



January 3rd, 2025

Dear Community,

Happy New Year! As my team and I gear up for the coming legislative session and all that 2025 has in store for us we have been taking a moment this week to reflect on our journey through 2024. I wanted to take this opportunity to share a few end of the year updates and reflections. Sometimes taking a moment to celebrate the good of a year is the best boost to launch the year to come!

2024 was, in many ways, a challenging year from ongoing war, humanitarian crises, economic struggles, escalating climate crises, and a presidential election that left many in our communities and around the world in a state of heightened concern. In my work in 2024, I also saw tremendous generosity between neighbors and communities redistributing food, making sure everyone was fed, and opening new shelters and doors so people in our communities had safety and warmth at night. I saw groups from every political persuasion coming together to protect the environment recognizing that we share this planet with animals and plants that, when we stop to listen, bring us tremendous joy and peace and prosperity. We experienced our collective lives come to a pause as we stood together in absolute awe and silence watching a solar eclipse that left us momentarily in darkness while solar rays flared visibly like northern lights reaching out into the universe. Personally, these are all the memories I will take with me to keep me humble and watchful and focused on the goodness of humanity that unites not divides, that lifts instead of crushes, that nurtures rather than neglects. We are the greater angels we choose to be.

I look forward to all that we will live and achieve together in the coming legislative session which commences on January 8th. From myself, my staff, and our families, we wish you all a wonderful start to the New Year.



The northern lights, visible from my backyard on October 11th at 12:33am in Freeville, NY.

2024: Year in Review

While the work is never done for any of us doing work of service, I've come to realize how important it is for us all to stop and take stock of where we have been so we can take heart and insights for the steps forward. In over 40 newsletters I have sent to you all throughout this year I have covered many of the steps forward my staff and I have made in partnership with you all. Here are a few of the highlights!

Legislative Wrap Up

Three very important bills were signed into law since September that I championed through the legislature this year:

[A8866](#) - **Expands the NYS fracking ban.** New York State wisely prohibited high-volume hydraulic fracturing in 2020, and this bill, signed into law just before Christmas, expands the fracking ban and prevents the use of supercritical carbon dioxide for the purposes of gas and oil extraction. The negative health and environmental consequences already well documented for fracking to extract oil and gas are only further exacerbated with the use of a highly corrosive supercritical CO2 as the extraction medium. Supercritical CO2 becomes highly corrosive in the presence of the smallest amount of water and is known to cause pipeline ruptures displacing ambient oxygen as well as destabilization of the very ground under our feet when used for oil and gas extraction due to soil and rock acidification and demineralization. This bill is closing a loophole in our state's fracking ban to protect our people, our environment, and our economy.

[A9102](#) - **EMS funding for treatment in place and transport to an alternate destination.** Emergency Medical Services (EMS) provide essential lifesaving care throughout the state including direct aid both on site and in transit to a medical facility. These services are especially critical in rural areas where access to hospitals may be hours away. However, before this bill signing EMS providers did not get reimbursed for any aid they provided on site if they did not subsequently transport a person to a hospital. This constitutes over 30% of all EMS calls. This bill fixes this oversight. Additionally, EMS providers spend significant unnecessary time sitting outside an overrun emergency room with a patient in the ambulance when there is no space available. This bill expands the allowable locations as destinations for transport by EMS providers when appropriate including facilities like urgent care centers, detox facilities, and mental health crisis centers.

[A4093](#) - **Establishes the native plant seed supply development and enhancement program.** Home gardens, institutional landscaping, and garden stores are full of ornamental exotic plants that are non-native to New York. While some of them can play important roles in habitats of our state, many are short-lived, hard to maintain, and can become invasive. In contrast, plants that are native to New York will inherently be hardier, easier to maintain, and have important benefits like improving habitat stability, filtering polluted water, increasing biodiversity, and making soils more resilient. This law will create a grant program to support growing operations either established by the government (such as the [Greenbelt Native Plant Center](#) operated by NYC Parks) or to support private entities, like plant nurseries or farms, that can increase the state's native plant seed supply. Second, it establishes a preference for the state government to use native plants whenever possible when engaging in land management, reforestation, and similar efforts. Demand for native seeds and plant materials is [already on the rise](#), with demand greatly outstripping supply. This law is designed to foster a robust agricultural market in New York State that is clearly needed.

