



Assemblymember Anna Kelles



REPORTS TO THE PEOPLE • FALL 2023

Dear Neighbor:

With the legislative season behind us and entering autumn, I want to reflect on our accomplishments and share with the district our successes and continued challenges as we focus on our future priorities. The annual legislative session from January to June is always a fast-paced marathon, and this year was no exception. I am proud of what we accomplished and recognize that the work of improving the lives of New Yorkers is on-going. I have loved being back in the district this summer connecting with constituents, attending and participating in events, and building support for legislation I have introduced. I am fortunate to have such engaged, passionate, and conscientious constituents. Learning about your work, goals, and challenges motivates me to make the most of representing you in the New York State Assembly.

In this newsletter I have highlighted community events and milestones, 2023-2024 budget highlights, legislative achievements I spearheaded and critical legislative wins I have fought for this year.

As we move into fall and I work on my legislative agenda for the coming session, I'm keenly aware of a need to focus on countering the devastating climate change impacts we are currently experiencing locally and globally, particularly to our lakes, which are some of the last remaining fresh water in the world.

The air we breathe, the earth we cultivate, and the water we drink should not be compromised to increase the wealth of a few at the expense of our collective health and well-being. Mitigating climate change is intrinsically linked with ensuring equity in our health care, housing, education, economic development, and social justice. We cannot collectively protect the environment unless we are all part of the solution, and we cannot all participate unless we have our needs and rights fully met. These are the rights I have and will continue to fight for every day I am in office. Here's to a productive and peaceful fall for us all!

In good health,

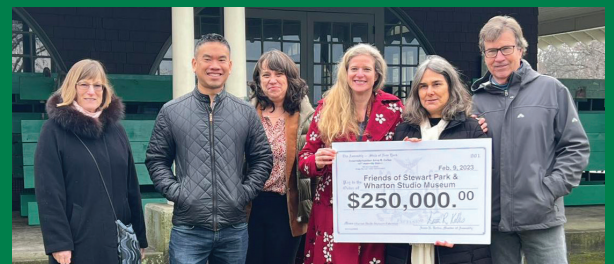
Anna R. Kelles
125th Assembly District

COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

SUPPORTING STRONGER COMMUNITIES

I am fortunate to serve a district that is supported by wonderful community-led organizations and advocacy groups. These organizations are intimately familiar with the needs of the people they serve. One of this year's highlights was being able to secure funding for Ithaca's beloved Stewart Park and the Wharton Studio Museum. This funding is designated for new, accessible amenities including public bathrooms, a splash pad for children and adults alike in the intense heat of summer, and an expansion of the museum, home to the first black and white American films.

I also want to thank the amazing staff at the Groton Food Bank, Seven Valleys Food Rescue and Lime Hollow in Cortland as well as Longview Senior Living, Coddington Road Community Center, the Ithaca Farmers Market, and the Racker Center in Ithaca for opening their doors to me and my staff to learn about and advocate for their critical work in our communities. (Continued on page 3)



2023-2024 Budget Highlights

Great strides were made in addressing challenges facing our communities. This included budget allocations toward improving local schools, combating climate change, safeguarding our environment, and supporting working families by raising the minimum wage and expanding access to child care programs. Specific budget wins include:

Expanding Access to Child care

- Eligibility requirement expansion for the State Child Care Assistance Program by raising the eligible income limit and widening the inclusion criteria for child care assistance.
- \$500 million for grants to child care organizations throughout the State for workforce recruitment and retention.
- Expanded the Child Tax Credit to children under age four and raised the benefits by an average of \$340 per affected taxpayer and \$284 for each newly included child.

Ensuring High-Quality Education

- \$24 billion in Foundation Aid, a program that creates equity in operational funding across all state school systems. This is the first time the program has been fully funded since its inception.
- \$150 million in additional funding to expand the total capacity in the state by 20,000 full-day slots for pre-kindergarten to support early childhood development.
- \$134 million in new funding to expand free meals in school to those students that need it most to promote learning and student engagement.
- \$106 million in new funding to community colleges, and \$1.38 billion in operational aid.
- \$1.9 billion in capital funding for the SUNY system. The Assembly also rejected tuition hikes.

Protecting our Environment and Combating Climate Change

New Yorkers are already feeling the effects of climate change with erratic and extreme weather, and we must act now if we are to avoid the worst impacts.

- All Electric Buildings Act: Buildings alone account for 32% of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions in NY. This act will reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and from rising and volatile gas prices. This law affects new construction only starting in 2026. It does not affect existing buildings including repairs or renovations nor a replacement of old gas stoves or furnaces.
- Build Public Renewables: This directs the New York Power Authority (NYPA) to build renewable energy infrastructure with fair labor standards and prioritizes environmental justice communities.
- Cap and Invest: This program will put a declining cap on pollution and require large scale sources of emissions to obtain allowances for their activities, incentivizing lower-emission alternatives. Revenue from this program will be used to provide state residents with rebates, will fund projects that promote further emissions reduction, and prioritize environmental justice.
- The Environmental Protection Fund: This fund was increased to \$400 million and provides capital funding to projects throughout the state focused on environmental protection and environmentally conscious community improvement.
- Additionally, \$500 million was secured for clean water infrastructure projects and \$200 million toward enhancing our State Parks.

