



THIS WEEK IN NEW YORK

COVERING NEW YORK & CITY GOVERNMENT

JANUARY 5, 2024 EDITION

“Obstacles don’t define us. Rather, it is the unparalleled courage and character of us that defines us as a people. So my confidence in the future is steeped in our glorious past - in the face of adversity, we always persist. We persevere, we prevail.” Governor Kathy Hochul



In the News-New York State



Governor Test Drives State of the State Initiatives

Begins to Tease Annual Message Initiatives Daily

Borrowing the pre-State of the State *A Proposal a Day* approach of her predecessors, Governor Kathy Hochul this week offered New Yorkers a preview of her 2024 agenda. Since Tuesday, Governor Hochul has “unveiled” initiatives to bolster consumer protection and affordability, go *Back to Basics* to teach reading, take on the maternal and infant mortality rate, and promote swimming in New York State.

Attorney General Leticia James and Financial Services Commission Arlene Harris joined the Governor to kick off the weeklong promotion at the release of the Consumer Protection & Affordability Agenda. Highlighting the agenda is the first “major” increase in Paid Medical and Disability leave benefits since 1989. The proposal would tie the benefits to the Statewide Weekly Wage (SWW), currently at \$1,700, with a weekly benefit of 67% of the SWW when fully phased in.

In addition, the Governor proposed a plan to eliminate insurance co-pays for insulin and protecting low-income New Yorkers from medical debt by limiting hospital’s ability to sue and expanding financial assistance programs.

Following a stop at Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie’s annual Opening Day breakfast on Wednesday, Governor Hochul traveled to Watervliet Elementary School to promote her *Back to Basics*’ plan to improve reading proficiency. Under the proposal, the State Education Department would promulgate instructional best practices in reading instruction, including teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. By September of 2025, all school districts will need to certify with SED that their curriculum, instructional strategies, and teacher professional development align with all elements of the instructional best practices. In addition, the State will provide \$10 million for teacher training programs to ensure teachers are prepared to utilize evidence-based standards in the classroom.

On Thursday, at Wycoff Heights Medical Center in Brooklyn, Governor Hochul detailed her six-point plan to combat maternal and infant mortality in New York State. She calls for expanding New York’ statewide Paid Family Leave policy (PFL) to include 40 hours of paid leave to attend prenatal medical appointments, directing the Commissioner of Health to issue a “standing order” allowing New Yorkers to utilize doula services without a referral from a physician, eliminating cost-sharing—including co-pays and other out-of-pocket costs—for pregnancy-related benefits for any New Yorker enrolled in the Essential Plan or Qualified Health Plans, implementing oversight measures to identify physicians whose behavior is out of line with clinical best practices in relation to cesarean sections, and training counselors answering the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline on issues related to maternal mental health, postpartum depression, and anxiety.

Today’s initiative, *NY Swims*, aims to expand access to safe swimming, address equity gaps with recreational activities and provide resources for communities facing extreme heat.

The Governor will deliver her Annual Message to the Legislature on Tuesday, January 9th, in the Assembly Chamber. [Sign up](#) to join virtually to hear the Governor’s plans for 2024.



New York Opens 247th Legislative Session



A solution to New York’s housing crunch and funding for New York City’s migrant crisis topped the legislative leadership agendas this week as the State Senate and Assembly opened New York’s 247th legislation session.

State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie delivered opening remarks to their members on Wednesday, recounting the economic and social reforms enacted last year including raising the minimum wage, enacting Clean Slate, codifying reproductive rights and addressing climate change. The leaders viewed housing as one of the main drivers of the session.

"The most significant cost burden facing our constituents today is housing. The soaring cost of living in New York threatens the very essence of our state's identity," Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins said. "It's time for us to develop a comprehensive plan that not only protects tenants including the principles of good cause, but also paves the way for the construction of new, affordable housing."