The following bill was included in this year's budget and is designed to help expand quality housing that is affording to working class New Yorkers - [A7322](#) - **it requires the state fire prevention and building code council to study and adopt uniform fire prevention and building code standards to promote fire safety and accessibility in single-exit, single stairway multi-unit residential buildings above 3 stories and up to at least 6 stories.** This single stair building model is already allowed up to six stories in NYC and this legislation would expand it to be a statewide allowable code. With a single central open staircase, it will be possible to build more units in a smaller square footprint with each unit having higher quality lighting access. Research has shown

this floor plan to be equally safe to corridor-style buildings with two separate staircases that take up significantly more room and offer significantly lower lighting for apartment units along the corridors.

Three more bills that I championed and that passed both houses this past session were vetoed last week. I will be reintroducing these bills in this coming session.

- [A4871](#) - which would require the installation and maintenance of EV charging stations in state owned parking garages and parking lots to expand the network of charging infrastructure in the state for the rapidly expanding number of EVs on the roads.
- [A5902](#) - to establish a uniform electronic medical records system for correctional facilities enabling continuity of care both when people incarcerated are transferred between facilities and when they are released.
- [A1273](#) - to establish the LGBTQIA advisory board to the executive.

Often a change in local policy requires state approval. We call this home rule legislation. I have the honor of working with local governments each year to ensure smooth passage of these bills to ensure continuity of service by local governments. This year I shepherded six pieces of legislation through the legislature that were signed by the governor performing services like extending local sales taxes, expanding the jurisdiction for electing village judges, naming local bridges on state highways and more.

Investing in Our Community



In 2024, my office brought state taxpayer dollars back to the 125th district for more than a dozen community organizations and projects. Securing investments for our local governments, community non-profits, public libraries, public service providers, and community centers is key to promoting robust, vibrant, engaging, and safe communities. Combined, these grants represent over **\$6.5million** in state funding I had the honor to announce this year for our district:

- **\$4.2 million for Coddington Road Community Center Childcare** doubling its capacity with an entire addition including classrooms and a multitude gymnasium space
- **\$100,00 for the Child Development Council** to support provider technical education and peer support services
- **\$750,000 for the Greater Ithaca Activities Center's Red & White Cafe** to promote youth entrepreneurship in the culinary arts industry
- **\$650,000 for Khuba International/The Learning Farm** to promote outdoor nature education and support the brilliant diversity in our sustainable farming communities
- **\$500,000 for Stewart Park Upgrades** expanding access to existing amenities and adding an all-inclusive summer splash pad and bathrooms

- **\$150,000 for Lifelong** to renovate and enhance the community center by improving energy efficiency with new windows and LED lighting
- **\$125,000 for the Ithaca Farmers Market** parking lot renovation and expansion
- **\$68,000 for the Finger Lakes Public Library System**
- **\$30,000 for Golden Opportunity Tutoring Services** expanding access to one-on-one tutoring services across all subjects and for all students in need

Connecting with the Community



With the help of a phenomenal team of student interns throughout the year my team and I hosted, co-hosted, or attended over **200** community as well as local and state nonprofit events and tours, I've given over **10** academic lectures and conference addresses on issues from criminal justice to the environment, and we collectively have provided case management through email, calls, and in person for over **1,500** constituents. It has been a productive year and I'm so very proud and thankful for the passion and commitment from a very dedicated team.

Around the District

Ithaca Farmers Market Parking Lot Groundbreaking



On Saturday, Dec. 15th, I joined representatives from the Friends of Ithaca Farmers Market, local elected officials, and members of the greater Ithaca community for a groundbreaking of the new parking lot at the Ithaca Farmers Market.

