



Assemblymember

Anna Kelles

Assembly District 125



February 12, 2024

Dear Neighbors,

February is an intense, fast-paced month in the Legislature as we finalize our collective budget priorities as Members. The Assembly and Senate priorities are then combined to create the “One House” budget released in early March. Governor Hochul is expected to release her 30-day amendments of the Executive Budget in late February, and the final NYS Budget will be a negotiation between the Executive proposed budget and the One House budget. The budget is due by midnight on March 31.

My team and I are meeting with constituents and advocates from within the district and across the state to understand budget needs and challenges. Over the next few newsletters, I’ll share highlights of issues that my colleagues and I are championing to be included in this year’s budget.

Read on for the week’s highlights!

New Bills to Track

Harmful Algal Blooms Monitoring and Prevention

Year after year we are seeing ever increasing harmful algal bloom (HABs) outbreaks across New York. HABs are not only toxic to humans and animals and destructive to our natural ecosystems, but they are also decimating our ecotourism economy as recreation areas have to routinely be shut down due to HABs outbreaks. While HABs were once rare occurrences in our lakes, ponds and reservoirs, last year alone we had over a thousand outbreaks spanning almost every county in the state. I'm proud to have introduced the Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring and Prevention (HABMAP) Act ([A8867/S8356](#)) with Senator Rachel May that will create a centralized resource for reporting and monitoring HABs as well as document potential causes and interventions. The comprehensive database of the outbreaks and the water quality conditions will enable us to efficiently administer a grant program to fund targeted strategies to intervene and prevent current and future outbreaks. Read more in this [recent Spectrum News article](#).



State Budget

Budget Hearing on Agriculture, Environmental Conservation and Energy

As a member of both the Agriculture and Environmental Conservation Committees in the Assembly, I had the opportunity in last week's Budget Hearing to discuss issues that our district cares deeply about and to pose questions to our State's departmental leadership.

- I questioned Erik Kulleseid, Commissioner of NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation about the impact of harmful algal blooms (HABS) on our state parks. I also asked Richard Ball, Commissioner of NYS Agriculture and Markets, about agrivoltaics and confirmed the State's intention to lean-in on this emerging technology. [Watch a brief video of my questions here.](#)
- I questioned Jeff Williams, Director of Public Policy, from the New York Farm Bureau on the impact of regulations from the industry on farmers. To Libby Post, from NYS Animal Protection Federation, I inquired about the challenges that animal shelters are facing and the impact on care for animals. [Watch a brief video of my questions here.](#)

- I commented on the need to direct Bond Act funds to adaptation and resiliency projects, such as dredging in Ithaca, to prevent further storm damage or flooding. Environmental Conservation officers are also a great investment as they are able to generate revenue for NYS through the fines levied to polluters for environmental violations such as illegal dumping. In terms of legislation, we need both the Climate Change Superfund Act to hold polluters responsible for their decades of pollution to the environment – as well as Cap and Invest to hold them responsible for future pollution. [Watch a brief video of my comments here.](#)
- To New York State Public Service Commission Chair Rory Christian, I noted that utilities make their money by laying more pipes and wires and questioned whether he felt it was a conflict of interest to task utility companies with administering programs that would help people use less energy since they have no incentive to do this. I also questioned the rate at which utilities are connecting renewable energy infrastructure to the grid. [Watch a brief video of my comments here.](#)



Legislative Update

Advocating for the Compassion and Reproductive Equity (CARE) Act

Babies born to incarcerated mothers deserve a healthy start to life! I am proud to sponsor the Compassion and Reproductive Equity (CARE) Act [A7630](#), which will require and set standards for pre- and post-natal care for incarcerated pregnant and postpartum mothers. The most critical stage of brain development occurs in the womb and continues post-birth through the

first year of life. The act will support this critical time of mother-baby bonding so that infants will be less likely to suffer physical challenges and more likely to develop cognitive resilience. In partnership with New Hour and Senator Julia Salazar, who sponsors the bill in the Senate, we hosted a press conference in Albany advocating for the bill's passage.