The leaders also looked to the federal government for financial assistance for the care of the migrants coming to New York from the nation's southern border.

"We also recognize the limited power of state government to provide long-term solutions for this new influx of asylum-seekers," Speaker Heastie said.

Meanwhile, outside the chamber, the November elections are looming large in the background. The Commission on Redistricting has until February 28th to redraw the congressional lines or the charge will be placed upon the Democratic legislature. Yesterday, Bronx Assemblywoman Latoya Joyner announced she will step down next week, leaving the chamber with 101 Democrats while 100 would be needed to pass redistricting maps without Republican support. In addition, all members of the Senate and Assembly are up for reelection this year.

New York State Legislative Session Calendar January – June 2024

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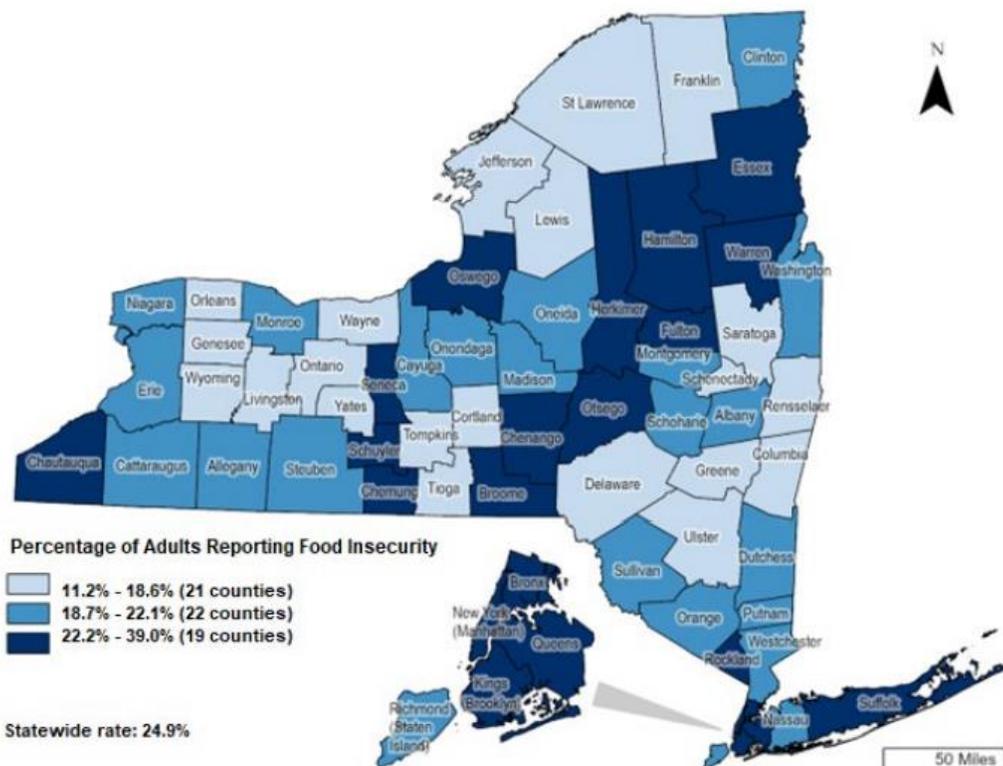
State Health Department Releases Report On Food Insecurity Among Adults

One in four New York adults experience food insecurity, according to a report released this week by the New York State Health Department.

Self-Reported Food Insecurity Among New York State Adults by County, BRFSS 2021, found that the Bronx, Queens, Kings, Herkimer, and Oswego are the counties with the highest rates of food insecurity among adults.

Food insecurity is characterized by limited or uncertain access to adequate food due to limited economic resources. The full report can be found [here](#).

"Hunger stresses the body and mind, and can result in malnutrition, inability to concentrate, anxiety, and depression," Health Commissioner Dr. James McDonald said. In addition, adults who experience food insecurity are more likely to report chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and cancer.