Supporting Workers and Economic Growth

We made supporting workers, who are the economic engine of New York State, a top line priority during this year's budget:

- Minimum Wage will increase to \$15 on January 1, 2024 and to \$16 in 2026. Beginning in 2027, wages will be indexed to inflation.
- Affordable Energy: The Renewable Energy Access and Community

Help (REACH) and Energy Affordability programs received the necessary funding to help reduce the utility burden on low- and moderate-income individuals and families, expanding the programs by \$200 million.

- Workforce & Economic Development: \$23.9 million was allocated to workforce development programs throughout the state. \$324 million was secured for Cost-of-Living Adjustment increases (4%) for human services providers, and an additional \$53 million was secured for in-home health care workers' wages.
- Fortifying Farming in New York: \$56.5 million for agricultural programs that include The Agricultural Environmental Management Program, The New Farmers Grant Fund, and The Farm-to-School Program. The Investment Tax Credit (ITC) was converted to a fully refundable tax credit for eligible farmers, rewarding the hard work of farmers who invest in growing food in New York State.

A Home is More Than Housing

We made steps forward with funds to keep homes, families, and communities intact:

- Keeping Renters at Home: \$391 million was added to New York's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Another \$50 million, including \$35 million specifically for Upstate NY, was provided for eviction prevention legal services.
- Keeping Homeowners at Home: \$40 million was provided for the Homeowner Protection Program, assisting homeowners in default or foreclosure.
- Safe Shelter for Unhoused Populations: \$10 million was allocated for 50 transitional housing projects for homeless individuals and families and \$4.3 million to establish 8 new Safe Option Support (SOS) teams for homeless people across the state.

Enhancing Our Transportation and Infrastructure

Significant funding was secured to upgrade local roads and bridges, including:

- \$1.3 billion for reconstruction of roads and bridges including \$9.66 million dedicated to Tompkins County to replace or repair 6 bridges: North Cayuga Street bridge, Town Line Road bridge, and East State Street culvert in Ithaca; Midline Road culvert to Six Mile Creek; Curry Road culvert in Ulysses; and Lee Road culvert in Dryden.
- \$60 million for Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement program (CHIPS) to upgrade local roads.
- \$306.6 million for upstate transit operating assistance.

Improving the Health and Well-Being of our Communities

- Mental Health: The economic stress and psychological fallout of the pandemic have only exacerbated a growing mental health crisis. \$1 billion was secured to strengthen state mental health programs, including the creation of new in-patient mental health beds in residential facilities.
- Food security: \$10 million was included in the budget for the Food Access Expansion Grant Program in food deserts as well as \$31.5 million for Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance (HPNAP), Nutritional Outreach and Education, and Double Up Food Bucks Programs.
- \$15 million was included in the budget to develop housing support for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.
- \$212 million was secured for harm reduction initiatives for people with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) including the Opioid Stewardship Fund.

Legislative Accomplishments

In the 2023 legislative session, I am proud to report that one of my bills passed in the New York State Budget process and 10 additionally passed through both the Assembly and Senate with 6 already signed into law and 4 that await the Governor's signature, including:

Supporting our LGBTQ+ Population

- **Gender Neutral Terms in Law (A1142 - Signed into Law):** The law requires that any new legislation including bills to amend existing law, gender-neutral language must be used. The laws of New York provide the structure, rules, and protections for all New Yorkers and it is essential that the language used is reflective of everyone regardless of gender orientation or sexual preference.
- **LGBTQ+ Access to Substance Use Disorder Services (A4903 - Signed into Law):** Data shows that the LGBTQ+ community is particularly vulnerable to substance use issues due to the unique stigma and discrimination this group faces, even in the health care community, and that because of this discrimination, they are less likely to seek treatment. This bill ensures that substance use disorder patients will have access to services based on their gender identity or expression and preferences.

Supporting Our Communities and Environment

- **Carshare Nonprofit Insurance/Risk Retention Groups (A5718 – Signed into Law):** This bill will allow Ithaca Carshare and other transportation-based nonprofits around the state to secure the insurance they need to resume operations through risk retention groups. Carshares provide an eco-conscious and economic alternative to private car ownership for members. Ithaca Carshare is a vital service that allows for transportation to work, grocery shopping, and interconnectivity between communities.
- **Agrivoltaics Research Program (A4911):** Research shows that dual land use for agriculture and solar energy is an efficient use of space that increases yields of certain crops while improving

land preservation and sustainability. The Agrivoltaics Research Program, housed at the New York State College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS) at Cornell University and supported by \$1 million in new funding in the NYS budget, will develop science-based recommendations for the combined use of land for agriculture and solar power arrays.

