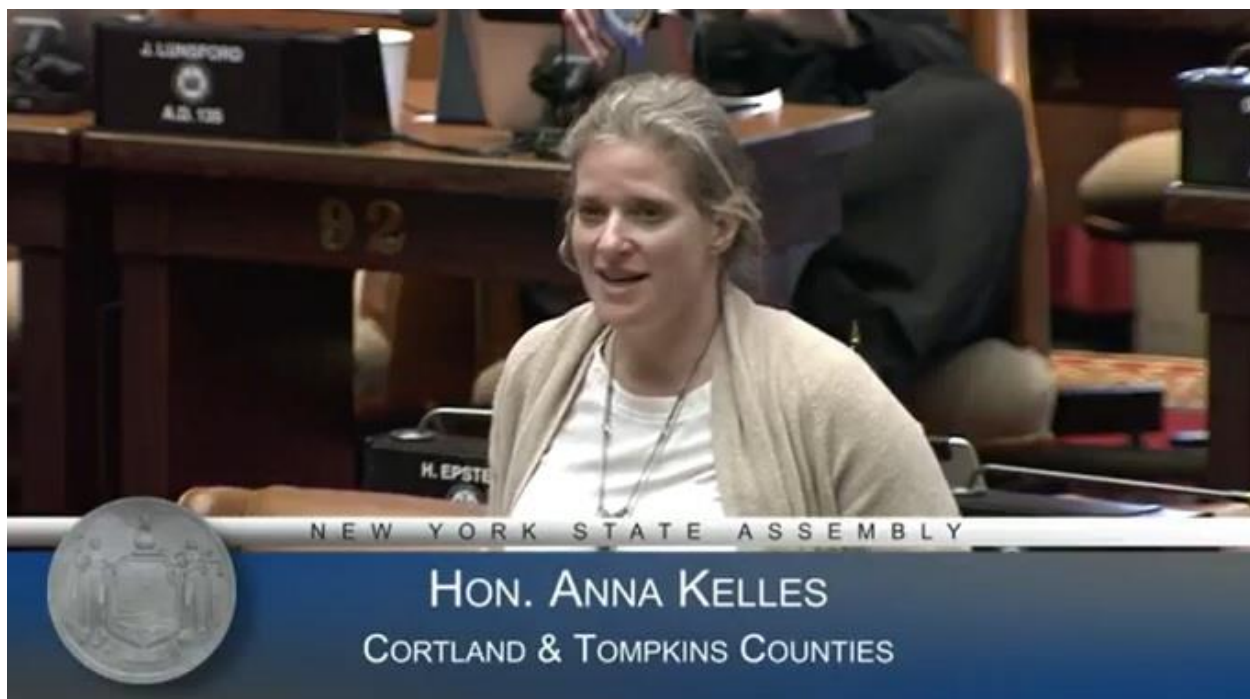
To ensure innocent New Yorkers are able to pursue justice, I helped pass legislation that will allow for post-conviction reviews of claims in cases that went to trial or were resolved in a plea, as well as remove stringent legal barriers for people to challenge convictions based on false or faulty evidence ([A2878](#), Aubry). Additionally, it allows those who were convicted of a crime that has since been decriminalized to have their records cleared, such as those arrested for possession of marijuana. Since 1989, more than 330 innocent New Yorkers have been exonerated, and we must do everything we can to ensure every wrongful conviction is corrected.



Increased Access to Contraception

On Tuesday, March 28th the Assembly passed legislation that will increase access to self-administered hormonal contraceptives by allowing pharmacists to execute a non-patient specific order from a licensed physician or certified nurse practitioner ([A1060](#), Paulin).

I voted in favor of this legislation and remain a fervent supporter of giving people the information and choices they need to make the best healthcare and family planning decisions for themselves. You can watch a [video of my remarks here](#).



Child Care Assistance Screening Tool

To help New York working families access child care assistance sooner, the state Office of Children and Family Services launched a new electronic pre-screening tool aimed at accelerating and streamlining the application process. [Click here for more information.](#)

New Child Care Eligibility Tool



Online tool helps NYS parents see if they qualify for financial support

Anna in the News

Fighting for Fair Pay for Home Care Workers

This week I raised my voice in support of home care workers and the need to fairly compensate them for the vital services they provide. We cannot expect to address staff shortages in home care in this state if we don't invest into this crucial workforce!



