



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF SYRACUSE, MAYOR SHARON F. OWENS

February 11, 2026

Hon. J. Gary Pretlow, Chair
Assembly Ways and Means Committee

Hon. Liz Krueger, Chair
Senate Finance Committee

Good morning,

Thank you, Chair Pretlow, Chair Krueger, and the members of the Legislative Fiscal Committees, for inviting me to these joint hearings to discuss the State Budget. This is my first testimony since being elected as Mayor of Syracuse and taking office on January 1, and it is an honor to be here with you today.

Two weeks ago, I delivered my 2026 State of the City address to the people of Syracuse. I was proud to report that the State of our City is growing, diverse, and ripe with opportunities for all.

Our community finds itself at a crossroads: with 2026 welcoming historic, once-in-a-generation investments that are now underway, such as the I-81 viaduct replacement and the groundbreaking of Micron; these projects present meaningful opportunities for our residents and families. At the same time, we face strong headwinds due to rising costs and affordability concerns that households across New York State are being forced to navigate. In spite of this, the City of Syracuse remains committed to our ongoing revitalization, with unprecedented investment underway and new workforce and housing initiatives that are helping us ensure we remain a place where individuals and families can pursue economic opportunity and provide for their families.

The ongoing resurgence in Syracuse is due in large part because of this Legislature. Your support has been critical in order to rebuild and revitalize our community. I am particularly appreciative of the members of our local delegation, Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli, Assemblywoman Pam Hunter, Assemblyman Al Stirpe, Senator Rachel May, and Senator Chris Ryan.

Last month, Central New York formally celebrated the ground-breaking of Micron, the leading manufacturer of memory chips in the United States, for its \$100 Billion investment to build four semiconductor fabs in Clay, NY. I had the privilege of being part of this historic event, joined by Micron's executive team, Governor Hochul, and members from our local delegation in the Senate and Assembly, and others at the federal, state, and local level. The Micron site is located just 12 miles north of Syracuse, and as the largest city and economic hub in our region, the investment being made by

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Micron presents a historic opportunity for our community to provide the jobs and the workforce needed to build these new fabs and provide thousands of new jobs. With site work on this historic project now underway, we are seeking continued state partnership for a new series of catalytic investments in jobs, housing, and infrastructure to ensure these chip fabs bring the maximum benefit possible to the City of Syracuse. Like local governments across New York, we also seek the state's help in building the city's own fiscal sustainability.

Capitalizing on the continued growth of New York's semiconductor ecosystem is essential to rebuilding Syracuse's middle class and reducing our stubbornly high poverty rate. We've made steady progress in recent years, but we must accelerate the rate in which children and families are rising above our poverty thresholds. By creating meaningful new careers and ensuring these jobs are available to City residents, this will help achieve economic stability, security, and generational wealth providing real pathways out of poverty. These efforts are critically important to change the financial realities of poverty that too many of our residents face.

We will continue advancing this work through three objectives: First, create new opportunity by using economic development funds to facilitate private investment and job creation; second, expand access to quality housing by advancing the Syracuse Housing Strategy implementation; and third, complete critical infrastructure investments to expand capacity and create shovel-ready sites to accommodate anticipated growth.

Jobs and Opportunity

In jobs and opportunity, the City will focus on spurring new private investment within neighborhood business corridors and commercial districts. We will connect economically distressed areas to workforce training and employment centers. We'll also emphasize key needs in preparation for Micron related growth: new hotel rooms; greater capitalization of Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBE's) and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) real estate developers; and new infill development to increase density and vibrant commercial districts.

Affordable Housing

As the City of Syracuse faces unprecedented growth, we need to ensure we have sufficient housing stock to meet both our current needs as well as the demands of our growing City. We currently have over 1,000 housing units under construction that will offer a mix of market-rate and affordable rental and homeownership opportunities. Several of these projects underway could not be possible without support from the Legislature and NYS HCR, and we are thankful to our state partners for these investments. Furthermore, I am grateful to the legislature and the Governor for having a thoughtful conversation about SEQRA reforms and ways to simplify reviews on critical housing investments. We will also continue to implement the Syracuse Housing Strategy, an innovative, multi-year plan to revitalize the city's aging housing stock. The strategy is now empowering city residents to fix up their homes and strengthen their neighborhoods with assistance from the Housing Strategies Fund.

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To maximize the impact of city and state investment, we are also using a new tool, the Syracuse Housing Strategy Corporation, to incentivize neighbors to partner together in order to make necessary upgrades to preserve our aging housing stock, while adding exterior curb appeal. These efforts are making the City more attractive for home buyers and encouraging greater private investment to lift up more properties. They will also result in stronger markets in Syracuse neighborhoods, increased property values and tax revenues, and draw more residents and families into Syracuse.

Additionally, I will remind the legislature that Syracuse like most metropolitan centers bare the greatest responsibility for housing our most vulnerable residents. Exclusionary zoning and land use laws, policies and practices in municipalities outside of Syracuse place an unfair and unsustainable burden on our ability to house and shelter the county and region's homeless and critically housing vulnerable residents.

