



Dear Neighbors,

Last week I shared an overview of what was included in the Executive Budget, which [can be found here](#). In the weeks following the release of the Executive Budget proposal, the Legislature held a series of public budget hearings to review the Governor’s plan. These hearings focused on all major areas of state spending such as health, social services, public safety, housing, education, transportation, and the environment.

At these hearings, Assemblymembers and Senators questioned state agencies and heard testimony from individuals and organizations invited to share their views. Testimony often comes from policy experts, advocacy organizations, local governments, and community leaders who explain how the proposed budget would impact their communities and outline changes they believe the Legislature should make. In many cases, they advocate for specific programs or funding priorities to be included, expanded, or protected in the final State Budget.



Budget Hearings Conclude as Legislature Prepares One House Budgets

The Legislature has now concluded this year’s series of public budget hearings. The information gathered during these hearings informs the Legislature’s response to the Governor’s proposal. Today, the [Assembly](#) and [Senate](#) released their respective One House budget proposals, which outline the changes and priorities each house believes should be reflected in the final State budget. We will vote to approve them this Thursday.

In the final stage of the budget process, the Governor, the Senate, and the Assembly will use their respective proposals as the basis for negotiations that will continue until a final State Budget

agreement is reached. The budget is legally due by midnight on March 31, though in the last four years negotiations have continued into April.

Below are highlights and notes from several of the hearings I participated in, along with links to watch them.

Tuesday, January 27: Agriculture & Markets



During this hearing, I questioned witnesses about several priorities important to farmers and rural communities in our district and across the State. My questions focused on strengthening conservation initiatives for farmland, soil, and water, increasing reimbursements to farmers who supply food for school meal programs, a much-needed increase in funding for agricultural products research through Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALs), and agrivoltaics research.

Below are some agriculture-related priorities I am fighting to have included in the final State Budget.

- **\$10 Million for [Cornell College of Agriculture and Life Sciences \(CALs\)](#) and [Cornell CALs AgriTech](#)**
 - **\$5 Million for operational support** to provide solutions for agricultural challenges facing farmers and processors. These programs are facing devastating cuts from the federal government, and state support for land-grant research activities has remained flat since 2009.

- **\$5 Million in capital funding** for Cornell AgriTech and Cornell CALS research facilities to support necessary infrastructure repairs, lab, field, and farm equipment, and facilities across New York.
- **\$500,000 for the [Center for Agrivoltaics \(restoration\)](#)**. Agrivoltaics combines solar energy production with agricultural use of land. This funding would support an additional year of a research study established through my legislation [A4911/S7081](#) in 2023. Because solar panels are often installed on open, sunny land, which is typically the same land best suited for farming, agrivoltaics research examines how crops and solar panels can coexist, so farmland remains productive while also generating renewable energy.
- **\$7.4 Million for [Cornell Cooperative Extension \(CCE\)](#)** which connects Cornell University with local communities across the state through county-based educators and partnerships. With a presence in every county and New York City, CCE delivers research-based programs supporting agriculture, youth development, and nutrition education.
- **\$1.625 Million for the New York Wine & Grape Foundation**
- **\$30 million for statewide [SNAP-Ed programming](#)** which helps low-income families access nutrition education and health food resources.
- **\$13.19 million for Cornell agricultural programs** that support New York farmers through dairy research and technical assistance, livestock disease testing and food safety monitoring, and crop research that helps farmers respond to pests, climate pressures, and changing markets.

You can watch the [entire proceeding here](#). Additionally here are [my notes from the testimonies](#), if you would like a more in-depth summary of the hearings.

Wednesday, January 28: Environmental Conservation/Energy



Over the course of twelve hours, the Legislature heard testimony from more than two dozen experts, advocates, and organizations working to make our state cleaner, protect our water, and advance climate policy. These witnesses shared their perspectives on the Governor's proposed budget and discussed the investments and policy changes needed for New York to meet the goals laid out in the CLCPA.

During the hearing, I raised questions and concerns about proposed funding cuts to the [Environmental Protection Fund](#), exclusion of draft regulations to implement a cap and invest program ([click here to see the pre-proposal released last year](#)), strategies to address rising utility rates, and the profits generated by plastic manufacturing by the oil and gas industry, and.

Here are several priorities that I am advocating to include in the State Budget:

- **\$20 million to Biosolids research** to implement the provisions of [A10138/S9115](#), which establishes a five year moratorium on the land application of biosolids until testing, reporting standards, and safety protocols are in place. Biosolids are treated sewage sludge that is sometimes applied to farmland as fertilizer. Emerging research indicates that biosolids often contain [PFAS](#) and other contaminants that accumulate in soil, livestock, and drinking water. This bill would also create an Agriculture Response Fund to support farmers impacted by contamination.
- **Supporting municipalities cleaning up PFAS contamination.** New York's Environmental Restoration Program (ERP) [A3091-A](#) was created to help municipalities investigate and

remediate contaminated, municipally owned properties, particularly abandoned or underutilized sites, so they can be made safe and returned to productive use. To date, the program has supported cleanup at more than 170 sites statewide, including 35 active projects and 141 completed, demonstrating its value as an effective tool for local governments. My proposal would modernize the program to allow funding for PFAS-related cleanup and ensure municipalities are not left to shoulder the cost of protecting drinking water on their own.

