



Dear neighbors and community,

Below are a few updates from a day in the life in our office, some troubling, some thought provoking and some awe inspiring and all deeply meaningful.



Around the District

A visit to Albion Medium Security Women's Prison



Earlier this fall, I joined the [Correctional Association of New York \(CANY\)](#) for the first day of their scheduled two-day monitoring visit to [Albion Correctional Facility](#), a medium-security women's prison in Western New York. While state law allows legislators to make unannounced visits, I chose to accompany CANY on this occasion because of their expertise and long-standing mandate. Established in 1846, CANY is the only independent organization in New York with statutory authority to regularly enter state prisons, interview approximately 10 percent of the incarcerated population, meet with staff and administrators, and issue public reports on conditions, services, and the implementation

of state laws and regulations. Their work provides essential transparency in a system that is otherwise closed to public view.

Albion currently houses about 540 individuals, roughly half of its maximum capacity, yet faces significant staffing vacancies across corrections officers, medical and mental health personnel, administration, and program staff. These shortages were a central theme in nearly every interview and have contributed to the widespread suspension of educational, vocational, and therapeutic programs across the state this summer. Programming plays a critical role in safety, rehabilitation, and reentry outcomes, and many incarcerated individuals expressed deep frustration with the near-total lack of access.

Our visit began with discussions with Albion's executive team, who described ongoing efforts to expand fixed-camera installations and implement body-worn cameras for all officers, funded in this year's state budget. They also outlined the impact of the February - March statewide corrections officer strike, which severely disrupted operations in all facilities. During the strike, essential services such as food, visits, medical care, and basic out-of-cell time were curtailed, and at least seven incarcerated individuals died. Because public employees in New York cannot legally strike, many officers involved were terminated, and the National Guard remains deployed to fill staffing gaps.

CANY's interviews with incarcerated individuals provided a more personal perspective on conditions. Members of the [Incarcerated Liaison Committee](#) (ILC), who represent the facility's population, described challenges with accessing medical care, delays in specialist appointments, inconsistent follow-up for everyday injuries, limited reproductive healthcare, and frustration with the grievance system. Many expressed concern about heat in their dormitories and in the [Special Housing Unit](#) (SHU), where ventilation is limited and fans are not permitted. Several individuals reported barriers to obtaining basic items such as clothing, replacement uniforms, and commissary goods, particularly given wages of 10 to 33 cents per hour.

A significant portion of the day focused on the implementation of the [Humane Alternatives to Long-Term Solitary Confinement \(HALT\) Act](#). Although HALT restricts solitary confinement to 15 consecutive days and requires more rehabilitative alternatives, statewide implementation has been incomplete. Individuals in Albion's SHU described very restrictive conditions, while both officers and incarcerated people indicated that the absence of programming incentives and the partial suspension of HALT during the strike have contributed to tension and instability inside facilities.

We also reviewed the flow of packages and mail, which has been slowed by limited staffing, and the use of tablets for communication and legal research. While tablets improve access to certain services, individuals in the SHU reported not receiving required daily access to the law library.

This visit highlighted significant challenges driven by staffing shortages, inconsistent implementation of state law, and the prolonged suspension of rehabilitative programming. Continued oversight, investment in services, and adherence to legal standards are essential to ensuring safety, dignity, and successful reentry for all New Yorkers impacted by the correctional system. [Here is a comprehensive report my staff and I compiled of the visit.](#)

Mental Health Association in Tompkins County



This fall, I joined the [Mental Health Association in Tompkins County](#) to celebrate the grand opening of their new permanent home at 511 West Seneca Street. After more than 70 years of service from rented spaces, this milestone marks not only a new chapter for the organization, but also a strengthened commitment to our community.

[For decades](#), the Mental Health Association (MHA) has worked to destigmatize mental health, provide critical resources, and ensure that individuals and families across Tompkins County feel supported. Their programs have been transformative for countless people, and this new home will allow them to expand that impact for generations to come.

During the event, I spoke about the importance of expanding access to mental health care and the role of peer support in that effort. Peer counseling connects individuals who have lived experience with mental health challenges to others currently seeking support. Research shows that this approach helps people build trust, reduce isolation, and stay engaged with treatment and recovery. Peer specialists provide practical guidance and emotional support, complementing clinical care rather than replacing it, and helping people navigate systems that can otherwise feel overwhelming.

The Mental Health Association's peer support programs are part of a growing statewide movement to integrate lived experience into mental health services. By meeting people where they are and emphasizing recovery over diagnosis, these programs strengthen the continuum of care and reduce pressure on crisis and hospital systems. I'm deeply grateful for the leadership of MHA and proud to stand with them and their partners across New York State as we work to expand access to evidence-based, community-centered support.

Connie Cook: A Documentary and The Deciding Vote



The third annual [Reproductive Rights Film Festival](#) was held this year between September 9th to the 20th. The film festival featured 11 films, 7 screenings over 5 days, the winners of the inaugural Short Shorts film competition, and virtual panels. The festival kicked off with virtual pans and held in-person screenings at [Cinemapolis](#). The Festival brought stories of advocacy and resilience to our community. At a time when reproductive rights are once again at the center of national debate, this festival provided a critical space for reflection, education, and action. The festival highlighted the long history of struggle for reproductive freedom and the leaders who have shaped its course, right here in New York. [End Abortion Stigmas \(EAS\)](#) from Ithaca NY and [Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights \(GRR!\)](#) from Portland ME sponsored the festival.

During the film festival I was invited to join a talk back for two films *Connie Cook: A Documentary* and *The Deciding Vote*. [Connie Cook](#) is a documentary that explores the life and legacy of [Assemblywoman Connie Cook](#), who also represented District 125. Connie Cook courageously championed reproductive rights in New York during the 1960s, co-sponsoring the landmark bill that legalized abortion in 1970, three years before [Roe v. Wade](#). At a time when few women held elected office, Cook's leadership broke barriers for women in politics and laid the foundation for reproductive freedom in New York. Today, her story is deeply relevant as reproductive rights face unprecedented challenges across the country.

[The Deciding Vote](#) tells the story of [Assemblyman George Michaels](#), who represented Auburn, NY, and cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of [New York's 1970 abortion legalization bill](#). Facing enormous political risk, Michaels' courage altered the course of history, making New York the first state in the nation to pass such comprehensive protections. This story resonates today as legislators across the country face similar high-stakes decisions on reproductive rights.

These films remind us that history is not distant, it lives on in the choices our leaders make today, in the same halls of the New York State Assembly, and in the same district Assemblywoman Connie Cook once proudly represented.

Community Resources

Are your NYSEG bills too high?



My office is collecting feedback from residents and businesses in Tompkins and Cortland Counties to better understand how [NYSEG's proposed rate increases](#) will impact you. We want your input, [please take our short survey](#) (10 minutes or less) to share your experiences with billing, outages, and affordability, your input will help guide our advocacy in the [state's ongoing review of NYSEG's rates](#).

- *[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.*

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 the office to bring targeted questions to the utilities and ask for specific data to help my office and I advocate for fair, transparent rates and improved service reliability in our region. We’re collecting feedback from residents and businesses across Tompkins and Cortland Counties to better understand your experiences with NYSEG service, billing, and costs that will help inform her questions to the utilities.

[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

In good health,



Anna Kelles, Ph.D.

Assemblymember, 125th A.D.

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