



Assemblymember Anna Kelles



REPORTS TO THE PEOPLE • 2025

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Dear Neighbor:

In June the 2025 Legislative Session came to a close in Albany. While my team and I are already preparing for next year's budget and legislative session, I want to pause and celebrate the progress we've made together this year. This year, we celebrated several hard-fought victories that will have a lasting impact on our district, particularly in areas like environmental protection, public health, housing, and climate resilience. I'm especially proud of the work we did to safeguard New York's native plant species, enhance the transparency and accessibility of statewide water data, and ensure equity in access to criminal justice. Since the legislative session ended, I remain focused on being present in the district by connecting with constituents, attending community events, and continuing to build support for the legislation we advanced this year.

I'm fortunate to have such engaged and passionate constituents, learning about your work, goals, and challenges motivates me everyday to represent you in the New York State Assembly.

In good health,

Anna R. Kelles
125th Assembly District

Visit nyassembly.gov/Kelles or follow me on social media for more updates.
Questions? Email us at kellesa@nyassembly.gov or call our Ithaca or Cortland offices.

Together, we are making New York stronger, healthier, and more just.

Legislative Accomplishments

I am proud to report the passage of the following legislation that I championed in this year's session:

Protecting Our Environment

New York State is home to some of the most abundant and diverse freshwater resources in the nation, from the Great Lakes and Finger Lakes to the Hudson River, St. Lawrence River, and Long Island aquifers. These waters are essential for drinking, recreation, agriculture, industry, and ecological health. As climate change increases pressure on these resources, ensuring reliable and accessible water data is important to protect both public health and long-term sustainability.

Currently, water data in New York is fragmented across agencies, jurisdictions, and formats. This lack of coordination makes it difficult for scientists, policymakers, and the public to understand trends, identify risks, and implement effective protections.

This bill (A5254) addresses the problem by directing agencies to standardize, share, and make publicly available water-related data through a central platform. Doing so will provide the necessary foundation for strong water governance, more efficient policy development, and improved resilience to environmental threats. Clean water is not only a resource, it is a necessity for the health and safety of all New Yorkers.

New York's native plants play a crucial role in maintaining healthy natural ecosystems. They have evolved alongside New York's pollinators, birds, and wildlife, creating interdependent relationships that sustain biodiversity. For example, monarch butterflies rely exclusively on milkweed plants to complete their lifecycle, while countless bird species depend on native insects, seeds, and fruit for food. Protecting and promoting native plants ensures the continuation of these ecological cycles.

Native plants also provide environmental benefits. They require less water and fewer chemical inputs than non-native species. They also stabilize slopes and streambanks from erosion, reduce nutrient runoff (nitrogen, phosphorus) into waterways, enrich soils with organic matter, improve fertility and structure of soils, and filter pollutants improving water, soil, and air quality. By restoring native vegetation in public and private spaces, New York can mitigate the harmful effects of invasive species, support pollinators critical to agriculture, and create healthier, more sustainable communities.

Habitat destruction, invasive species, and climate change have put New York's native flora under increasing stress. This legislation ensures that the State actively promotes the use of native plants in landscaping, restoration, and public projects. Doing so strengthens ecological health, supports agriculture, and enhances recreational and aesthetic values for residents.

Protecting Survivors

People involved in the sex trade are disproportionately likely to be victims or witnesses of violent crimes, including assault and trafficking. Yet, due to the risk of arrest for prostitution related offenses, many individuals are deterred from coming forward to law enforcement. This fear enables predators to continue operating with impunity, putting countless lives at risk.

The Long Island Serial Killer case illustrates the consequences of this dynamic. In 2023, Rex Heuermann was formally charged for the murder of seven women whose remains were discovered during the prior decade, known as the Gilgo Beach murders. All seven were known to be engaged in sex work. Law enforcement monitoring Heuermann had limited access to witness cooperation, and the lack of testimony likely delayed justice. This case underscores the urgent need for laws that protect victims and witnesses from criminalization when they seek help.

