



Assemblymember

**Anna Kelles**

Assembly District 125



January 22, 2024

Dear Neighbors,

We have officially entered budget season as Governor Hochul shared her Executive budget this past week, and the Senate and Assembly will be releasing their budget proposal responses in the next month. The NYS Budget represents our state-wide values and priorities. How we choose to spend and invest our resources is critically important and will take months of review and negotiations. While we need to be fiscally responsible, we also need to make wise investments in the people of New York and in our environment for the long-term health and vitality of our state. Read on for more budget and legislative highlights from the week!

# State Budget

## **Governor Hochul's Executive Budget**

On January 16, Governor Hochul presented her Executive Budget proposal. The priorities in the budget align with her State of the State address (which I highlighted in [last week's newsletter](#)) and focus on public safety, education, economic development, housing, and healthcare. You can [watch the Governor's address](#), [review highlights](#), or [view the entire proposal](#).

The Executive Budget provided more details than the State of the State address on proposed Environmental Investments. I'm concerned, though, that the Executive Budget did not make the level of investment necessary in climate change solutions given the dire state of the crisis. For example, the funding for the Environmental Protection Fund was kept flat. Clean water infrastructure funding was cut by 50% with only an additional two-year commitment for funding.

I appreciate the inclusion of parts of the [NY HEAT Act](#) into the Executive Budget, especially ending the 100-foot rule that requires gas utilities to supply gas to any customer who wants it and forcing ratepayers who live within 100 of an existing line to pay for that gas infrastructure. However, my hope is that through budget deliberations we will end on an agreement that takes greater strides toward climate solutions. I stood with fellow legislators on January 17 calling for increased investments. You can view my comments and read more from [Spectrum News](#).

## **Budget Hearings**

An open and transparent government is critical for public trust, and citizen engagement is critical for a responsive and effective government. While the State Budget process can seem complicated, I encourage you to engage in the process. The first opportunity to hear the proposed Executive budget as well as the Legislative concerns and questions is through the public budget hearings. The legislature just announced the [2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing Schedule](#), with hearings beginning this week and concluding on February 14. Each hearing is focused on a programmatic area of the Executive Budget proposal, and witness testimony provides the legislative committees with important public input. While in-person testimony is limited, any person or organization is permitted to submit written testimony for any hearing. Written testimony must be submitted no later than 5 p.m. on the day of the corresponding hearing to [financechair@nysenate.gov](mailto:financechair@nysenate.gov) and

to [wamchair@nyassembly.gov](mailto:wamchair@nyassembly.gov). If you are interested in viewing any hearing, you can watch live from the [Assembly](#) or [Senate](#) websites.

I also welcome your input in this process on budget and legislative priorities that you support or oppose. I have a specific [Online Contact Form](#) for your thoughts on my Assembly website. While my team and I are not able to individually respond to each contact, we can more quickly compile the district's priorities that come in through the contact form and use them to inform my advocacy in Albany. I will keep you informed over the next two months on the budget process through my weekly newsletters. I look forward to advocating for our district's priorities at hearings and events as we work toward a final budget!

### **Paid Family Leave Increase**

I know household budgets are tight and families across New York need relief. That's why I'm excited to share that the state paid family leave program's maximum weekly benefit has increased to \$1,151.16 and the employee paycheck contribution percentage has dropped in 2024! That means less money out of your paycheck now and higher benefits when you need them later. For more information, visit the [NYS Paid Family Leave website](#). Help is also available via a toll-free Paid Family Leave Helpline at (844) 337-6303, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

# Big news!

NY's paid family  
leave program  
increases benefits,  
lowers the payroll  
deduction!



# Legislative Update

## Advocating for Climate, Jobs & Justice

To truly lean in to advancing climate solutions that will limit the negative effects of climate change on all areas of our economy – from agriculture, to tourism, to transportation as well as attract new industry to our state – we need to fund the [People's Climate Justice Budget](#), a \$1 billion investment in the state's newly created Climate Action Fund (CAF). I joined with legislators and climate action groups advocating for the funding in this year's \$233 billion budget. The saying that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” resonates deeply here. The long-term cost of inaction is astronomical. In this briefing, I also highlighted the bill I sponsor [A8469](#) that outlines guardrails for the Cap and Invest program, a policy initiative loosely outlined in last year's budget.

A “Cap and Invest” program sets a limit (a **cap**) on the maximum allowable amount of greenhouse gas emissions obligated businesses (determined by the program parameters) can emit and requires them to buy credits to emit pollutants if they exceed the limit, generating revenue from industries most directly responsible for climate pollution. The funds from purchased credits are **invested** back into the implementation of clean, renewable energy projects across the state, upgrading our transmission infrastructure, and prioritizing communities that have disproportionately borne the brunt of climate change and pollution. When implemented correctly, a cap and invest

program can reduce emissions, create clean energy jobs, improve public health, and reduce energy bills for households across the state. However, if done poorly, a cap and invest system can exacerbate environmental injustice and not bring us closer to our climate goals. You can [view a video of my comments](#) and read more about the bill in this recent [Spectrum News article](#).