After years of planning, fundraising and grant applications, the Friends of the Ithaca Farmers Market officially broke ground for the new parking lot at the [Ithaca Farmers Market \(IFM\)](#) on December 15th. I'm deeply grateful to have been invited to celebrate this exciting first step in a series of planned updates and renovations to the IFM grounds at Steamboat Landing that will realize a long-standing vision for true accessibility for all to the market. Over the last year, my office has worked with Friends of IFM to help secure a \$125,000 grant from the Assembly majority for the construction of the parking lot and the installation of EV charging stations. I deeply appreciated the conversations at the groundbreaking that I had with various organizers, including landscape architects, who pointed out the nature of the focused tree removal to-date that has been focused exclusively on invasive species on the property. The finished project will include replanting with exclusively native plant and tree species. Construction is due to be completed by April of 2025, in time for the market at Steamboat Landing to open back up for regular seasonal operations.

IFM is a pillar of our community, bringing together local farmers, artisans, craftspeople, and restaurateurs year-round to offer their goods to our community. Operating for more than 50 years, the Market is a member-run cooperative with over 150 active members who grow and make their products within 30 miles of Ithaca. On Saturdays from April – December and Sundays from May – November, they are located at Steamboat Landing on the Cayuga Lake waterfront. They also operate two other markets within the City of Ithaca including one on Tuesdays in Dewitt Park and one on Wednesdays at East Hill Plaza. In addition, from January through March their winter market operates out of Triphammer Marketplace on Saturdays.

I look forward to seeing the project come to life over the next several months and to the IFM continuing to connect our communities with local produce, food, and goods for decades more to come!

Guthrie Cortland Visit



Meeting with Guthrie CEO Dr. Edmund Sabanegh, CMO Dr. Philip Heavner, Chief and Nursing Officer Kansas Underwood during a visit to the Guthrie Cortland Medical Center on Dec. 17th.

I had an engaging discussion about health care initiatives at a recent visit to [Guthrie Cortland Medical Center](#) where I met with CEO Dr. Edmund Sabanegh, Chief Medical Officer Dr. Philip Heavner, Chief Nursing Officer Kansas Underwood, and Kate Ellison, VP of Government and Community Affairs. We talked about ways we could support one another in the upcoming session, be it through sharing data and statistics to support new legislation, or mutually championing the rights of healthcare workers. I learned about the [Guthrie Pulse Center](#), which uses virtual technology to provide 24/7 assistance from virtual nurses who provide technical support for onsite nursing staff and enable them to respond quickly to patients' needs. For example, through this platform, virtual nurses based in Big Flats, can assist in bedside staffing, by adding additional remote monitoring for a patient to help identify any changes in condition and perform tasks to validate measures and procedures that then allow the bedside nurse to devote more time to the patient.

I am excited to continue to collaborate with this crucial healthcare facility in our community. We had a lengthy conversation on staffing needs, and I was pleased to hear how complete their staffing was and how few traveling staff are currently needed to fully support their patient needs. I was also thrilled to hear how well rated and ranked they are both by patients and professionals for their services. We spoke extensively about their OBGYN services as well as their commitment to ensure the same prenatal, perinatal and postpartum care is provided including for mothers during pregnancy and birth and for postpartum care for those incarcerated to ensure ultimate care for all children born in the Guthrie service area, a topic I focus on in my legislation [The CARE Act \(A7630\)](#). Thank you, Guthrie, for your invitation to meet and collaborate with your leadership and for your commitment to addressing the unique health care needs of our rural community.

Town Hall with Cortland County Elected Officials



I spoke with a group of Cortland County and City of Cortland elected leaders at a Legislative Town Hall at the Cortland County Office Building on Dec. 17th.

Near the end of the year, I took part in a Town Hall meeting with Cortland County legislators and town leaders. We had an engaging dialogue about the state's legislative priorities and Cortland County's priorities specifically. We covered a very wide ranging set of topics during our two hour discussion. Here are just a few highlights:

We discussed the upcoming transition for Cortland's public Transportation from the current [TransDev](#) (formerly Cortland Transit) to [Centro](#), a provider that currently covers a 7-county service area that will bring their robust system and network to Cortland. I shared my desire to see a reformulation of the public transit funding formula in Upstate NY to address the tremendous inequity between downstate and upstate transportation support.