This legislation (A1029) provides immunity from prosecution when individuals report crimes they have experienced or witnessed. The model is similar to New York's "Good Samaritan" law enacted in 2011, which protects people from prosecution when they call for medical assistance during an overdose. By removing barriers to cooperation with law enforcement, this bill strengthens public safety, protects vulnerable individuals, and ensures that perpetrators of violence are held accountable. The bill passed the Assembly with a unanimous bipartisan vote.

Home Rule Legislation

In the 2025 state legislative session, I carried ten Home Rule bills in the Assembly, all of which passed both houses of the legislature and five of which have been signed into law by the Governor at this writing. Each of these Home Rule bills was formally requested by one of the local governments in the 125th Assembly District, and required active support and advocacy by my office to navigate the legislative process in Albany.

The term "Home Rule" refers to the authority of a local government to exercise powers of governance, whether delegated to it by the state only via explicit legislative action or allowed unless denied by explicit state action. Most of the fifty states apply some form of "Dillon's Rule," which says that local governments may exercise only those governing powers that the state specifically grants them. In some states, known as "home rule states," the state's constitution grants municipalities and/or counties the ability to pass various types of laws to govern themselves (so long as the laws do not conflict with the state and federal constitutions). In other states, known as "Dillon's Rule states," only limited authority has been granted to local governments. In these states, a city or county must obtain permission from the state legislature if it wishes to pass a law or ordinance not specifically permitted under existing state legislation. Most states have a mix, as does New York State.

The Home Rule bills I carried still awaiting action by the Governor include five individual retirement fix bills, each one to transfer a particular individual into a retirement plan within the NYS Retirement System from which they had been inadvertently excluded (with the cost of the transfer to be paid by the local government) as follows: A7910 and A7825 for Tompkins County and A8213, A8387 and A8544 for the Village of Trumansburg.

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2025-2026 Budget Highlights

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Ensuring High-Quality Education

- \$37.6 billion allocated for public schools, including \$26.4 billion in Foundation Aid (a \$1.4 billion increase), with every district guaranteed at least a 2% increase.
- \$5 million in additional funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program, connecting young people with work opportunities.
- \$28 million for the My Brother's Keeper initiative, which supports equity in education.
- \$106 million for libraries, including targeted support for cultural and community-based library programs statewide.
- \$2.1 billion in capital funding allocated for SUNY campuses.
- Creation of the New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship, providing free tuition, books, and fees at community colleges for students ages 25–55 in high-demand careers such as nursing, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, and teaching.
- \$9 million restoration + \$3 million increase for opportunity programs including the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP), the Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge (SEEK) program, the Science and Technology Entry Program (STEP), the Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (C-STEP), College Discovery, Liberty Partnerships, and the Foster Youth Initiative, which support students from underserved backgrounds.
- \$1 billion+ in funding for the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) financial aid programs, supporting tens of thousands of students statewide.
- \$47 million to expand free community college for adults through the New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship.
- \$12 million in new funding to make Advancing Success in Associate Pathways (ASAP) and Advancing Completion through Engagement (ACE) programs permanent at SUNY campuses.
- \$21.4 million to restore funding for Teacher Centers, which support professional development, mentoring, and specialized support for educators across school districts.

Investing in Our Environment & Clean Energy

- \$1 billion for the Sustainable Future Program, directing at least 35% of benefits to disadvantaged communities through investments in clean energy, electrification, and decarbonization.
- \$450 million for emissions reduction in buildings, including energy efficiency retrofits, thermal energy networks, and clean schools initiatives.
- \$200 million for renewable energy projects, including municipal and public renewables.
- \$200 million+ to expand thermal energy networks for neighborhood and district-scale clean heating and cooling.
- \$12 million to support innovative electric grid technologies to improve reliability and enable integration of more renewable energy sources.
- \$2 million for the Green Affordable Pre-Electrification Program, helping low- and moderate-income households prepare their homes for clean energy upgrades.
- \$425 million for the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), which supports land conservation, farmland protection, climate resilience, invasive species prevention, parks and trails, and

community sustainability initiatives (a \$25 million increase).

- \$500 million for water infrastructure improvements, supporting clean drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater upgrades statewide.
- Ban on the use of PFAS in firefighting gear, reducing toxic chemical exposure and advancing environmental health protections.