## **Medical Aid in Dying**

New York has always been a leader in protecting individual's rights to privacy and personal autonomy. Ensuring compassionate choices at life's end is a responsibility we all bear in order to stop unnecessary pain and suffering. I joined fellow legislators and advocates at a press conference in support of the [Medical Aid in Dying Act](#) that gives terminally-ill patients with less than six months to live the option to voluntarily request, legally obtain, and self-administer medication from their physician to transition peacefully and in a dignified manner. The Act has necessary safeguards to ensure that patients are mentally capable, are making the decision of their own free will, and ensures that patients are protected from coercion or abuse in making this difficult decision. Ten other states and Washington, D.C. have similar laws without a single instance of abuse or coercion, including Oregon from which this bill is modeled and that has been in effect since 1997. A further eleven states have active legislation pending. Passing the Medical Aid in Dying Act is imperative to empower New Yorkers during one of the most important and personal decisions that only they should be allowed to make.



## Compassion and Reproductive Equity

Babies born to incarcerated mothers deserve a healthy start to life! That is why I am proud to sponsor the CARE Act: Compassion and Reproductive Equity [A7630](#), which ensures safety for babies and 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 would 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. We are planning our first advocacy day in Albany on February 6 in partnership with [New Hour](#). You can [sign the online petition](#) to show your support of the bill, and if you're interested, [RSVP](#) to participate in the day.



**newhour**  
Compassion and  
Reproductive Equity (CARE)  
**1st Advocacy Day**

**FEB | 6<sup>TH</sup> | 2024**

New York State Capitol, Albany

Join us and together we will advocate across the state with a rally and press conference and call on the New York State Legislature to pass the CARE Act (S.7132/A.7630). The CARE Act puts babies first by ensuring access to all necessary prenatal care for incarcerated pregnant individuals and ensuring postpartum support for mother-baby bonding. There is only one chance to create this bond and when it happens it will help babies for life.

Let's show we CARE together.

**RSVP:**

**[bit.ly/ItsAboutTheBabies24](https://bit.ly/ItsAboutTheBabies24)**

**SIGN ON:**

**[bit.ly/CareActSignOn](https://bit.ly/CareActSignOn)**



# Around the District

## Utility Assistance Event

I know that New Yorkers' budgets are stretched, and I was so pleased to be able to assist Cortland residents get connected to programs to reduce their energy costs at last week's utility assistance event. We were able to help residents complete HEAP applications, enroll in NYSEG energy assistance programs, and learn more about rebates to insulate their home or upgrade their heating systems. Thank you to Senator Lea Webb and the NYS Public Utility Law Project (PULP) for hosting the event with me and to all the organizations who assisted: Cortland County DSS, CAPCO Energy Services, Cortland Office for the Aging, NYS Public Service Commission, NYSEG, National Grid, and the NYS Regional Clean Energy Hub.

Not able to attend? Residents can call the [PULP](#) toll free hotline at 877-669-2572 to discuss their individual needs and connect to services. Or plan to attend this week's utility assistance event in Tompkins County!

**Thursday, January 25**

**4 - 7 pm**

**Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC)**

**301 W. Court St, Ithaca**



## **American Kennel Club's Pet Promise**

The American Kennel Club's (AKC) [Meet the Breeds event](#) is January 27-28 in New York City. While I am not able to attend the event in-person, I am thrilled to serve as an Honorary Chair for the event! Folks in the district know that I am an avid animal lover, and my pets occupy tons of space in my heart! Pet ownership is a serious responsibility, and I encourage all dog owners to sign the [AKC Pet Promise](#) to show your commitment to healthy and responsible pet ownership.



# Community Resources

## **Free Tax Preparation Assistance**

Tax season is approaching! Assistance is available for qualifying individuals in both Tompkins and Cortland Counties.

## **Tompkins County**

[Lifelong](#) can provide free tax return preparation for residents who are 1) Sixty years of age or older, or 2) disabled, or 3) have limited English proficiency, or 4) with family incomes of \$60,000 or less. Appointments are available at Lifelong in Ithaca, Ulysses Philomathic Library in Trumansburg, and Southworth Library in Dryden. Appointments will be available beginning Tuesday, January 30 through Saturday, April 13. Call 607-279-3741 to schedule an appointment.

## **Cortland County**

The [Volunteer Income Tax Assistance](#) (VITA) program will provide free basic income tax return preparation for residents who 1) make \$64,000 or less annually, 2) are disabled, or 3) have limited English proficiency. Call 211 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays to schedule an appointment.



## National Blood Shortage

The American Red Cross has announced an [Emergency Blood Shortage](#) as the nation faces the lowest number of people giving blood in 20 years. Blood and platelet donations are needed now to help alleviate the shortage and ensure lifesaving medical procedures are not delayed. If you are able, find a blood drive near you and [sign up to donate](#). Area organizations can also volunteer to [host a blood drive](#). Your blood donation can save lives!



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In good health,

*Anne R Keller*

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](mailto:kellesa@contactme.nyassembly.gov)