I am deeply grateful to the students of Professor Alexandra Dufresne's State Policy Advocacy Clinic at Cornell University's Jeb E. Brooks School of Public Policy for the research and work they contributed to the creation of this bill. I was thrilled that the students were able to join us in Albany for an advocacy day and that I was able to [introduce them on the Assembly floor](#).



Controlling PFAS, Forever Chemicals

I know that many of you are concerned about the prolific use of PFAS, or forever chemicals, in everyday household items and in clothing. These chemicals are leaching into our water supply, contaminating our waterways, and posing a threat not only to human health but also to species diversity. I joined with fellow legislators in Albany advocating for legislation to control PFAS in our household products and in our environment. However, we cannot control, regulate, or remove these chemicals from our waterways if we don't even know where they are coming from. I'm proud to sponsor the [PFAS Disclosure Act](#), with Senator Rachel May, which is common sense legislation that requires all entities to test and disclose PFAS in the water discharged in the surface water of our state. You can read more in this recent news article or [view a video of my comments at the conference](#).



New Laws

To keep you informed, I'm happy to share the [new laws taking effect in February 2024](#).

I'm proud to highlight a new protection for consumers that I helped pass. As costs are increasing for consumers with many hidden fees, a new law that went into effect on February 11 requires businesses that impose a surcharge for using a credit card to post the total price of the transaction prior to the sale. The law also limits the surcharge to the amount charged to the business by the credit card company. You can [read more](#) at the Governor's website.

Protecting consumers from surprise credit card surcharges



Around the District

State Route 34B Bridge Recognized

New York State takes bridge safety seriously, and I am happy to share that the State Route 34B Bridge over Salmon Creek in Tompkins County has been nationally recognized with the American Institute of Steel Construction and the National Steel Bridge Alliance's 2024 Prize Bridge Merit Award. I was proud to support investments in our upstate infrastructure and thank Governor Hochul and NYSDOT for their commitment to our iconic bridge here in Lansing. The award is a testament to the bridge's innovation, beauty, and excellence in infrastructure. You can read more in this recent [Ithaca Journal article](#).



Tour of DOCCS Food Processing Facility

As a member of the NYS Assembly Corrections Committee, I am committed to growing my knowledge base on the many facets of the State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) services. Last week, I stopped for a tour of the state DOCCS food processing facility in Rome, NY. I appreciate the time that DOCCS Acting Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III and his staff took to lead the 3-hour tour for my team. With my educational background in nutrition, I appreciated the opportunity to do a deep dive into food safety, nutritional content of the food, food processing technologies employed, nutrition education needs among incarcerated individuals, and safety measures for incarcerated individuals working in the facility. Right now, the state budgets \$3.40 per day per incarcerated individual for food, and much of the food comes from this processing center.

DOCCS takes input from those incarcerated on food preferences, but as with our general population, food choices are made based on emotion and taste rather than nutrition. I deeply appreciated the staff and leadership's shared concern for the health of people incarcerated and look forward to exploring ways to help improve diets and health in the carceral system.

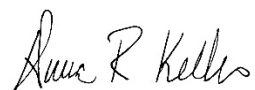


Community Resources

NYSEG Webinars to Help Customers Manage Monthly Bills

[New York State Electric & Gas \(NYSEG\)](#) and [Rochester Gas and Electric \(RG&E\)](#) will host webinars this week, sharing information on programs and resources to help customers manage monthly bills and save money. These free sessions will be held via Zoom on February 13 and 14 from noon to 1 p.m. and will last approximately one hour. Both sessions include the same information, so you can attend whichever best fits your schedule. Customers can register for either session [using this link](#).

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

**ALBANY
OFFICE**

LOB 833
Albany,
NY 12248
518-455-
5444

**CORTLAND
OFFICE**

83 Main St.
Cortland, NY
13045
607-208-2024

**ITHACA
OFFICE**

130 East
State St.
Ithaca,
NY
14850
607-277-
8030

Assembly District 125 | kellesa@contactme.nyassembly.gov