Investing in the Health of New Yorkers

- \$8 million to expand Daniel's Law Pilot Programs, promoting health-led crisis responses.
- A \$50.5 million increase in cost-of-living adjustments for human services agencies, including funding for developmental disability, mental health, addiction, and child services.
- \$500 million for financially distressed hospitals.
- \$30 million in additional nursing home funding.
- \$25 million for Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and the SOMOS Value Based Payment Innovation Fund. FQHCs are community-based health centers that provide essential primary and preventive care, often serving rural areas and medically underserved populations regardless of ability to pay. SOMOS is a physician-led network that delivers coordinated care for Medicaid patients, aiming to improve outcomes and reduce costs.
- Expansion of provider reimbursement rates for hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living programs, FQHCs, physician services, and Article 28 diagnostic and treatment centers.
- \$7 million for maternal health, \$5 million for medication abortion providers, and \$4 million for clinical training.
- Establishment of the BABY Benefit, a one-time \$1,800 allowance for public assistance recipients after the birth of a child.

Supporting Our Families & Youth

- \$400 million more for child care subsidies, prioritizing New York City but also extending support statewide.
- \$55 million for Nourish NY and \$58 million for hunger prevention programs, supporting food-insecure households.
- \$340 million for Universal School Meals, ensuring that all students in New York State receive free breakfast and lunch, regardless of income eligibility, projected to save families about \$165 per child each month.
- \$825 million over three years to expand the Empire State Child Tax Credit, now including children under age four and removing the minimum income requirement for the lowest-income families
- \$25 million to expand early childhood education capacity, including grants for child care facility expansion and stabilization.
- \$10 million to support a new statewide child care workforce recruitment and retention initiative, addressing workforce shortages in early care settings.
- \$8 million in new investments for home visiting and early childhood mental health services, improving family support systems.
- \$5 million in increased funding for family resource centers and parent support programs.

past few months I have heard from many of you seeking details on the state’s budget and how we are protecting programs & services at the state level in the face of federal cuts. Below I have outlined some of this year’s budget fiscal highlights in key areas of health, housing, safety, community services, and the environment.

Expanding Access to Housing

- \$500 million for new construction and preservation of affordable housing
- \$50 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), to assist individuals and families at risk of homelessness (a pilot program)
- Increased funding for neighborhood and rural housing preservation programs.
- Extension of the state’s low-income housing tax credit for four years, with higher annual allocations.

Tax Relief

- Broader eligibility for the STAR property tax relief program, easing age and income requirements.
- Income tax cuts for about 8.3 million taxpayers, averaging \$119 in annual savings when fully phased in.
- Payroll tax eliminated for self-employed workers earning under \$150,000.
- Inflation rebate checks of up to \$400 per family, funded by higher-than-expected sales tax collections.

Transportation and Infrastructure

- \$7 billion for the Department of Transportation’s capital plan to modernize roads and bridges, \$1.2 billion above the previously approved level.
- \$349.4 million for upstate transit operating assistance, a 5% increase from last year.
- \$100 million increase in funding over the next two years for local road and highway repair.
- \$50 million increase to the Consolidated Local Street & Highway Improvement Program (CHIPS), bringing total CHIPS funding to about \$648 million.
- \$200 million for local bridge projects via the BRIDGE-NY program.
- \$200 million for “Pave Our Potholes” program for state and local roads.

Supporting Agriculture & Innovation

- \$500,000 allocated for the Cornell University Pro-Diary
- \$5 million for the Farmworker Housing Revolving Loan Fund, providing no-interest loans to improve or construct housing for farmworkers.

Legislative Accomplishments ...continued

The Home Rule bills I carried that have been signed into law so far are:

- **A8371a** (Town of Ithaca) a parkland alienation removing a parcel from parkland status in exchange for designating another parcel, of equal value, as parkland
- **A8373a** (Town of Cortlandville) a parkland alienation to allow permission for a small part of a park to host an electronic sign for a business
- **A7821** (Cortland County) a local 1% sales tax extender
- **A8210** (Cortland County) a local mortgage recording tax extender
- **A8155** (Tompkins County) a local 1% sales tax extender

Public Safety and Justice

- Establishment of a new Office of Gun Violence Prevention within the Division of Criminal Justice Services.
- \$18.4 million for body-worn cameras in correctional facilities.
- Adjustments to discovery laws to reduce case dismissals caused by technicalities, while maintaining transparency requirements.
- Expanded funding for legal services, including \$10 million for discovery implementation.
- An additional \$2.5 million, for Prisoners’ Legal Services.

