



Assemblymember

Anna Kelles

Assembly District 125



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Dear Neighbors,

This newsletter continues the breakdown of the New York State FY2025 Budget, focusing on the areas of **Health, Mental Health, Disability Services, Addiction Services, and Investments for Families and Communities**. Next week, I will wrap up my review of the budget, focusing on Public Safety and Corrections.

If you missed the [April 25](#) and [April 29](#) newsletters which highlighted additional areas of the budget, you can read them on my [Assembly website](#). This [recent article from City and State New York](#) also provides a good breakdown of the final housing deal.

The legislative recess has concluded, and I am back in Albany, working hard during these final weeks of session for passage of my legislative package.

State Budget

Health

Medicaid and Health Facilities: The initial executive budget proposal included \$1.2 billion in Medicaid cuts for long-term care, hospitals, nursing home facilities, and home care. The Legislature was able to restore many of these cuts through the budget negotiations. The State plans to secure approximately \$4 billion of much-needed Medicaid revenue to invest in healthcare for vulnerable populations of low-income, elderly, and disabled individuals. Highlights include:

- \$800 million for **financially distressed hospitals**, which will assist with rural hospitals and benefit constituents in our district
- \$350 million for **Hospital Medicaid repayment rates** by an increase of approx. 3.5% as well as per diem increases for Nursing Homes and Assisted Living programs
- \$400 million to keep **SUNY Downstate Medical Center** operating until 2025 and an advisory board will set long-term plans for the hospital. It is part of the SUNY system, and serves a majority of low-income, uninsured or underinsured patients. It is also a teaching hospital, connected to SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University, with an emphasis on graduating a diverse and representative cohort of doctors, nurses, and healthcare practitioners.
- Secures \$7.6 million to guarantee continuous **Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** eligibility for children from birth to age 6 regardless of changes of family income.

Reproductive Freedom and Equity: The budget codifies into law the Reproductive Freedom and Equity grant program. The state program provides funding for abortion care providers and non-profit organizations to ensure the affordability of and access to care for individuals who lack the ability to pay for care or individuals who lack insurance or adequate insurance.

Office for the Aging: The final budget restored the proposed \$9.3 million cut in the Executive budget and added an additional \$700,000 for a total of \$10 million for the Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly Program. The program oversees county-run home- and community-based services. Approximately \$41 million additional funds are needed to eliminate the statewide wait list (of over 12,000 individuals) for these vital services like, home-delivered meals and personal care, including toileting and bathing. Although this funding was included in both the Assembly and Senate One House budget proposals, these funds did not make it into the final budget.

Long Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP): A [Long Term Care Ombudsman](#) serves as an advocate and resource for seniors living in nursing homes or assisted living centers by mediating conflicts, ensuring a senior's rights are not infringed upon, and providing consultation on state and local programs. The final budget restored the \$2.5 million proposed cut in the executive budget. From an AARP report, at least \$15 million is needed to professionalize and improve LTCOP to the point where each facility receives a weekly visit from an ombudsman, which is the program's stated goal. Currently only 12% of facilities are visited on a weekly basis, according to records from the State office of the Aging. We will need to continue to push for this representation moving forward.

The **Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP)**, which provides essential home care to chronically ill or disabled individuals, was one of the most controversial debates of the budget season. New York faces extreme shortages in home care workers, and workers have struggled for years with chronically low wages. The Executive budget initially proposed \$200.4 million in cuts by excluding wage parity benefits to the CDPAP. The Legislature rejected this proposal, and the final enacted budget included CDPAP assistants in the 1.7% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) wage increases for human service staff. However, as I explain below, this increase is not sufficient, and we will likely see more home care staff leave the workforce, an issue we will have to address in future budgets to keep residents in their homes with sufficient quality care long term. Keeping individuals in their homes, with the assistance they need, not only provides more comfort but is more cost effective than long-term care facilities or nursing homes. Without home care workers, more individuals will have to

choose long-term care facilities or nursing homes to ensure their safety and get the care they need. You can learn more about the program [here](#).