The report highlights self-reported food insecurity data among adults across New York State, including:

- Among New York City boroughs, the percentage of adults who experience food insecurity is highest in the Bronx (39 percent) and lowest in Richmond County (22.1 percent).
- Counties outside of New York City with the highest percentage of adults who experience food insecurity are Herkimer (28.8 percent) and Oswego (26.2 percent).
- Counties outside of New York City with the lowest percentage of adults who experience food insecurity are Wyoming (11.2 percent), Columbia (12.3 percent), and Lewis (12.5 percent).

Within New York State, the percentage of adults who report that they are food insecure varies by county and ranges from 11.2 percent to 39 percent.

In the News-New York City



Adrienne E. Adams Re-Elected as New York City Council Speaker

Adrienne Adams was re-elected this week to lead the City Council and named an all-women leadership team for 2024.

At the New York City Council's Charter Meeting, Council Members re-elected Speaker Adams to lead the legislative body for a second two-year term. The 2024 New York City Council includes four new members: Yusef Salaam of Council District 9, Kristy Marmorato of Council District 13, Chris Banks of Council District 42, and Susan Zhuang of Council District 43.

Council Members Diana Ayala and Selvena N. Brooks-Powers will continue to serve in their roles as the Council's Deputy Speaker and Majority Whip, respectively. Council Member Amanda C. Farías was named Majority Leader, replacing Council Member Kevin Powers.

According to the Speaker, the change places another member that is not in their final term in the Council on the leadership team to prepare the institution for its next generation and expand representation. It also marks the first time the top leadership positions of the New York City Council will all be women, and all are women of color.

"Leading this historic City Council is the honor of a lifetime, and I am grateful for the opportunity to continue serving New York City and our diverse communities," said Speaker Adrienne Adams. "I'm proud of the work we have accomplished together over the past two years to address long-standing issues through the lens of equity, and I look forward to building on this momentum to continue delivering for all. I thank our returning members for their support and commitment, and I welcome our new members who bring their diverse experiences and expertise to this legislative body. Together, this Council will continue to confront the challenges facing our city and make meaningful changes that prioritize the health, safety, and well-being of every New Yorker."

Briefs

Report: SUNY System Sustainability in Question Without Additional State Funding

The State University of New York (SUNY) system may face a \$1 billion shortfall by 2033 if the State does not commit additional financial resources, according to a report from SUNY officials on long-term enrollment and financial sustainability.

SUNY's report, mandated by the Legislature, projects a \$224 million budget gap across its 64 campuses this year and forecasts an increase in expenditures of up to \$6.9 billion by the 2033-34 school year.

If there is "no investment in resources beyond the committed increases in the State's current financial plan," the report says, SUNY would face a \$1.1 billion annual shortfall at the end of this period.

If SUNY does not receive the needed state tax support, it could resort to tuition and fee increases to make up the difference. Last year, SUNY received \$163 million in operating aid as part of the state budget and was promised \$54 million in 2024 and 2025, according to published reports.

For the first time in a decade, the total enrollment in the SUNY system increased from Fall 2022 to Fall 2023. First-time undergraduate enrollment also rose 4.3% across the SUNY system. However, compared to a decade ago, the number of students enrolling is down almost 100,000.

Both Chairs of the respective legislative Higher Education Committees—Senator Toby Stavisky and Assemblymember Patricia Fahy—do not support higher tuition and fees.

According to *Spectrum News*, Senator Stavisky said she would be hard-pressed to support a budget with the tuition increases that SUNY and Hochul have called "modest," which would index increases to the Higher Education Price Index, or 3% for both the State University of New York and the City University of New York systems and up to 6% for research institutions.

Ahead of Citywide Curbside Composting, Adams Administration Expands Staten Island Compost Facility

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY) Commissioner Jessica Tisch this week celebrated a major expansion of capacity at the DSNY Staten Island Compost Facility that includes new equipment — known as an aerated static pile — that will increase the facility's capacity to turn food waste into compost by nearly 2,000 percent.