I spoke about my work with the executive director at Lime Hollow to design and introduce a bill recently introduced and passed in Oregon and Maryland to establish a childcare designation specifically tailored for facilities prioritizing outdoor childcare. We have seen a significant increase in overuse of cellphones, mental health challenges, and obesity among our children, all a result of

sedentary lifestyles. Outdoor play not only empowers our children to feel safe in the outdoors but sells a lifestyle that has been shown to benefit both mental and physical health as children grow through adolescence and into adulthood.

We also discussed public safety and initiatives that will reduce crime and enhance public safety. I presented one piece of legislation I carry, the Earned Time Act, [A1128](#) that provides increased good time and merit time allowance credits to incarcerated individuals and incentivizes participation in educational, vocational, treatment-related, and other beneficial programming. When incarcerated individuals engage in rehabilitative programming, violence between those incarcerated as well as against corrections staff and volunteers is reduced.

This bill is modeled after legislation that has become law in other states like Alabama, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and California. This type of approach enables formerly incarcerated individuals to reenter society and the workforce and makes them far less likely to recidivate.

I shared an extensive list of my bill priorities to address healthcare needs in the state including bills that would expand the mental health workforce, provide training for teachers to identify mental health crises and provide referrals, provide youth mental health tele-health during times when children and adolescence are not in school and experience acute crises, establish a program that would provide up to three years of universal long term care for our aging population, and regulations to ban food additives and colorants in foods targeted to children that have already been banned in Europe, California and NYC.

We continued the discussion covering important topics like the delayed 5% increase in reimbursement rate approved in last year's budget to Early Intervention providers that has yet to be released and for which I've been advocating and will continue to advocate until the funding is released. We discussed in depth the need for tax relief and financial equity. One of the important conversation topics here centered around who is paying for the extensive cost of climate damage. The governor recently signed the Climate Superfund that will require the largest climate polluters to pay for the cost of climate adaptation to the climate change damage we have already experienced. For example, the cost of road, bridge, and culvert collapses, infrastructure damage due to flooding and fires, and superstorm damage to communities cost New York communities \$2.2 billion in 2023 alone. It is time that those who caused the damage participate in paying for it.

Despite 2.5 hours of an engaged conversation, we just scraped the surface of all the topics folks wanted to cover. I look forward to continuing these conversations in the new year!

Navigating Insurance Issues Event with Community Health Advocates and Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County



An intimate community conversation at the Tompkins County Public Library highlighting resources available to EVERYONE to navigate any insurance coverage issues at a joint town hall with Community Health Advocates and the Tompkins County Human Services Coalition.

On December 18th, I held a community conversation on navigating health insurance coverage issues in partnership with [Community Service Society of NY](#) (CSS) and the [Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County](#) (TCHSC). CSS has been contracted by New York State to provide the statewide [Community Health Advocates](#) (CHA) program to help New Yorkers navigate the complex health care system by providing individual assistance (including some legal), advocacy for New Yorkers with both the state and to insurance companies, and education to communities. CHA is an "all-payer" program, providing one-stop services to consumers with either public or private coverage, or no coverage at all. CHA helps consumers find and navigate health coverage or access low-cost or free care, solve billing issues, navigate the appeals process for denied health coverage, understand the impact of health care reforms and build fluency for individual and family in their health care rights. In 2010, New York State designated CHA as its Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program (CAP) under Section 1002 of the Affordable Care Act. CHA uses a "hub-and-spokes" model: CSS acts as the hub with its live, toll-free helpline, while Advocates at 22 Community Based-Organizations (CBOs) and 3 specialist agencies serve as the spokes. CHA provides services in more than 7 languages and has access to more than 170 languages through a translation service.

The [Human Services Coalition of Tompkins County \(TCHSC\)](#) serves as the CHA in our district. JD Drader (he/him), serves as the Health Access Coordinator for the TCHSC Consumer Assistance Program and can be reached directly at jdrader@hsctc.org.

