



Dear Neighbors,

February always goes by at a whirlwind pace in the Legislature, as Members meet with constituents and advocates, attend public hearings, and finalize the priority items they would like to see included in the State Budget. This process will culminate in the Assembly and the Senate each creating a “One House” budget, which we will debate with the Governor until an agreement is reached in the form of the final State Budget, in April.

In other important and time sensitive news: the Building Code Council will hold a public hearing this morning, **at 10:00 AM** to discuss the long overdue draft codes to implement the All-Electric Building Act for new construction, which is statutorily required to take effect by December 31, 2025. The hearing will most likely go throughout the morning and into the early afternoon if you would like to jump in and participate. I will be joining to share the points below.

In July of last year after many months of advocacy the council released a draft code that outlined a strong commitment to the intent of the act. Given both the seamless rollout of an all-electric new construction requirement in NYC over the last few years combined with studies showing cost savings of all-electric construction in NY, there is no reason not to move forward as the law is intended. However recent statements by the governor suggest that the council may present a rollback of the draft code at this next council meeting.

This meeting will be an opportunity to advocate for maintaining the timeline set by the All-Electric Building Act and ensuring that energy efficiency standards continue to improve as outlined in the **Advanced Building Codes and Standards Act**. [Click here to register to speak at the hearing.](#)

Here are key code provisions outlined in the [draft building code released in July 2024](#) that would ensure strong implementation of the law for newly constructed buildings including:

- Banning fossil fuel combustion equipment,
- Higher energy efficiency requirements for walls, roofs and basements,
- Requirements for onsite renewable energy generation,
- Demand response controls for water heating,
- Efficiency standards for exterior lighting,
- Automatic shut-off controls for exterior lighting during daylight,

- Manual dimmer or automatic shut-off requirements for habitable spaces,
- Limits on the use of inefficient electric resistance heating,
- Increased minimum efficiency requirements for appliances,
- Higher efficiency requirements for elevators and escalators
- Electric readiness requirements for water heaters, clothes dryers and cooking appliances,
- Updated standards for the Energy Rating Index,

For more background information on the building code process, read [this NY Focus article](#) and listen to this [Capitol Pressroom report](#) from July 2024.

State Budget

Each year the Governor puts out 30-Day Amendments, which are changes to her initial budget proposal. [These were released this past Friday](#). Over the next few weeks, my team and I will continue to meet with people from within our District and across the State to discuss the needs and challenges faced by our constituents and neighbors.

The Public Budget Hearings Season Continues

This week, the Senate and Assembly held joint budget hearings on Health, Public Protections, and Human Services. Below are the summaries from the hearings I participated in, as well as a link to the Human Services hearing, which I did not attend as I am not on the relevant committees.

Tuesday, February 11: Health

[Link to full hearing](#). I questioned witnesses on changes to Medicaid's care management and payment systems, particularly regarding the **Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP)**. This program allows individuals to hire a caregiver of their choice to provide home care services, keeping them out of nursing homes. I raised concerns about recent changes to CDPAP that could potentially disrupt access to care for people who rely on it. There are serious concerns about the transition to a single statewide fiscal intermediary of over 240,000 recipients and 350,000 providers by April 1st. At the time of the budget hearing less than 60,000 recipients had been registered into the new system. There are 4 weeks left to register the remaining

people through the extensive process with no comprehensive list of who the current recipients or caregivers are nor where they are. I'm working with local service providers to continue our advocacy for this vulnerable population and the caregivers who assist them. I also asked to clarify their efforts to remove fiscal intermediaries that have previously misused Medicaid funds. Additionally, I addressed funding for food banks and pantries and the availability of healthier food options.

Speaking with the final panel of witnesses for the day, I discussed the vast protections and safeguards that make the [Medical Aid in Dying Act](#) a compassionate, responsible option for end-of-life care. In addition, I questioned them about initiatives to set up overdose prevention centers, which are shown to reduce both overdose deaths and the spread of diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

Thursday, February 13: Public Protection

[Link to full hearing.](#) During the 11-hour budget hearing on Public Protection, **Robert Ricks, the father of Robert Brooks** gave a testimony that was profoundly moving. He answered questions from people throughout the period that panel E was testifying. His answer inspired this quote from me, "I just wanted to say thank you also for coming to do this work right after your son was murdered. It takes tremendous self awareness and commitment and love for humanity and I wanted to thank you for that. It shows that you still have faith and hope in us. I hope we don't disappoint that." His response, "I hope so too."

