



Assemblymember

Anna Kelles

Assembly District 125



Dear neighbors,

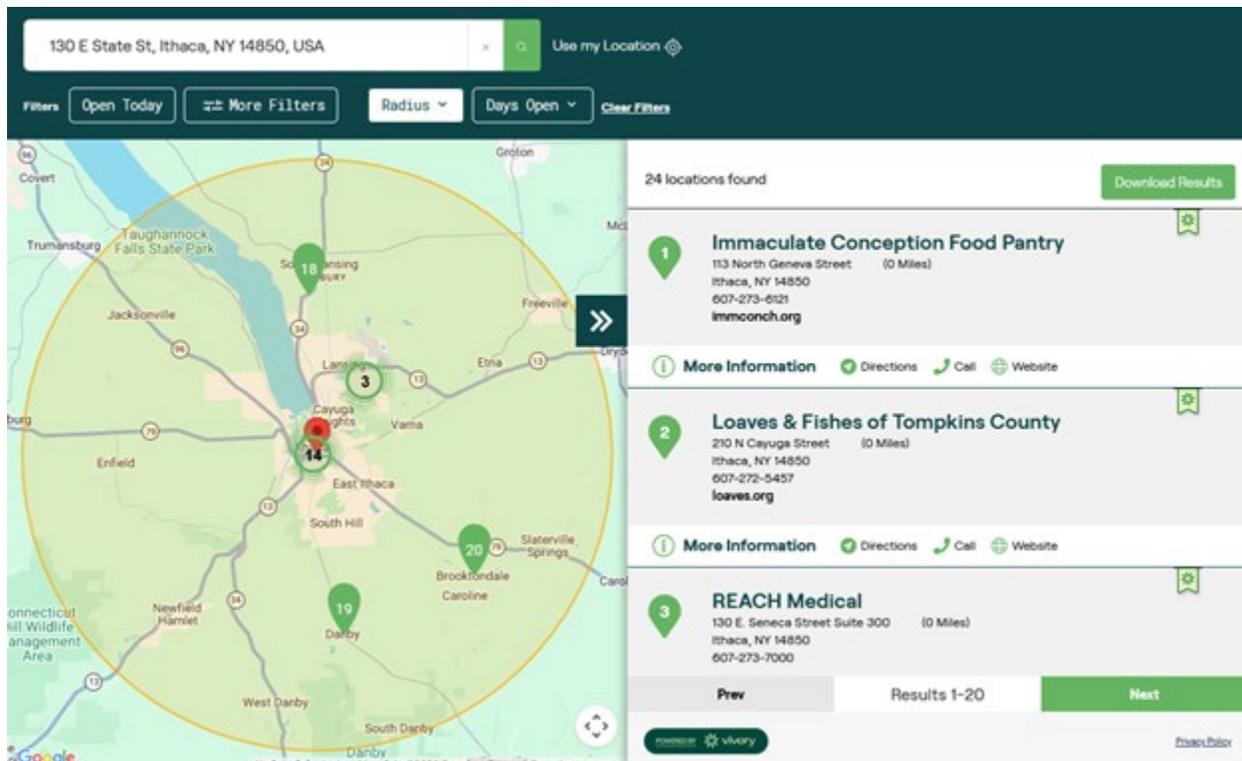
After sharing a Community Resources newsletter last month, I heard from many of you that it was useful, and I also received messages with additional resources worth sharing more widely. This follow-up newsletter highlights those community-recommended tools and supports.



Community Resources

[Finding Food Assistance Using the Foodbank of the Southern Tier Map](#)

In addition to its food assistance programs, the Foodbank of the Southern Tier offers an online “Find Food” map to help residents locate free groceries and meal sites near them. By entering an address or ZIP code, users can find nearby food pantries, community meal sites, shelters, and mobile food distributions across the Southern Tier. The map allows users to filter results by day, including locations that are open today, and by type of service, such as food pantries, community meals, or mobile pantries. Users can also download a printable list of search results for easy reference.



[Tax Filing Assistance Through VITA](#)

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) is a free tax preparation support program that helps eligible residents file their federal and New York State income tax returns at no cost, with the help of IRS-certified volunteers. VITA primarily serves individuals and families with low to moderate incomes, people with disabilities, and taxpayers with limited English proficiency, helping them access important tax credits and refunds without paying commercial tax preparation fees. Eligibility is based on total household income for the tax return being filed, not the number of earners, and income limits may vary by location. Because local guidelines differ, individuals should check with their nearest VITA site to confirm eligibility and appointment availability. To find the nearest VITA location to you click the link to use [the VITA locator](#) or call 800-906-9887.