The cost and use of the program since its inception has skyrocketed, though the myriad of causes is not fully known. Once pens were down, the final budget included an agreement to consolidate the work of over 700 fiscal intermediaries (FI) that currently administer the program into one state-wide FI. This FI will subcontract with FIs to implant the program regionally. All Independence Centers (like the Finger Lakes Independence Center) that have been FIs, will continue to be sub FIs. Additionally, there will be at least 4 region-based FIs. The structure and number of sub FIs will be determined in the months to come. As we find out more details we will communicate any opportunities to provide input into the implementation of this plan.

The governor estimates a savings of \$200 million by centralizing the FI responsibilities, while maintaining the same level of care, but it remains unclear if this shift will achieve the desired streamlined services, or if the change will limit consumer choice and reduce services to our older population and individuals with disabilities. No estimate was made official of how many jobs the state is expected to lose via terminated FI contracts.

Dementia & Alzheimer's Disease: An existing program that subsidizes the cost of assisted living for those with dementia or Alzheimer's disease (who are not currently eligible for medical assistance) will be restricted to those residing in a certified special needs assisted living facility. Although, depending on future funding allocations, the total vouchers for the program will no longer be restricted to 200, potentially expanding access to the program.

Veterans' Support: The final budget loosens the requirements for veteran eligibility to skilled nursing facilities or health related facility by reducing the New York residency requirement from 1 year to 6 months.



Assemblymember Kelles poses a question at the Health Budget Hearing in January 2024.

Mental Health, Disability Services, and Addiction Services

Cost of Living Adjustments: As we continue to address the growing mental health and substance use disorder crises in our community, as well as provide services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), it is critical that we invest in the practitioners doing the hard, day-to-day work to provide this critical care.

The final budget included COLA increases of 1.7% to support staff, direct care staff, clinical staff, and non-executive administrative staff for a total of \$244.4 million in funding. While this is an important step, the COLA increase is below the 3.2% requested, and it is not keeping pace with inflation. For many previous years, COLAs were zero or below the rate of inflation, leading to a cumulative underfunding of staff wages. We will need to continue to make investments in future budgets to retain and attract the workforce to these important jobs.

Early Intervention: Having a young child with special needs presents families with unique challenges. The range of therapeutic and support services offered through Early Intervention (EI) programs are critical in helping children with disabilities or developmental delays live life to the fullest. The final budget provides \$19.5 million in funding to support a 5% rate increase for in-person services under the EI program, as well as an additional 4% rate increase for rural areas and underserved communities. The increase is lower than the 11% rate increase needed but moves us in the right direction for funding these critical services.

Support for Individuals with Mental Illness in the Criminal Justice System: Too often, individuals with mental illnesses get caught up in the criminal justice system. A total of \$31.1 million funding in the budget will support individuals in accessing the help they need and potentially diverting them from prison. Investments include: court based mental health navigators; support for transitional housing for individuals referred through the court system; specialized housing for people with Severe Mental Illness (SMI) and criminal history; and crisis intervention team training for law enforcement. An additional \$3.5 million has been designated for crisis intervention teams.

Job Placement Services for those in Recovery: The Executive budget proposal had initially eliminated funding for vocational, rehabilitation and job placement services for those recovering from and dealing with addiction. The Legislature fought to restore funding for this important job assistance program and included \$3 million in the final budget.



Assemblymember Kelles poses a question at the Mental Hygiene Budget Hearing in February 2024.

Investments in New York Families and Communities

The **childcare** workforce provides essential services in our communities and deserve job stability and livable wages. The NYS budget strongly invests in childcare by providing \$280 million in workforce funding for the recruitment and retention of childcare providers and \$60.2 million for various family and children’s services programs.