I questioned Chief Administrative Judge Joseph Zayas of the New York State Office of Court Administration about the important role of **environmental courts**. There are not enough environmental courts because of a lack of funding and representation throughout the state preventing us from effectively enforcing our environmental laws. I also discussed, both with Judge Zara's and Alice Fontier, Esq from the Legal Aid Society, the data that is being used to justify rolling back the hard fought **discovery reforms** that enabled defense attorneys to have access to evidence. DCJS data shows an increase in dismissal rates and that is being used to justify the rollback but it includes all dismissals including those dismissed for a lack of evidence necessary to pursue charges by DAs and by juries. Because the OCA data only outlines dismissals of speedy trial felony cases any dismissals would in fact be due to a failure to turn over evidence on the part of the DA. This data shows no significant increase from before to after the discovery reform was enacted. I questioned Robert H. Tembeckjian, Administrator & Counsel, New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct whether or not it would or could be considered an **ethics violation by judges** for repeatedly releasing defendants on their own recognizance to wait trial without setting bail even when the cases are bail eligible. This would certainly give bail reform a bad name.

Wednesday, February 12: Human Services

[Link to the full hearing.](#) The Human Services budget hearing covers a broad range of issues including services for our seniors, services for children and adults with

disabilities, veterans, survivors of domestic violence and many more. I've communicated my support for increased funding for these vital services and will continue to advocate for increases to be included in the final budget.

Legislative Update

Food Safety and Chemical Disclosure Act

After over 30 years of advocacy, the FDA finally banned Red dye #3. We need to do more to protect our food. I'm working on a bill to further advance food safety, the Food Safety and Chemical Disclosure Act, which I sponsor along with Senator Brian Kavanagh. The bill prohibits certain food additives and food color additives and provides that in an action to enforce compliance, the recognition by the Federal Food and Drug Administration of any of these substances as "safe" may not be alleged as a defense. The bill also establishes requirements for the reporting of GRAS (generally recognized as safe) substances. If you would like to learn more about how to advocate to protect your loved ones, **join me and the Center for Science in the Public Interest on March 3rd at 10:45 am-11:15 am** for a discussion about the bill. [Register here.](#)

Advocacy Day for the Compassion and Reproductive Equity (CARE) Act



On February 11th, I participated in Lobby Day to support The [Compassion and Reproductive Equity \(CARE\) Act](#) which ensures incarcerated pregnant, postpartum individuals and their babies have access to comprehensive prenatal, perinatal, and postpartum healthcare based on medical and scientific best practices. Denying this care harms both mothers and babies. [Read the press release here.](#)

Federal Action

The Speaker's office briefed legislators on the risks of federal cuts to critical services including education, health and social services, housing, transportation, the environment and energy. These cuts are already resulting in job hiring freezes, job losses and funding reductions for our state. The total potential loss to the New York

State budget could be \$85 billion dollars. We are tracking every action carefully as are the Executive and Judicial branches, Attorney General and Comptroller offices.

Launch of Indivisible Tompkins

I was honored to be a part of the launch of **Indivisible Tompkins**, a local chapter of the nationwide [Indivisible movement](#). This grassroots organization is dedicated to preserving democracy and fighting for the well being of all residents of the United States. The event was a huge success thanks to the incredible organizers with a packed house of over 350 people in person and over 500 people tuning in virtually! It's clear that there is a strong local commitment to standing firm against divisive policies. So much was left unsaid and there is so much more to do but we are just getting started! You can see the entire 2-hour launch event [here](#) covered by ICTV and my comments [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).



Anna in the News



Indivisible Rally

I recently spoke at a rally in Ithaca, where we pushed back against the harmful Trump administration policies impacting our community. These policies, which include aggressive immigration tactics and sweeping federal budget cuts, are already being felt in our community. Our immigrant population is part of our community. They work here, raise families here, and pay taxes. In fact immigrants in the US pay almost \$1 trillion in taxes every year to help fund our governments. Research consistently shows that communities with large immigrant populations are safer with less crime, even undocumented immigrants. We need to counter the lies with truth every step of the way. If we don't we will be complicit as a dictatorship is formed. If we want to arm ourselves and be prepared to fight back let's get community study groups together to learn the rules of the game. Let's read the constitution and understand the fabric of our country. Let's read the president's roadmap that he is rolling out called Project 2025 so we know what to prepare for. We are stronger together. [Read this Ithaca Voice article for more on the event.](#)

Responding to the DOJ on Immigration

Last month, Tompkins County became a focal point in the Trump administration's push for localities to cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. Sheriff Derek Osborne released an undocumented immigrant after he served his sentence, but ICE requested he hold the individual for deportation. The Department of Justice has launched an investigation into the sheriff's actions, threatening prosecution. However, experts, including Cornell Law's Estelle McKee, agree that Osborne followed local and state policies, which do not require cooperation with ICE.