To visit or contact the TCHSC directly:

LOCATION: 118 N. Tioga Street, Suite 304, Ithaca, NY 14850, in the Tioga Place Building on the Ithaca Commons above M&T Bank

PHONE: 607.273.8686

FAX: 607.273.3002

HOURS: Monday through Friday - 8:30 am – 5:00 pm

For more information about the CHA program and to access support virtually, you can visit www.communityhealthadvocates.org or call the helpline at 1-888-614-5400.

Our town hall covered a myriad of insurance issues being experienced by the constituents in attendance, and CHA and TCHSC offered tangible solutions and personalized assistance with each issue. I am deeply grateful to these organizations for their dedicated service to our community and for their participation in this event to offer direct assistance to members of the public. I hope to continue to offer learning sessions that assist members of the public in navigating insurance issues in the coming year, so if you missed this one, don't worry, there will be more to come!

To view the recording of the workshop, click [here](#).



My staff and I are always reading something, whether it's a bill draft, a white paper, a grant proposal, a report on our climate goals progress, a research study, or timely and topical articles. Given items and news you all have shared with me recently, I thought that some of what we have read during this new year period would be of interest so I have shared them here separated by local first followed by a few select pieces of state news.

1. [Gallery: The 2024 International Rutabaga Curl - The Ithaca Voice](#)
2. [Is EMS An Essential Service? | Tompkins County | ithaca.com](#)
3. [Should Ithaca's Board of Education Have a Vote When Granting Local Tax Abatements?](#)

4. [New culvert in Ulysses to reduce erosion, improve watershed connectivity – Tompkins Weekly](#)
5. [Flights between Ithaca Airport and Washington Dulles will resume in 2025 | 14850](#)
6. [Homer Winterfest to thaw winter blues - Cortland Standard](#)
7. [New York May Finally Put a Price on Pollution in 2025 | NY Focus](#)
8. [Superrich should pay their fair share in NYS taxes - Newsday](#)
9. [Criminal justice reform advocates start new push for sentencing reform - City & State New York](#)
10. [Governor Hochul Visits Marcy Correctional Facility Demanding Answers Following Death of Robert Brooks and Announces Immediate Corrective Actions](#)
11. [Governor Hochul Signs Bill to Ban CO2 Fracking, Make Polluters Pay for Climate Damage | City Limits](#)

Community Resources

Open Family Play - Winter'25

January, February, March and April

From Jan 6 to April 7 (closed on 01/20 & 02/17)

Monday Mornings, 9:30 - 11:30am

Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins

615 Willow Avenue, Ithaca



**Free Play Space
Parents & their children
0 - 4 years old**



Questions? Contact us at cce-parenting@cornell.edu or (607) 272 - 2292 ext.247

Open Family Play at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County

Cornell Cooperative Extension of Tompkins County Parent Education Program welcomes children aged 0-4 and their parents for Open Family Play, Mondays from 9:30am-11:30am, from January 6 - April 7, 2025. Open Family Play is a free play space for parents and their children, located at 615 Willow Ave, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Contact cce-parenting@cornell.edu or (607) 272-2292 for more information.

State Services and Programs for Your Home Energy Needs

- Colder weather often means rising energy costs. [New York's Home Energy Assistance Program \(HEAP\)](#) is available as a resource for families who may be struggling to keep up with extra costs. You can use this [link](#) to find out if you are eligible and apply for assistance.

- New York offers extensive benefits for installing energy-efficient utilities, including furnaces, heat pumps, thermostats, cooling systems, and more for low and middle-income families. [Check to see if you qualify and find a participating contractor.](#)

Wintertime Warming Center Services and Code Blue Emergency Shelter Regular Hours

Cortland:

The warming center at the Grace and Holy Spirit Church at Court Street is open from **11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday**. The Code Blue overnight shelter at The Salvation Army on South Main Street is open from **6:30 p.m. to 10:30 a.m. during the week, and 24 hours a day on weekends and holidays**.