Public Infrastructure

On the topic of public infrastructure, the state has and continues to be our essential partner in maintaining and upgrading our roads, sewers, and water systems. 2026 marks the start of new contracts as part of the I-81 viaduct project, and new portions of the \$2.25 Billion investment will take place within city limits, which we are actively making preparations for the detours and disruption. We recognize that disruptions are inevitable, and as I like to say, here in Syracuse, we are paused in the midst of progress.

In addition to this once-in-a-generation project, we will deploy additional state support to complete strategic infrastructure upgrades to support new commercial and mixed-use development. Major infrastructure improvements will occur in alignment with the East Adams neighborhood near the Interstate 81 Community Grid, Syracuse's Inner Harbor neighborhood, and the new Lafayette Hills development which will bring hundreds of market rate single family and duplex homes to the city. The pinnacle of the I-81 project will see the removal of the elevated section that have divided our community for years. Upon its removal I plan to go to the location and just stand there in order to see and feel this monumental change.

This is why the land under the viaduct, which is currently owned by New York State, must be conveyed for ownership to the City of Syracuse. The future of the land under the existing viaduct is a critical puzzle piece to the revitalization of our community. I look forward to working with NYSDOT to create a pathway for City ownership, which is critical to ensure public engagement in the determination of land use and zoning.

We are continuing to reduce the levels of lead considered acceptable by EPA standards in our drinking water and remain in full compliance with EPA requirements, and thanks to our dedicated staff in the Syracuse Water Department, we remain ahead of EPA mandates for replacements, and we're going to stay that way. We are poised to complete more than 1,700 lead water service lines in 2026. To meet

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this goal, we have tripled the number of crews undertaking this work within Syracuse. With continued help from the state and federal governments, I remain confident that we can do away with all lead service lines well before the 10-year mandate.

Fiscal Sustainability

Regarding fiscal sustainability, I'm pleased to report that all major indicators of financial health show Syracuse is stronger today than in years past.

In 2022, S&P upgraded our city's credit rating from A to A+, and I have every intention on maintaining that rating as our efforts continue during my Administration. The reality is, though, the City of Syracuse has consistently needed to draw upon our reserves as part of our annual budget. As long as we are in that position, we have not achieved fiscal sustainability.

To address our current structural deficit, we are working to grow our tax base by investing in housing, jobs, and neighborhoods - because growth, not austerity is the path to stability.

Even in the early weeks since taking office, my Administration is actively exploring new revenue sources and plans to complete a city-wide property revaluation to better capture property values and taxes. We are also exploring new opportunities, such as a Land Value Tax, to incentivize the highest and best use of property for economic growth. I am aware that a Bill for the Senate to authorize a Land Value Tax at the local level be instituted in New York State is under consideration by the Assembly, and I urge the Legislature to work together to pass this legislation, allowing these pilot communities to be identified.

We are also grateful to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for authorizing Temporary Municipal Assistance in last year's budget to help supplement AIM aid, which, as you know, has remained unchanged since 2012. Furthermore, the AIM formula must also take into account communities like Syracuse that have a majority of nonprofit and government-owned properties, which comprise of 52% of our tax base. I'm pleased that temporary aid is again in the Executive Budget, and I urge the Legislature to revisit the AIM formula and permanently adjust this vital funding source in order to reflect the substantial growth in state budgets and the actual costs New York's municipalities face.

I would also like to address the actions taken by the Federal Government around immigration. Within the City of Syracuse, like so many other communities and around the United States, we have seen neighbors wrongfully detained, families torn apart, and actions taken by immigration enforcement that are cruel and unacceptable. As I have said publicly and will reiterate this morning, the men and women of the Syracuse Police Department, sworn to protect and serve the people of Syracuse, will not take on the role of immigration enforcement.

It's also why I strongly support new legislative proposals including the Local Cops Local Crimes Act introduced by Governor Hochul, and the New York for All Act. This legislation, if passed, would prohibit local law enforcement across the State from enforcing federal immigration law. It would also limit federal agents from entering property without a signed judicial warrant. These protections matter because they

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uphold trust, safety, and dignity for everyone who calls New York and Syracuse home.

We stand ready to partner with this Legislature in advocating for the needs of cities and the many diverse people who make urban communities vital, appealing, and enduring.

I want to reiterate my appreciation to the members of the Syracuse delegation and the full Legislature for your enduring support during this crucial moment in our community. As I declared at my State of the City address, with continued partnership and collaboration at all levels of government, we will continue to pursue “What’s Next”, for the City of Syracuse and the opportunities for the entire State. I am confident the progress underway in Syracuse and Central New York is creating a meaningful impact that will be felt throughout New York State.

I look forward to working with you in the year ahead. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Sharon F. Owens
Mayor

cc: Hon. Rachel May
Hon. Chris Ryan
Hon. William Magnarelli
Hon. Pamela Hunter
Hon. Al Stirpe