VITA Appointment Locations

- Tompkins County Public Library Computer Lab - 101 E. Green St, Ithaca, NY
- Access to Independence - 26 North Street, Cortland, NY
- Cortland Presbyterian Church - 25 Church Street, Cortland, NY
- [Cortland Chenango Rural Services](#) - 2702 Lower Cincinnatus Road, Cincinnatus, NY
- McGraw Library - 5 Main Street, McGraw, NY
- Tully Library - 12 State Street, Tully, NY
- Cortland YWCA - 14 Clayton Avenue, Cortland, NY
- [Cortland County Office for the Aging](#) - 165 Main St, Cortland, NY

[Click here](#) for a list of documents to take to the VITA site for your appointment to do your taxes for free.



[The Alternate Eligibility Pathway: Protecting Family Privacy While Applying for Student Financial Aid](#)

The Alternate Eligibility Pathway is an option for students who are U.S. citizens or eligible non-citizens, but who have at least one required FAFSA contributor, such as a parent or spouse, who is not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. New York State recognizes that students in this situation may have concerns about sharing sensitive personal information when completing the FAFSA. To address these concerns, the state created an alternate way for students to apply for state-funded

financial aid that is secure, accessible, and designed to protect family privacy while still ensuring students can receive needed support.

While the Alternate Eligibility Pathway was created to protect sensitive personal information and give students a safer option for applying, choosing this pathway does limit eligibility for certain forms of aid. Students who apply through the Alternate Eligibility Pathway may qualify for many New York State grants and scholarships, but they are not eligible for the Excelsior Scholarship or the Enhanced Tuition Award. In addition, students who choose this pathway instead of completing the FAFSA will not be eligible for federal financial aid, including Pell Grants, federal Work-Study, or federal student loans. This pathway is not a financial aid program itself, but an alternative way for eligible students to apply for New York State financial aid without completing the FAFSA. To apply [click this link](#).

[State Financial Aid for College, New York's Tuition Assistance Program \(TAP\) Is Open for Applications](#)

The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) helps eligible New York State students pay for college tuition. TAP is a state scholarship, not a loan, and does not need to be paid back. Both prospective and current students should apply if they want to receive funding.

Eligible students can receive up to \$5,665 per year and must apply each year to continue receiving TAP. The application is open now. Students using the FAFSA must complete the FAFSA first, followed by the TAP application. Students applying under the NYS DREAM Act do not complete the FAFSA and instead apply through the DREAM Act application.

For those who want more detail, I've put together a complete TAP guide covering eligibility, deadlines, and how to apply, [available here](#).



UTILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)

HEAP helps income-eligible New Yorkers pay the cost of heating their homes during the winter. HEAP provides financial assistance that is applied directly to household heating costs, helping reduce the amount a household owes to keep their home warm.

HEAP can help households that heat their homes using electricity, natural gas, oil, coal, propane, wood or wood pellets, kerosene, or other deliverable fuels. **The regular HEAP application period typically opens in early to mid-November and continues through the winter until program funding is exhausted.**

HEAP assistance is applied directly to heating costs. For households that heat with electricity or natural gas, the benefit is paid directly to the utility company and appears as a credit on the household's bill, reducing what the household owes. For households that heat with oil, propane, wood, pellets, coal, or other deliverable fuels, the benefit is paid directly to the fuel vendor to reduce the cost of a fuel delivery.

A household may receive one regular HEAP benefit per winter, even if the home uses more than one heating source. The benefit is applied to the household's primary heating source, as determined during the application process.

2025–2026 Regular HEAP Benefit Amounts:

Eligible households living in government-subsidized housing or group home settings with heat included in rent

Base benefit: \$21

Eligible households with heating costs included as part of rent

Base benefit: \$45 or \$50

Eligible households that pay a vendor directly for oil, kerosene, or propane

Base benefit: \$900 plus applicable add-ons*

Eligible households that pay a vendor directly for wood, wood pellets, coal, corn, or other deliverable fuels

Base benefit: \$635 plus applicable add-ons*

Eligible households that pay a utility directly for electricity or natural gas, based on actual usage

Base benefit: \$400 plus applicable add-ons*

***Applicable add-ons** refer to additional amounts added to the base HEAP benefit based on household size, heating type, and whether the household includes vulnerable members, and are automatically calculated during the application process.