No person should go hungry. The budget includes **funding for hunger relief** to secure equitable access to food for our most vulnerable populations, including:

- \$58 million for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program
- \$54 million in additional funding for Nourish NY to connect struggling farmers to food-insecure households

- \$5.5 million for the Nutritional Outreach and Education Program (NOEP)
- \$2 million for Double Up Food Bucks that allows SNAP recipients to “double up” their dollars for fruit and vegetables, allowing their benefits to go further on healthy options

Libraries are not just a place to access books and information but serve as centers for our communities. The budget provides \$103.9 million in aid to public libraries, which is an increase of \$1.7 over the Executive proposal. In addition, \$44 million is designated for library capital improvements.

New York Statewide Investment in More Swimming (NY SWIMS) initiative will rehabilitate pools and enhance access to swimming for communities, including natural swim areas. Of the \$150 million allocated, \$60 million will be directed for pools in underserved communities.



Assemblymember Kelles visits the SUNY Cortland Child Care Center, April 2024.

New Laws

Boating Safety Laws Now in Effect

In 2020, a new state law took effect, known as [Brianna's Law](#), after Brianna Lieneck, an 11-year-old Long Island girl who was tragically killed in a 2005 boating accident. The law requires all motorboat operators, regardless of age, to have a boating safety certificate beginning in 2025. However, the law had a five-year, phase-in plan and some aspects will be in effect for the 2024 boating season. If you plan to boat this spring and summer, read on for important information!

Who needs a boating safety certificate?

Motorboats: Under the new law, all motorboat operators:

- Born on or after Jan. 1, 1978 will need a boating safety certificate beginning in 2024
- All motorboat operators regardless of age will need a boating safety certificate beginning in 2025

Personal Watercraft:

- Anyone operating a Personal Watercraft (JetSki™, Wave Runner™, etc.) must have a boating safety certificate and be at least 14 years of age or older.

Boaters may take approved courses either in person or online. For course information, frequently asked questions, as well as a digital copy of the 2024 Boaters Guide visit: <https://parks.ny.gov/recreation/boating/>

Additionally, the following federal regulations were adopted into state law this year:

- **Fire Extinguishers:** Effective April 20, 2022, federal law dictates that disposable fire extinguishers are considered expired 12 years after the manufacture date stamped on the extinguisher.
- **Engine Cut Off Switch (ECOS):** If a vessel less than 26 feet is equipped with an engine cut-off switch, the operator of the vessel is required to use it and the associated lanyard attached to the operator. As of 2018, all newly manufactured boats are required to have an ECOS installed.
- **Sound Signaling devices** aboard paddle craft: All paddle craft users must carry a sound signaling device aboard. A mouth whistle fulfills this requirement.



Image from Freepik

Around the District

Community Restaurant Included in the New York State Historic Business Preservation Registry

Local businesses are the backbone of villages, towns, and cities across the state and have helped to shape the history, heritage, and identity of the communities they serve. This is the premise of the [NYS Historic Business Preservation Registry](#) and was created to honor businesses in operation for more than 50 years who have helped shape their community. I was honored to nominate the Community Restaurant in Cortland, and I am grateful I was able to celebrate their successful inclusion on the registry! The Community has been in operation on Main Street for more than 90 years and under the ownership of the Souzas family since 1963. For family dinners, date nights, milestones and business gatherings, it serves the community with classic dishes, amazing Greek specialties and hospitality! Congratulations to Evan Souzas and his family for continuing this family restaurant, preserving not only his family history, but the history of the Cortland community.



Recognizing Doug's Fish Fry during National Small Business Week

The U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) Syracuse District Office has named Mark Braun, owner of Doug's Fish Fry, as the Upstate New York Rural Small Business Owner of the Year. I was honored to be in Cortland and celebrate with Mark's children as they accepted the award on his behalf. Doug's Fish Fry first opened in Cortland in 1991 and has grown into a successful and popular local restaurant with over 33 employees. Doug's To Go trailers are used by charity events to help organizations raise funds, where a percentage of the sales is donated back to the organization. To date, over \$2 million has been raised for charity! Congratulations to Mark and all the staff who have contributed to the success of Doug's Fish Fry!



In good health,

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