- **Municipal Broadband Bonding (A1260):** This bill authorizes municipalities to sell bonds to provide funds for broadband infrastructure, a crucial step in ensuring equitable access to high quality internet connection, especially for those in rural areas and "digital deserts."
- **Home Rule Bills (A1261, A6588, A6590, A6591 - signed into law):** Allows Cortland and Tompkins Counties to enact mortgage and sales taxes to support necessary county revenue.

Ensuring Government Transparency Funding Innovation

- **Cryptocurrency Disclosure for Public Officers (A2873-B):** Cryptocurrency is a new form of wealth, and given that companies have a highly influential stake in crypto mining activity, it leaves the possibility for legislators to be influenced by investments and donations. This bill will require clear reporting of cryptocurrency holdings on financial disclosure statements.
- **Small Business Matching Grant Program (SBIR/STTR - included in the budget) (A4507):** These state matching grant programs increase grant amounts to small businesses that have already been awarded federal funds under the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) or Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs to support a successful market entry and ensure the launch and grow right here in New York.

FIGHTING FOR HOUSING EQUITY

One of my priorities as a legislator is to improve access to affordable housing in the district. Stable housing is fundamental to a community's economic strength and health, and I am pleased to see that affordable housing is growing in the district. I was happy to celebrate the opening of Founders Way housing development with Ithaca Neighborhood Housing Services and the groundbreaking at Northside Apartments as they transform into updated, energy-efficient, and affordable housing units for more of Ithaca's residents.

Though the need is not yet filled, I hope to see this momentum grow and will continue advocating for my legislation that supports further development of affordable housing (A3111) and secures additional protections for renters (A4093).

ADVANCING EDUCATION AND ETHICAL ECONOMIC GROWTH

Supporting quality education is a vital step toward economic growth and prosperity, and I want to do everything I can to ensure that our district's students and schools get the resources they need. I was thrilled to secure \$200,000 in needed funding for the Newfield School District to ensure safe and timely transportation of students, including new CB radios in school buses and new 911 technology throughout the school district. Around the district, I participated in the Randall Middle School Job Fair in Cortland School District, served as keynote speaker at a Rev: Ithaca Startup student networking event for young entrepreneurs, spoke to Cornell Masters of Public Health and School of Public Policy students about policy and governance, and visited the P-TECH program at Tompkins Cortland Community College. I am continually inspired by the brilliant, innovative students in our district. Retaining our young talent in the district is what our industries and businesses need to thrive economically.

I appreciated the opportunity to speak with business leaders at Chamber of Commerce events in both Tompkins and Cortland Counties regarding local workforce development and small business investment. Our hardworking home care and child care workers in our district also need our support, as do the families who rely on their care and services. I will continue to address the staffing shortages and pay equity for workers in these vital industries. (Continued on page 4)



COMMUNITY HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

When individuals experience instability in their lives related to housing, mental health or substance use disorder, crime and violence in our communities increases. I partnered with the Vera Institute of Justice to host events in Tompkins and Cortland Counties to discuss public safety and what we can do to break these cycles of instability as well as bring about a more effective and rehabilitative carceral system. I appreciate the thoughtful engagement of law enforcement, service providers, elected officials and the public who participated in finding solutions to these issues. I look forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders to create a healthy and productive transition for those incarcerated back into the community including through my Earned Time Act legislation (A1128).

Our Fire Departments and EMS providers need access to capital funds to keep pace with the changing safety requirements and make improvements to their buildings, and I was proud to champion the NYS budget addition of a \$25 million capital fund for volunteer fire departments. I appreciated the opportunity to tour the Ithaca Fire Department Headquarters and to learn more from our district emergency service agencies. I continue to work on establishing annual operational funds for EMS services across New York, especially in our rural regions, through my legislation that would secure state subsidies for all municipal and community-based EMS services (A1091).

I am encouraged by the growth of public health resources, and the hard-working organizations like Ultimate Re-Entry Opportunity that provide life-changing services to some of our most vulnerable citizens. I'm grateful for the growth of resources in our district such as the opening of the Alcohol and Drug Council of Tompkins County's new detox center. I will continue to support and promote data-informed solutions to public health issues and criminal justice that make our community safer for everyone.

In addition to services, we also need to preserve our municipal buildings that serve the public. I was honored to secure \$4.6 million in Assembly funds for much-needed renovations to the Cortland County Courthouse, including rebuilding the entrance stairs, repairs to the dome and replacement of an old, energy inefficient VAC system. These critical investments will help the Courthouse shine for generations to come.



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