Emergency HEAP

Emergency HEAP assistance is available when a household faces an immediate risk to health or safety related to heating, such as running out of fuel or having utility service shut off. Emergency HEAP may be available in addition to a regular HEAP benefit and is intended to address urgent heating crises. Emergency HEAP is accessed through local social services departments.

Tompkins County DSS:

320 W State St

Ithaca, NY 14850

Phone: (607) 274-5680

For HEAP specific questions (including emergencies), you can contact the Tompkins HEAP unit directly at (607) 274-5264.

Cortland County DSS:

60 Central Avenue

Cortland, NY 13045

General DSS phone: (607) 753-5303

HEAP line: (607) 428-5400

Or call the **Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) Hotline** Monday-Friday 9:00AM-5:00PM (800)342-3009

Energy Affordability Program (EAP)

The Energy Affordability Program (EAP) provides ongoing monthly discounts to help income-eligible households make their electric and or natural gas utility bills more affordable. Unlike HEAP, which provides seasonal help with heating costs, EAP lowers utility bills month after month through credits applied directly to the bill.

Many households are automatically enrolled in EAP if they receive HEAP. In addition to households that receive HEAP, households receiving certain other income-based public benefits, such as food assistance, cash assistance, Supplemental Security Income, or Safety Net Assistance, may also qualify for the Energy Affordability Program, with enrollment handled by the utility. In some circumstances and service areas, households receiving Medicaid, veterans disability benefits, or other income-based state or local assistance may also qualify, depending on utility rules and household income.

Households that believe they qualify but are not automatically enrolled, or that want to confirm enrollment, should contact their electric or natural gas utility directly. Utilities can provide information about eligibility, monthly discount amounts, and enrollment procedures. For further information [download this fact sheet](#).

Most residents in Tompkins and Cortland Counties are served by New York State Electric & Gas (NYSEG). Some areas may be served by National Grid, particularly for natural gas. NYSEG or National Grid can confirm enrollment in EAP, explain monthly discount amounts, and help determine whether you need to apply.

If your utility is NYSEG:

Phone: 800-572-1111

Email: NYSEGEnergyAssistanceProgramMailbox@nyseg.com

Mail:

NYSEG Energy Assistance Program

P.O. Box 5240

Binghamton, NY 13902-5240

[Here is a link to the NYSEG EAP application](#) that you can download and fill out and either email or mail to your utility company.

If your utility is National Grid:

Phone: 718-403-2216

Email: EAPNY@nationalgrid.com

Mail: Attn: Energy Affordability Program

300 Erie Blvd. W. C-3

Syracuse, NY 13202

You can complete the [National Grid EAP application](#) directly online on the National Grid website.

Enhanced Energy Affordability Program (EEAP)

The new EEAP (as of January 13, 2026) expands access to monthly utility bill discounts for households that do not qualify for traditional EAP but still have incomes below program limits.

To qualify, a household must have an active residential electric or natural gas account with a participating New York utility and meet income limits that vary by household size and location. Applicants must provide documentation showing total household income for the most recent month for all household members.

Households cannot be enrolled in both EAP and EEAP at the same time. If a household is already enrolled in EAP, it does not need to apply for EEAP.

EEAP is administered through a statewide program and is separate from utility-run assistance programs. Applications, eligibility determinations, document submission, and support are handled centrally through the program administrator, not through individual utility companies, even though the monthly discount ultimately appears on a household's electric or natural gas bill. Households applying for EEAP should use the statewide EEAP application and support channels, regardless of which utility company they use.

Applications can be completed online, and applicants may upload electronic files or clear photos of required documents. Additional documentation can be added after submission if requested. Help with the application process is available by phone or email.

For EEAP applications and support:

Phone: (877)400-2501

Email: nyeeap@clearesult.com

Online application: nyeeap.com

Which program applies to you?

- If you need help paying for winter heating costs, apply for HEAP.
- If you want ongoing monthly discounts on your electric or natural gas bill and already receive HEAP or other qualifying benefits, you may be eligible for EAP.
- If you do not qualify for EAP but your household income is still below program limits, you may qualify for EEAP.
- If you are unsure which program applies to you, your utility can help confirm eligibility.



