



January 21, 2025

Dear Community,

Happy Martin Luther King day and I think, appropriately, week to you all. This weekend I went to the Greater Ithaca Activity Center's (GIAC) Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast and morning of workshops where Lt. Governor Antonio Delgado spoke ([see second half of his speech here](#)) and inspired the crowd, reminding us of the words of MLK. There was no sugar coating about the world that we are in and the challenges we face but a recognition of the value and need for decency in the face of adversity. There is something in this moment that I keep coming back to. We are all mortal and there is nothing we can take with us so who do we want to be when we look back at our lives? What do we want our legacies to be? In that image, love is a true commodity. In many ways the only true commodity. Not when it is easy but the journey of consciously holding it in the mind's eye when walking through every action of every day no matter how challenging. I look forward to working with you all from this mindset as we navigate the needs of all through 2025.

We are off and running in this year's legislative session. Our first day was Wednesday the 8th and this past week we had session both Monday and Tuesday ending with the Governor's State of the State address outlining her priorities for the legislative session to be presented in her executive budget that will be released this week, marking the official beginning of the budget season. I've outlined a few highlights of the State of the State and the NYS

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie's opening speech to this year's session in my summary below.

In good health,

Anna

From the Speaker



New York State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie's beginning of term address

After an Assembly vote electing Carl Heastie to once again take the mantle as the Speaker of the New York State Assembly, Mr. Heastie began our first official session with a speech recognizing the need to address the ever growing costs to families across New York and across the United States. We have addressed some of these rising costs with tax breaks, fully funding the foundation aid formula to fund our schools, increasing financial aid for higher education, increasing financial and capital support for housing, and increasing aid for healthcare in the state. The speaker continued with highlights of the actions and priorities we must take in this coming session to further address economic burdens to small businesses and farms, confront corporate corruption that has led to price gouging, continue to increase public safety, and preserve the robust diversity of New York. [Here is a link to his full statement.](#)



State of the State



Governor Kathy Hochul addresses the New York State Legislature and the public in her State of the State address

Last Tuesday afternoon the Governor addressed New Yorkers with her State of the State address. The highlights presented represent items the Governor intends to include in this session's executive budget to be released this week. This budget release will represent the starting point of what will be several months of negotiation. There are many needs in the state and, as a democracy, we rightly have many opinions of what to prioritize to best serve New York. In the end, we will end with a budget that will hopefully balance many different perspectives. Here are a few of the highlights that stood out that I believe resonate with the needs and priorities of our district:

- Universal school meals - our youth cannot reach their academic potential if they spend the day malnourished. We have been working in this direction and this may be the year that we finally fully fund breakfast and lunch in school so no child goes hungry.
- Childcare - an increase in the child tax credit to a maximum of \$1000/child 4-years-old and under and \$500/child for school-age children.
- Establish a pathway to universal childcare.
- \$110 million in capital funding for childcare centers.
- Unplug and play - funding to expand outdoor recreation for school children and establish more time and space for play.
- Mental first aid kits for kids in schools
- Making EMS an essential service
- An additional \$100 million to add to the previously allocated \$600 million for pro-housing communities to increase construction of affordable housing
- \$1 billion in capital dollars to fund the transition to zero emissions to meet our ambitious climate goals as established in law in 2019
- Tax cuts for the middle class though it is unclear exactly what this proposal will look like

I will be looking to see where revenue raisers are in the budget to fund these initiatives and in particular, I will be keeping an eye out for any proposed cuts to critical services. Any funding changes should be done in ways that increase income and wealth equality across the state rather than a decrease. There are also many needs that were not addressed in the State of the State but will certainly be addressed in the larger budget that ranges anywhere from 4,000 to 5,000 pages.

Legislative Update

My committee appointments

At the beginning of each legislative term, each member is officially assigned to committees, commissions, and taskforces. In my third term in office I have been assigned to the significant committees I have requested and that align with many of the priorities of our district including: Health, Higher Education, Environmental Conservation, Housing, Corrections, and Agriculture. For the first time I have been appointed as Co-Chair of the Bicameral [Legislative Commission on Rural Resources](#). [Here are prior actions of the commission](#). My co-chair Senator Rachel May and I put out our first public statement last week in response to language in the Governor's State of the State creating the Excelsior Broadband Network, to provide new middle mile infrastructure to improve high speed internet and cell service.



NYS LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL RESOURCES

Statement from Chairs Senator Rachel May & Assembly Member Dr. Anna Kelles

As co-chairs of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, we are thrilled to see Governor Hochul's proposal to establish the Excelsior Broadband Network, a statewide public broadband network that will provide improved high speed internet and reliable cellular service for many upstate residents, especially in rural areas. Over the last few years, we have led the fight to make New York a leader in innovation through public broadband. The legal infrastructure is in place, and, thanks to the efforts of President Biden, the physical infrastructure is well on its way to serving communities across the Empire State. The Excelsior Broadband Network is another step in the right direction of treating internet access as what it really is: a necessity of modern life. A public broadband network that can be tailored to and by local communities will fill the gaps in coverage that profit-minded incumbent providers simply will not serve. We look forward to working with the Governor, the ConnectALL program, and our colleagues in the legislature to make this proposal a reality.