NYSEG SURVEY SECTION

Over the last three years we have seen our NYSEG service delivery charges increase by 62% and weeks after the final hike was implemented NYSEG submitted a new request for an additional 35%. Yet the excessive burden of utility bills is the single greatest issue I’m hearing from constituents. My office has signed up to be a formal intervenor in the ongoing NYSEG electric and gas rate cases before the New York State Public Service Commission (PSC). This will enable my office to bring targeted questions to the utilities and ask for specific data to help advocate for fair, transparent rates and improved service reliability in our region.

To help inform my advocacy, my office is collecting feedback from both residents and businesses in Tompkins and Cortland Counties. Please take our short survey (10 minutes or less) to share your experiences with billing, outages, and affordability. Your input will inform counter arguments, challenges to assumptions, and alternative analyses my office presents in response to rebuttal testimonies from NYSEG/RG&E. These are due by Monday, November 17, 2025. The survey will remain open after this date so that our office can continue gathering local experiences to inform future work on energy affordability and utility oversight.

This short survey (10 minutes or less) asks for the following:

- The affordability of your NYSEG bills and recent rate changes
- Your experiences with power outages and restoration times
- The quality of customer service and billing accuracy
- Educational materials and/or outreach you have received of energy-assistance programs like HEAP or NYSEG’s discount plan
- Your views on NYSEG’s clean-energy and infrastructure investments designed to stabilize the grid and long term energy affordability

Link to survey:
<https://forms.gle/X4Cf4E5KzPocnGZ26>



Community Highlights

One of the highlights of representing the 125th District is being able to help bring to life the area’s rich history and support our community-focused organizations that collectively make our district a wonderful place to live. Here are just a few highlights from this year:

Honoring Women Who Lead With Heart

This year, we received over 20 nominations for our **Women of Distinction** celebration. Each one a story of quiet strength, dedication, and deep community impact. We were only allowed to bring one honoree to Albany, but that didn’t stop us from celebrating all nominees locally. Our community event at **Serendipity** (formerly Coltivare) was overflowing with love, stories, and reminders that the backbone of our district is so often the women working behind the scenes to lift others up.



Affordable, Green Housing in Trumansburg

INHS unveiled **Village Grove**, a 46-unit Passive House and NetZero affordable housing project that also houses the **Trumansburg Community Nursery School**. These apartments are **INHS’s greenest project to-date**. This development is located within walking distance to schools, shopping, and thriving downtown, making it more accessible and affordable for families to find housing.



Public Transit Investment in Cortland

Public transportation took a major step forward in Cortland County with the launch of **CENTRO**. With a **\$1M investment secured** in the state budget, service is expanding and fares are now just \$1 per ride.



Youth Leadership on Climate Youth Climate Panel and Cayuga Lake Interns

At the Museum of the Earth, I had the honor of moderating a climate panel with incredible student leaders from across Tompkins County. Their passion, clarity, and commitment left the entire audience inspired. Whether it’s teaching younger students, leading camps, or asking the hard questions, they are already shaping a better future. I also spent time this summer with Cayuga Lake Watershed interns young adults learning to turn environmental values into local action.



New York State Assembly • Albany, New York 12248



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Anna Kelles

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Community
Highlights
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Investing in Local Infrastructure and Culture

We celebrated a trifecta of community investments this spring. Cortlandville unveiled its new **ADA-accessible mobile stage**, which will bring live music and events to parks and public spaces. In Ithaca, we celebrated the opening of a modern, expanded **East Hill Fire Station** designed with the safety and resilience of our first responders in mind. And at the **Ithaca Farmers Market**, Taste of the Finger Lakes brought together **over 50 vendors** to support food access and sustainability.