- **\$500,000 for a Native Plants Program ([A3030/S1690](#))** which would establish requirements for the use of native plants on public lands wherever practicable and direct the establishment of a New York Native Plants Program to encourage and promote the sale of NY native plants and seeds at retail garden centers and nurseries.
 - The purpose is to strengthen New York State’s native ecology by preserving, promoting, and enhancing native plants and the pollinator insects and birds that rely on them. This approach reduces the need for irrigation, pesticides, and fertilizers on state or municipally owned, and state-funded or subsidized green spaces. It also increases the resilience of New York’s ecosystems.
- **\$385,000 to Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank (MARSB)** to support New York State’s Native Plant and Seed Supply Program. This investment will help ensure that New York has the native plant materials needed to implement recently enacted laws that iml championed calling for the banking of native plant seeds (Chapter 89 of 2025) as well as the creation of a NYS native plant “grown and certified” program (see A7964 of 2025 and chapter amendment A9478 of 2026), and will support climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, habitat restoration, and public infrastructure projects statewide.
- **\$400,000 for Clean Energy Apprenticeship Wraparound Services** helping workers entering the clean energy workforce access childcare, transportation, tools, and other supports needed to complete training and secure good-paying jobs.
- **\$12.5 Million for Harmful Algal Blooms (HABS)** research and intervention. HABS occur when certain types of algae grow rapidly in lakes and waterways, sometimes producing toxins that can harm people, pets, livestock and wildlife. HABS have become increasingly common in New York due to changing conditions like warmer temperatures and nutrient pollution.
 - This funding would allow the [Department of Environmental Conservation \(DEC\)](#), together with [Departments of Agriculture & Markets \(DAM\)](#) and [Health \(DOH\)](#), to develop a comprehensive statewide Harmful Algal Bloom (HABS) database, which would combine two decades of research conducted across state agencies, higher

education and non-profit organizations to improve monitoring, prevention and response strategies for HABs outbreaks in lakes and waterways across New York.

- **\$500 Million for the [Environmental Protection Fund \(EPF\)](#)** The EPF is New York’s primary funding source for [critical programs](#) that support land conservation, climate resilience, parks, water quality and protecting farmland. Initiatives I advocated to add include:
 - \$300,000 for the Natural Fibers Initiative
 - \$500,00 for the Finger Lakes Watershed Grants Program
 - \$500,000 for Grassland Bird Conservation Centers
- **\$1 billion for the Sustainable Futures Fund.** This funding ensures New York continues making measurable progress towards the goals of the [Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act \(CLCPA\)](#). According to a 2025 report from [NYSERDA](#), every \$1 billion invested in clean energy generates approximately \$1.5 billion in economic output, supports 7,400 new jobs, and produces \$685 million in labor income. Programs like [Empower+](#) have already supported nearly 42,000 home energy projects statewide, saving families an estimated \$25.8 million annually.

If you are interested in watching the full hearing, [you can view it here](#) or read a more in depth summary in my [notes from the testimonies](#).

Advocacy to keep CLCPA changes out of the budget

The [Climate Leadership and Protection Act \(CLCPA\)](#), signed into law in 2019, established legally binding statewide climate targets for New York. It requires the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 40% by 2030 and 85% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels and sets a goal of reaching a zero-emission electricity system by 2040.

The law directs agencies to align regulations, funding decisions, and implementation plans with the CLCPA targets. The law also required New York to develop the [Climate Action Council’s Scoping Plan](#), which outlines the major strategy recommendations to align our policies and infrastructure for transportation, buildings, electricity, industry, agriculture, land use and waste to align with the climate law.

The need to implement the CLCPA Scoping Plan and transition to energy independence through renewables in New York State is more important than ever. Recent evidence shows how strongly our utility costs are tied to volatile fossil fuel markets. This February, [NYSEG and RG&E reported](#) that rising natural gas prices and increased demand were pushing up winter supply costs. For example, they cited electric supply prices more than 44% higher for NYSEG customers and nearly 36% higher for RG&E customers, and noted that the New York Independent System Operator (NYISO) [has](#)

[identified natural gas](#) as the single largest driver of wholesale electricity costs in the state. [NYISO has also explained](#) that high natural gas prices raise both heating bills and electricity prices because natural gas is widely used for home heating and power generation. NYISO also noted that wholesale electricity supply costs have been climbing as natural gas prices nearly doubled over the past year.

Global oil and gas markets are highly sensitive to geopolitical instability, and [the new conflict in the Middle East initiated by the United States and Israel, has already added further escalation in fossil fuel prices](#). Rising utility bills cannot be attributed to the implementation of the CLCPA, because most of the policies in the Scoping Plan have not yet been implemented. Instead, much of the pressure on household energy bills reflects our continued dependence on oil and natural gas and the price volatility that comes with it.

Given the politically charged nature of energy and climate policy discussions, it is critical that any analysis, debate, and decision-making remain transparent and publicly accessible outside the budget process. You can [watch a short clip here](#) of my remarks during the budget hearing discussing the Climate Action Council's Scoping Plan and why it's critical that we stay committed to implementing the [CLCPA](#).

In the weeks to come there will be a three way negotiation to consolidate the three proposals into one final set of budget bills that, if on time, we will vote on by midnight on March 31st.

Updates will continue as the budget process moves toward the April deadline. Constituent feedback is an important part of this process and helps inform the priorities raised during budget negotiations. If there are issues that are important to you, please reach out to my office!

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

ALBANY OFFICE	CORTLAND OFFICE	ITHACA OFFICE
LOB 538	83 Main St	130 East State Street
Albany, NY 12248	PO Box 5026	Ithaca, NY 14850
518-455-5444	Cortland, NY 13045	607-277-8030

607-208-2024