The New York State Legislative Calendar for 2025

For those who want to keep track of the days that we will be in session this year here is the [2025 NYS Legislative Calendar](#). You will see that the two most active months are March and May. This is because the first half of the session is focused heavily on the budget which is officially due by midnight on March 31st. In the calendar you will see that some flexibility has been created into the calendar with session days in the first two weeks in April in case the budget negotiations continue after the March 31st deadline. We have two weeks where legislators are back in district to regroup and prepare for the post-budget policy portion of the session cycle. The calendar ramps back up in May as we wind towards the final days of session in the beginning of June.



The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) launches their 2025 legislative priorities

Last Monday, January 13th, I joined the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), a member organization representing almost 200 immigrants rights organizations across New York, and over a dozen of my Assembly and Senate colleagues at a press conference. We advocated for the following package of legislation this session to ensure equal protections for all NYers including the immigrant community that is and always has been a fundamental part of what makes New York, New York. Unlike the rhetoric at the national level, I made the point during my speech to highlight the fact that the immigrant community across the United States pays almost a trillion dollars in taxes at the state and federal level, a truth that many leave out when criticizing immigrant populations.

They pay taxes but are rarely afforded full access to the services that their taxes fund. They are also integral to the economic integrity of our state both in rural and urban areas. In the current political climate immigrants are painted as unlawful or even criminal but I believe in truth and data. As I pointed out in my remarks, [According to Jacob Stowell](#), an associate professor of criminology and criminal justice at Northeastern University, “In most cases, immigrants not only don't increase crime in communities, their presence decreases crime. The relationship between crime and immigrants is near universal across the country. In communities with more immigrants, crime rates, specifically homicide rates, are lower.” [According to the Migration Policy Institute](#), a research think tank, some research suggests that, “unauthorized immigrants are less likely to commit crimes because they are aware of a “constant threat of deportation” and have more to lose than other groups if they violate the law. This in turn may result in lower crime rates in U.S. communities.” It is important that the conversation around our immigrant population as we move into 2025, is based on facts and data and that we recognize that fair laws for all will further increase public safety in all of our NY communities. Here is a link to part of my speech.

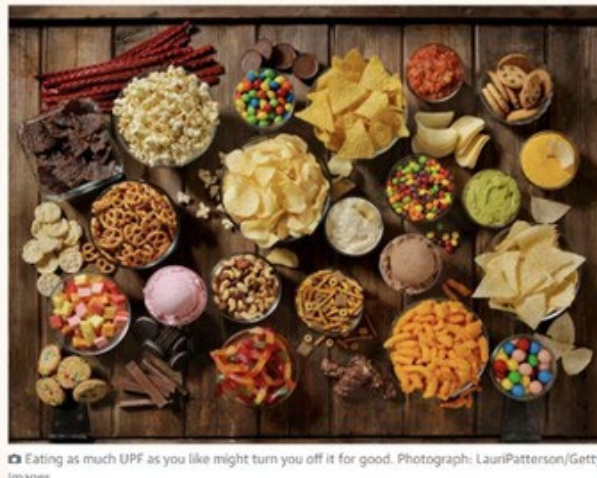
Here are the bills that were advocated for at the press rally:

- [Access To Representation Act](#) (S999A/A170A)
- [Language Access](#) (S3381A/A7235)
- [New York for All](#) (S987/A5686)
- [Working Families Tax Credit](#) (S277A/A4022)

This NYIC press conference followed on the heels of a prior press conference that took place the previous week hosted by the Immigrant Defense Project where additional legislation was highlighted in addition to the Access to Representation Act and the New York for All Act. They also highlighted the need to pass the [Dignity Not Detention Act](#) (Salazar/Reyes): to end ICE

contracts with local jails, reuniting people with their families and communities while also enabling them to more capably stand up for themselves in the justice system in the face of possible deportation, as well as the [Clemency Justice Act](#) (Myrie/Solages) to streamline the clemency process and make it more transparent and accessible.

Protecting NY consumers from harmful chemicals in food



New York Food Chemical Safety Act (A1556/S1239)

Fighting to remove known toxins from our foods

This past Wednesday the 15th, I was joined by my cosponsor Senator Kavanagh, as well as the [Center for Science in the Public Interest \(CSPI\)](#), the [Environmental Working Group \(EWG\)](#), Consumer Reports, and Dr. Vanessa Salcedo, a NY-based Pediatrician for a legislative briefing to present our bill ([A1556/S1239](#)). This legislation protects New Yorkers from three of the most pervasive and harmful food additives by prohibiting the manufacture or sale of food containing any of the following: red dye 3 (linked to cancer and behavioral problems in children),

potassium bromate (linked to cancer) and propylparabens (linked to hormone and reproductive system harm). This bill is similar to the California Food Safety Act, enacted in 2023. The European Union (EU) already prohibits the sale of food containing the substances prohibited under this bill. The bill also bans the use of 6 different food colorants in foods sold in schools that have already been banned in California, the EU, and in the New York City school system.