Previously, food waste brought to the Staten Island Compost Facility was processed in large piles known as windrows and took six to eight months to break down into finished compost. The expansion — an aerated static pile system set up across 16 temperature- and moisture-controlled concrete bays — cuts that time in half while boosting the facility's capacity to process food waste from 3 million pounds per year to a total of 62.4 million pounds per year.

As the Staten Island Compost Facility can also process 147 million pounds of yard waste per year, the new expansion brings the facility's total capacity to 209.4 million pounds of incoming material per year.

NYC Teachers & SI Borough President Join to Fight Congestion Pricing

Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella and the United Federation of Teachers this week filed a lawsuit in Brooklyn federal court to stop the implementation of congestion pricing in Manhattan, expected to go into effect this spring.

The lawsuit contends that MTA's plan to toll drivers coming into parts of Manhattan cannot be put in place until an environmental impact statement is completed, including possible effects of the plan on air quality, including on Staten Island and in The Bronx. They also said the plan will penalize educators, firefighters, police officers, EMS workers, sanitation workers and other public sector workers who commute to Manhattan.

"Thousands of teachers and other UFT members, along with many other workers, live in places with little or no access to mass transit," UFT President Michael Mulgrew said. "They are facing dramatically rising commuting costs, and all for a traffic reduction plan whose potential effects on air quality and other issues were never seriously examined."

Mayor Adams Announces Suit Against Texas Charter Bus Companies Seeking \$708 Million to Cover Costs of Caring for Migrants Transported to NYC

New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York City Corporation Counsel Sylvia Hinds-Radix this week announced a [lawsuit](#) against 17 charter bus and transportation companies that have transported migrants to New York. The lawsuit seeks to recoup all costs New York City has incurred providing emergency shelter and services to migrants transported by the charter bus companies – totaling at least approximately \$708 million in the last 20 months.

"Governor Abbott continues to use human beings as political pawns, and it's about time that the companies facilitating his actions take responsibility for their role in this ongoing crisis," said Governor Kathy Hochul.

According to the Mayor, the 17 defendants named in the lawsuit knowingly implemented Governor Abbott's publicly articulated plan without any regard for the individuals they were transporting or an effort to help manage this humanitarian crisis. It has been "bad faith" conduct—from which the bus and transportation companies are profiting—to execute Texas's plan to sow chaos and shift the traditional cost of migration at the southern border to New York City and other cities across the country.

Coming Up

New York State

Monday, January 8th

Senate Health Committee, State Capitol Room 124, 10:30 a.m.

Senate Local Government Committee, Legislative Office Building, Room 904, 11:30 a.m.

Senate Insurance Committee, State Capitol, Room 124 12:30 p.m.

Senate Elections, State Capital Room 124, 1 p.m.

Senate Women's Issues, Legislative Office Building, Room 801, 1 p.m.

New York State Assembly Session, Assembly Chamber, 2 p.m.

Assembly Agriculture Committee, Speaker's Conference Room, Off the Floor

Economic Development Committee, Speaker's Conference Room, Off the Floor

Governmental Employees Committee, Speaker's Conference Room, Off the Floor

New York State Senate Session, Senate Chamber, 3 p.m.

Tuesday, January 9th

Senate Housing, Construction and Community Development Committee, Legislative Office Building, Room 512, 9 a.m.

Senate Consumer Protection, Legislative Office Building, Room 901, 9:30 a.m.

Senate Transportation Committee, Legislative Office Building, Room 708, 9:30 a.m.

New York State Assembly Session, Assembly Chamber, to be announced.

New York State Senate Session, Senate Chamber, to be announced.

State of the State Address, Governor Kathy Hochul, Joint Meeting of the Legislature, Assembly Chamber, 1 p.m.

New York City

No Meetings Scheduled at Time of Publication

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