As I shared in the media, Tompkins County has long been committed to sanctuary policies that protect community safety and dignity. We will not use local resources for immigration enforcement, as our policies prioritize human rights. I'm proud of our community's support for these values, including the recent reaffirmation of Ithaca's sanctuary status by the City Council. To read more, [click here](#).

Supporting Food Security in Cortland County



I recently participated in the inaugural Kiss the Calf Fundraiser hosted by [Seven Valleys Health Coalition](#) (SVHC) and Fouts Farm inaugural Kiss the Calf Fundraiser to support efforts addressing food insecurity in Cortland County. SVHC's Food Systems program, which includes the Seven Valleys Food Rescue initiative, rescues still-edible food from

local businesses, grocery stores, and farmers to distribute to local food pantries and shelters. The program directly supports over 45 local New York farms, investing more than \$180,000, with nine farms located in Cortland County. Notably, SVHC's work is entirely funded by grants, donations, and philanthropic efforts, ensuring that healthy, fresh, locally-sourced food reaches those in need in our community.

Advocating for Tobacco-Free Policies



Pictured here is Rose Walsh, Rebecca Main, Julian Genson (age 17), Caleb Hamilton (age 16), and Lillianna Fitch (age 14) from the Tobacco Free Zone (TFZ) delegation I had the pleasure of meeting recently in Albany. The TFZ is the result of a New York State Department of Health's Bureau of Tobacco Control grant to the Cortland County Health Department. This grant covers Cortland, Tompkins and Chenango Counties. Their work focuses on promoting tobacco-free policies and reducing the impact of tobacco use through community engagement and youth action. Their goals include reducing retail tobacco marketing's influence on youth, increasing tobacco-free public spaces and smoke-free housing, and minimizing tobacco imagery in films and other media. TFZ is dedicated to improving health outcomes by addressing the social and economic burdens caused by tobacco use. You can learn more about their work [here](#).



Working on Sustainable Heating Solutions for Enfield

If you are going to hang with hard working dedicated firefighters you better be willing to walk in their “jacket” for a moment! I walked away deeply inspired by the 50+ volunteers at the Enfield fire station - the place was bustling with life, people fixing gear, working on tricks, cleaning equipment, and general lending a helping hand to each other. I could tell I was in the midst of a family. Thank you to the team for the warm welcome!

During my tour of the station, we discussed the upcoming project to replace the aging heating system and the possibility of installing a networked geothermal system with surrounding town government buildings, which, although more expensive initially, could save the community tens of thousands of dollars annually. This project offers an exciting chance to improve heating while reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving money!

The Public Employees Federation Conference



I attended the Public Employees Federation (PEF) Leadership Conference at Cornell University's Statler Hotel where I had the opportunity to meet with union leaders from 28 counties across the state. It was a fantastic chance to connect with dedicated individuals who are working hard to advocate for their fellow public employees and their communities. There were members attending from across the New York State government agencies, from the [Department of Labor](#) to the [Department of Health](#), the [Office for People with Developmental Disabilities](#), the [Office of Mental Health](#) and the [Office for the Aging](#). I spoke briefly to the crowd about the need to [fix the Tier VI pension system](#) that most state employees are in and for the need to match public wages with the private sector so that we don't continue to see a drain of the workforce because of a lack of a living wage. These are critical jobs taking care of our aging population, those with disabilities, our children, youth in the system of corrections, victims of domestic violence trying to rebuild their lives, those who are unhoused or looking for a work, and more. Without them our society would stop functioning. I'm always inspired by the commitment of these leaders and look forward to working together to continue strengthening the vital work they do.

Fractivists gather to celebrate



Community Resources

Tompkins County Community Health Survey

Tompkins County is currently collecting data about the health of our community through the Community Health Survey which can be found [here](#). If you have yet to complete, we encourage you to do so before the end of the week. This information is important to them as they set the priorities for their community health improvement plan for Tompkins County.

In good health,

Aimee R. Keller

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