At the same time, New Yorkers deserve to know what they are consuming. Currently, under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, Generally Recognized As Safe, or GRAS, allows for any substance that is intentionally added to food as a food additive, that is subject to premarket review and approval by the FDA, unless the substance is "generally recognized", among qualified experts, as having been adequately shown to be safe under conditions of its use. Under this current definition, companies that don't have the consumer's best interests in mind are not required to disclose to the FDA whether their product contains a chemical that is safe for consumption or not. These chemicals can pose serious health risks to the consumer. This legislation allows New Yorkers to know what they are consuming and make health conscious decisions as consumers by requiring that companies who currently keep their GRAS confidential to report these ingredients to the NYS Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture and Markets and requires the Commissioner to make this information publicly available. [Here is a link to the powerpoint slides](#) used for this legislative briefing to learn more about the bill.

Adding credence to the importance and validity of this legislation, after 30 years of fighting to remove the toxic red dye #3 from our food supply in the United States, the FDA announced a ban on this food additive literally the morning of the legislative briefing.

Here is a [press release](#) I put out with Senator Kavanagh applauding this ban decision by the FDA.



A proven plan to increase access to long term care

On Friday, January 17th, My colleague Senator Shelley Mayer and I hosted a legislative briefing in partnership with the [Association on Aging in New York](#), the [Caring Majority Rising](#), and Dr. Benjamin Veghte, Director of the Washington State [WA Cares Fund](#) in the State Department of Social & Health Services.

Bill background: The New York State Department of Health estimates that by 2030, more than 5.3 million New Yorkers will be over the age of 60. 70% of adults will need some long term care after age 65, with a disproportionate number being older African-American and Hispanic adults who are more likely than white adults to have functional impairments. Contrary to what many believe, the federal Medicare program provides for time-limited rehabilitative care but does not pay for long term care. To qualify for long term care through the Medicaid program, New Yorkers

must fully deplete income or assets and may be left with very little to live on.

The U.S. Treasury-led Federal Interagency Task Force on Long-Term Care Insurance reported that, of the approximately \$217 billion spent on long term care in the United States in 2018, 70% (\$159.1 billion) was paid by Medicaid, 25% (\$55 billion) was out-of-pocket spending, and only 4.5% (\$10.3 billion) was paid by private long term care insurance, which is becoming progressively less affordable and covers less and less of actual care. Notably, those numbers do not account for care provided by loved ones which is Unpaid. In 2021 alone, 2.2 million people in New York provided unpaid care to older adults valued at \$39 billion (an \$8 billion increase in unpaid contributions since 2019 and is expected to continue growing as the percentage of New Yorkers over 60 years-old continues to grow). Caregivers provide 30 hours of uncompensated care on average per week. 67% of caregivers struggle to balance work and unpaid caregiving responsibilities while 16% have stopped working altogether because of caregiving responsibilities. Family caregivers have higher rates of depressive symptoms, anxiety, stress, and emotional difficulties as well as lower self-ratings of physical health, elevated levels of stress hormones, higher rates of chronic disease, and impaired health behaviors.

We must change our approach if we are to ensure that New Yorkers get the care they need and are not forced to impoverish themselves in order to receive it. The New York Long Term Care Trust Program as created by this bill, follows a successful model established in Washington State in 2019 and has existed for decades in countries in Europe. It will provide universal long term care benefits at an initial rate of \$200 per day for a lifetime limit of 365 days worth of benefits, funded by a modest payroll tax. The comprehensive benefits are balanced by a prudent fiscal approach: the premium is expected to be very small (in

Washington State, it amounted to 58 cents out of every 100 dollars in wages) and individuals qualify after they meet the minimum investment in the system and if they meet the need requirements. Such an approach delivers a significant benefit when it is needed, without imposing an unreasonable burden on working New Yorkers; leaves room for private long term care insurance to offer policies that can supplement this benefit for those who choose to purchase extra protection; and will result in savings to the state through reduced spending on Medicaid. The bill also contains provisions establishing wage protections for long term care workers. [Here is a link to the powerpoint slides](#) used in this member briefing to learn more about the bill.

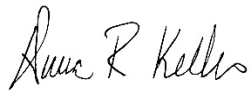
Anna in the News

In the final weeks of 2024 the governor signed a bill that I championed with Senator Lea Webb to expand the fracking ban in NY to include a ban on the use of super critical carbon dioxide as a medium for the oil and gas extraction. [Here is a January related article in the Ithaca Voice](#) for a summary.

In the Governor's State of the State address she highlighted that more people in prison should be eligible to reduce their sentences through good behavior and expanded job training — especially in emerging green energy fields. Although not directly mentioned, this speaks to the need to pass the Earned Time Act, a bill that I champion in the NY Assembly with my Senate counterpart Senator Jeremy Cooney and will be advocating to pass in this legislative session. The Earned Time Act 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 individuals incarcerated as well as against corrections officers decreases. Many states use this incentive extensively and have not only seen these drops in violence but have also seen significant drops in recidivism rates, decreasing overall crime and improving public safety. You can watch a recent interview I did with [Spectrum News 1](#) and read a summary article [here](#).

In good health,



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