Calling for Volunteer Fire Service Funding

I want to do everything I can to promote and improve my district's emergency service resources. One of the priorities I called for in the state budget is securing stable funding for volunteer fire services so that stations like Cortland Fire Department can get the facility upgrades they need to better serve our communities. You can watch a [video of my statement here](#).

Supporting Affordable Housing and Renter Protections

Earlier this week I attended an event in support of the Governor's Housing Compact. Our decades-long housing shortage is hurting all New Yorkers, especially working-class New Yorkers and people of color.

We need a comprehensive approach to building new affordable housing at the state level. My bills, [A4933](#) (The Sustainable Affordable Housing and Sprawl Prevention Act) and [A3111](#) (Affordable Housing Appeals Process), will expand affordable housing access for all New Yorkers. [You can see a video of my speech at the event here](#).

I also attended a rally to support [A4454](#) (Hunter), prohibiting eviction without good cause.



Working to Protect Car Shares

An important factor in a greener, more economically just future means giving people better transportation options. Car shares are an environmentally conscious, community-centric transportation choice allowing greater freedom and flexibility for those who cannot or choose to not own personal vehicles. Unfortunately, nonprofit car shares are at risk of being shut down this spring as they face an impossible situation when securing affordable car insurance. I seek to combat that with my bill A5178. [Here is a video of my remarks.](#)

World Water Day

We commemorated World Water Day by passing a resolution proclaiming March 22 as Water Day in New York State. In celebration of this resolution I want to share [an op-ed](#) that I wrote in January with NYC Council Member Sandy Nurse about the connection between waste management and our drinking water. We must take action to curb the expansion of massive landfills like Seneca Meadows Inc, which release PFAS – forever chemicals – into our environment, threatening the health and safety of the state’s water supply.



Around the District

Ithaca Board of Realtors Annual Legislative Luncheon

Housing is a vital part of the state budget and a critical issue in Ithaca where demand is surging. I was happy to talk to my district's realtors (like Carol Bushberg) at the Ithaca Board of Realtors Annual Legislative Luncheon on Friday. We discussed issues like local housing, good cause eviction, the NY Housing Compact, and climate action plans.



Remembering Irene Stein

On the last day of Women's History Month, I want to honor a woman who defies singular description. Words cannot do justice in describing Irene Stein, who passed this week at age 92. Irene came up during an era that didn't routinely see women achieve Master's degrees and PhDs, become Director of the County Office of the Aging, let alone become a powerful and historic institution as Chair of Tompkins County Democratic Committee for more than 30 years. She was a founder and leader of the Democratic Rural Caucus, ensuring Upstate NY had a powerful voice in Albany. Over several decades Irene moved the needle as an agent of societal change by lifting up those privileged to walk and work alongside her. She fought fiercely for what she knew to be right, and against what she knew to be wrong. Irene Stein will be missed and cherished, most of all by her children and grandchildren. Irene's impact is immeasurable, shaping past, current, and future generations.



Community Resources

Business Leader & Manager Resilience Training

Southern Tier 8 Regional Board is offering a Resilience Training Program for business leaders and managers, presented by Workplace Wellness expert Dr. Joel Bennett. These 1-hour sessions will address issues of employee mental health such as burn-out and fatigue. [Click the link to learn more and register.](#)

Tompkins County FEMA Flood Map Zoning

From the Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County:

Many Ithacans and residents of Tompkins County will be affected by changes in FEMA's new flood zone maps, being updated for the first time in forty years. Want to know more about it, and how you might be affected by flood insurance requirements? Here is a [new article by the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network](#) which explores what's happening, and why.

Community Conversations about Substance Use and Stigma

The Healing Cortland Project and the University of Rochester Recovery Center of Excellence will host two community conversations about substance use and stigma in the Cortland County Area on **Tuesday, April 18th** at 11:00am and 5:00pm.

From Healing Cortland:

“This workshop will use portraits of volunteers in rural communities who have been affected by opioid use disorder as a creative way to educate, change beliefs, and reinforce the positive messages conveyed in the artwork. Through this workshop, participants will examine the definition and impact of opioid use disorder stigma on their rural community and will identify ways to reduce stigma, biases, and negative perceptions around recovery. Participants will increase their understanding of resources and tools available in combating stigma and supporting those who use drugs and/or in recovery.”

[Click on the link to register](#)



I will close with a reminder to take a moment to do something that makes your heart happy. For me, it was cuddling with Little Moo the lamb at the Rural Resources Fair!



Also, please note that future newsletter updates will be sent on Mondays, so keep an eye on your inbox at the start of the week!

In good health,

Anna R. Kelles

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