Tompkins:

Tompkins County is operating a Code Blue warming center in a vacant County-owned building on 300 North Tioga St, Ithaca to shelter individuals experiencing homelessness under the Code Blue program for 2025. The building, formerly a bank branch, has been refurbished to allow for temporary use as an emergency congregate shelter.

During regular business hours (**8:00am-4:30pm, Monday-Friday**), anyone looking to access Code Blue shelter should first go to DSS (**320 W. MLK Jr. Street**) or call (607) 274-5348, to start the intake process. If unable to go to DSS first, please arrive at the Code Blue building (**300 N. Tioga St, Ithaca**) between the hours of **7:00pm-10:00pm** to complete an intake process.

The Code Blue building offers a warming center space **Monday-Friday, 4:00pm-7:00pm**. The Code Blue building's Emergency Shelter operates **Monday-Friday, 7:00pm-8:00am**. **The Code Blue building's warming center is open all day (24hrs) on weekends and holidays**. Clients may access both warming center services and Code Blue shelter.

When the facility is not operating, clients will be asked to utilize other community facilities for warmth, including the DSS/Human Services Building Lobby at 320 W. MLK Jr. Street (Ithaca).

For information about hot meals, warming centers and other needs or services, please dial 211 (or call toll-free at 877-211-8667) to speak with the 211 Tompkins/Cortland helpline.

To learn more about available emergency shelter during winter months (Code Blue), visit: <https://www.tompkinscountyny.gov/All-Departments/Social-Services/Emergency-Assistance>



Rural Teacher of the Year Award Applications Open

The Rural Schools Association of NY (RSANY) seeks to highlight the wonderful level of teaching in rural school districts. In selecting a NYS Rural Teacher of the Year, they hope to spotlight an exemplary rural teacher, to inspire others and help increase the awareness of the value rural education brings to its communities.

Award includes:

- \$1,000 Awarded to the teacher for their own classroom
- \$2,000 Awarded to the teacher to enhance the rural education program in their district

- Plaque given to the school district to proudly display
- Nomination to represent RSANY in the National Rural Teacher of the Year Program facilitated by the National Rural Education Association

Expenses for travel and overnight accommodations shall be covered. View the new [Rural Teacher of the Year webpage](#) for more information!

Submission deadline: **Friday, January 31, 2025**

ConnectALL Deployment Program Request for Applications Now Available

The ConnectALL Deployment Program Request for Applications is now available on the [ConnectALL website](#). **The application deadline is February 7, 2025, at 11:59PM ET.**

The ConnectALL Deployment Program, with funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)'s Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, will provide grants for broadband deployment to locations that do not currently have access to reliable, affordable, high-speed internet service. The Program will provide grant funding to eligible applicants to construct and install last-mile infrastructure, and/or communications equipment that can deliver broadband services to unserved and under-served locations.

Volunteer Tompkins Promotes Platform

Volunteer Tompkins, a program of [United Way of Tompkins County](#), is recruiting volunteers to view and utilize [Volunteer Tompkins](#), a page where you can create your volunteer profile and be matched with potential volunteer opportunities across the county. Additionally, if you are a non-profit organization in need of volunteers, reach out to rhinton@uwtc.org for information and resources.

Hospicare Bereavement Services & Ongoing Groups

Grieving Together: Online Ongoing General Support Group

This group meets the first and third Wednesday of every month via Zoom

Next meeting: Wednesday, January 15th, 2025

Time: 5:30 to 7:00 pm

This group is for anyone 18 years of age or older grieving a loss, regardless of when the death occurred. Open to residents of Tompkins and Cortland County. Registration is required. Please contact bereavement@hospicare.org or call Liz Wood at 607-272-0212. Login details will be provided after registration.

Grief Support: In-person Ongoing General Support Group

This group meets the third Thursday of every month.

Facilitator: Laura Ward, LMFT, FT


Next meeting: Thursday, January 16th, 2025

Time: 1:30 to 2:30 pm

Location: Lifelong, 119 W. Court Street, Ithaca, NY.

This group is for anyone 18 years of age or older grieving a loss, regardless of when the death occurred. Registration is required. Please contact bereavement@hospicare.org or call Liz Wood at 607-272-0212.

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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