[Help Paying for Child Care, What to Know About the Child Care Assistance Program \(CCAP\)](#)

The CCAP helps eligible families pay for child care so parents and caregivers can work, attend school or job training, or meet other approved activity requirements. CCAP can significantly reduce the cost of child care, and in some cases may cover the full cost, depending on a family's income and circumstances.

CCAP is administered locally by each county's [Local Social Services District \(LSSD\)](#) and overseen statewide by the New York State [Office of Children and Family Services \(OCFS\)](#). The program is available to families receiving [Temporary Assistance \(TA\)](#) as well as other low-income working families who meet eligibility requirements.

Families must meet income and eligibility guidelines to qualify for child care at low or no cost through CCAP. Eligibility varies based on factors such as household income, family size, and the reason child care is needed. Families can review [eligibility requirements](#) and application guidance, including video tutorials and step-by-step resources, before applying.

The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) is funded through a combination of state and federal dollars that are allocated to counties, and because the program is administered locally, each county has a limited pool of funding for the year. As a result, availability can vary by county and over time. Some counties are able to serve all eligible families year-round, while others may reach their funding limit before the end of the year, particularly when demand is high. When funding is limited, counties may establish a waitlist, temporarily pause new applications, or prioritize certain families, such as those receiving Temporary Assistance, families experiencing homelessness, or families already enrolled in CCAP. Families who are already receiving assistance are often prioritized for continued coverage, and funding availability may change during the year if additional state or federal funds are released.

[Click here](#) for information on how to apply that I have compiled.



Help Paying for Food, The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP helps eligible individuals and families afford groceries and put healthy food on the table. SNAP provides monthly benefits that can be used like cash to purchase food, and it serves low-income working households, seniors, people with disabilities, and others who meet eligibility requirements.

SNAP benefits are provided through an [Electronic Benefits Transfer \(EBT\) card](#), which works like a debit card at authorized grocery stores and food retailers. If you are approved, an EBT account is set up for you and your SNAP benefits are deposited into that account each month. Benefits can be used at participating supermarkets, local grocery stores, and some farmers markets.

Who Should Consider Applying for SNAP

Many people who qualify for SNAP do not realize they are eligible. SNAP is available not only to people who are unemployed, but also to working families and individuals, seniors on fixed incomes, people with disabilities, and households facing high housing, child care, or medical costs.

You may want to apply for SNAP if you are working but struggling to keep up with grocery costs, supporting children or other dependents, living on a fixed income, or experiencing a recent change

in income or household size. Many people assume they earn too much to qualify, but many SNAP recipients are working, and high costs for housing, utilities, child care, or medical care can make households eligible even when their income feels too high. If food costs are a strain, applying is the only way to receive an official determination and see whether SNAP can help.

What Can I Purchase With SNAP?

SNAP benefits can be used to purchase food for your household, including breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, and seeds or plants that produce food to eat at home.

SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase alcohol, cigarettes, or other tobacco products. They also cannot be used to buy hot prepared foods, foods meant to be eaten in the store, or non-food items such as pet food, cleaning supplies, paper products, vitamins, medicines, or household goods.

Eligibility

Eligibility for SNAP is based on household size, income, and certain expenses, among other factors. If your household's income, based on family size, is at or below program limits, you may be eligible for SNAP benefits. Being under the income limit does not automatically guarantee eligibility, and being slightly above it does not always mean you are ineligible.

When determining eligibility, SNAP considers both gross income and net income. Gross income is your household's total income before taxes or other deductions. Net income is gross income minus allowable deductions, such as housing costs, child care expenses, and medical expenses for seniors or people with disabilities. These deductions can significantly affect both eligibility and benefit amounts.

Applying for SNAP

You can apply for SNAP online, by mail using a paper application, or in person through your local Department of Social Services. Regardless of what method you use to apply, your local DSS will review your application and contact you if additional information is needed.

Online application (recommended):

You must first create an [NY.gov](https://www.ny.gov) account to get a personal NY.gov ID. You will then use this ID to sign in to [New York State's benefits portal](#) to apply for SNAP.

Paper application:

You may print and complete this [New York State application](#) and submit it to your local Department of Social Services.

Tompkins County Department of Social Services

320 West State Street

Ithaca, NY 14850

Phone: 607-274-5680

Cortland County Department of Social Services

60 Central Avenue

Cortland, NY 13045

Phone: 607-753-5303

In good health,



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