

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and thank you for watching remotely to my 10th annual State of the County Address. I would like to extend a sincere note of gratitude to my fellow leaders in government – United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Congressman Paul Tonko, State Senator Breslin, State Senator Michelle Hinchey, Assembly Members Pat Fahy, John McDonald and Phil Steck, the city Mayors and Town Supervisors, and of course our fellow leaders in the County, Chairman Andrew Joyce, Majority Leader Feeney, Minority Leader Frank Mauriello, and all county legislators.

I sincerely appreciate the advocacy and efforts made by Senator Schumer, as the Majority leader of the Senate and a true voice for not only New York State, but for Albany County and similarly situated counties throughout America. I truly appreciate his willingness to listen, his understanding of state and local governments, his continued partnership and his effective leadership.

Indeed, this evening's address is like no other. The first known case of coronavirus in Albany County was on March 12, 2020. Today marks a year that we have been at war against COVID-19 and continue in our battle against this deadly disease every minute of every day. We are closing in our enemy and I shall accept nothing short of full victory. Now is not the time to soften or relax. I have been vigilant throughout this pandemic. And to be sure, I shall

remain vigilant and use all resources to deliver the final blow that will return our community back to safety.

Tragically, during this pandemic, over FIVE HUNDRED thousand Americans lost their lives. No communities have been spared. Here in Albany County we lost over 360 of our citizens. These are our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters, our neighbors and our frontline workers. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families and loved ones of all those who have passed. Please let us take a moment of silence to remember them all.

“We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain”, so said Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg in 1863. Now, today, we must heed these words. We must recognize each life. We must not discount or diminish the value through contempt or political rhetoric. It matters not that so many were in nursing homes, or older in years, or had preexisting medical conditions. Every life is valuable. Let us honor each of those fallen equally. Let them not die in vain.

We have seen the inequities amongst those infected and died. Why is this? For far too long our society as a whole has not provided equal access to health care to our minority community. This multigenerational failure resulted in a disproportionate amount of our black and brown community to have underlying health issues, thus creating a higher likelihood of hospitalization

and/or death should they contract COVID. We are past due to correct these disparities. We can wait no longer. The time to act is now. Let us resolve that these fallen have not died in vain. Let us resolve to correct this injustice. As Desmond Tutu stated, “if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you are on the side of the oppressor.” Tonight, you will hear of many actions that my administration has taken through partnerships during this war on COVID-19 toward ending these historical injustices. Indeed, I am forever committed to those words of Lincoln, our fallen have not died in vain.

And while there has been great sorrow and pain felt throughout our County during this time, we have also seen times of hope and inspiration. We have seen our community come together to show its character in caring and compassion. We have also seen times for opportunity and optimism, and we have witnessed significant advancements and many successes. This evening, I will share with you some of these stories of hope, promise and success.

Throughout my years in the military, including tours in Iraq, as well as my years as a Captain for the Albany Airport Fire Department, my nine years plus as County Executive, and my tenure as President of the County Executives of America and President of New York State County Executives, I have responded to many crisis situations, and the one thing I have learned through all of this is that you have to be ready to respond to the unexpected.

We plan for a crisis. We prepare for crisis. We train for crisis. However, when reality happens and the crisis occurs, and you are on the frontline, the battlefield in front of you changes, there are situations that arise that one could never have expected. As President Eisenhower said “In preparing for battle, plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” So, when we are called into action, we respond, we pivot, we recalculate, we adapt and evolve...we do this to save lives.

Decisions and actions during these times occur within a split second. Now each decision and each battle may not be a success, but we learn from these and press forward. We use these lessons to further prepare and respond when called into action again. And so, it is this context and this background that impacts my decision making during the COVID-19 crisis.

While my military and leadership experiences provided the skill set to lead us through this battle, it must be recognized that any successful operation and any winning strategy requires collaboration. All great leaders know that partnerships are vital to victory. As I have said throughout this global pandemic, we must work together to provide for our citizens. We are all in this together. There is no time for politics. There is no time for finger pointing. There is no time for egos. At this juncture, resources are limited and we must

band together and work shoulder to shoulder, as one unified community and one unified America to win this war against COVID.

After our first case of coronavirus hit Albany County, we needed to step into action. I issued a State of Emergency on March 14, 2020. Actions needed to be taken and decisions needed to be made. The flexibility to respond in a war requires a State of Emergency to remove the barriers and bureaucracy of everyday regulations. It is necessary for our operations to remain fluid. This allows for us to continue to provide essential services to our citizens on a daily basis, while changing the manner in which this is achieved.

As we began this battle against COVID-19, we did not know much about the virus. It seemed as though information was being released and changed on a daily and even hourly basis. We consumed all the information and parsed out all that could be understood as credible, and even that information morphed. One thing we did understand early is that personal protective equipment (PPE) was our first line of defense against the unknown virus. While we had no sword yet to battle the virus, we certainly had a shield, and that was PPE.

As I said earlier, we are all in this battle together. We needed to collaborate and work together in a partnership to find, exchange and share PPE. Through my years of leadership and association with NYSAC and County Executives of America, I had contacted other county executives and county managers. We

reached out to school districts and other local municipal leaders. We communicated and brainstormed often, and still do! For all of us, COVID was a mutual enemy and we banded together for the greater good of our communities to get PPE where it was needed most on that specific day.

Our business partners in the community stepped up to join the fight. Local companies switched operations to manufacture PPE. National companies donated thousands of masks for our frontline workers in Albany County. Small businesses began to make masks. All of these partnerships and all of these efforts contributed to our success. Indeed, through all of this, many lives were saved, and I thank all of our partners in business and government.

One weapon in the arsenal that was discovered was tracing and testing. While the state had a large scale testing site at the University at Albany, we knew we needed more and had to reach the people directly. We had to bring testing to the neighborhoods to really be effective in our battle. As I mentioned earlier, there are neighborhoods that have been historically disadvantaged and often left behind, I know far too well growing up in such a neighborhood. So when we are battling this war on COVID, I was not going to sit by and let this happen again. It was a priority of mine to bring testing directly to the underserved population.

We needed a strong ally and partner in this endeavor, and I called upon Whitney Young. A known and trusted provider of health care in the City of Albany. We worked together to bring walk up testing to many different neighborhoods. These walk up testing sites were vital in tracking infection rates and community spread. We were the first in the State to set up pop-up testing sites in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. These pop up sites were a success in our battle and provided the opportunity to ensure equity. I applaud the efforts of Whitney Young, as well as our Department of General Services for setting up the many locations as well as Sheriff Apple for providing security and my executive team for getting this accomplished.

In addition to Whitney Young, we also had partners to provide testing to our essential employees who reported daily to work that may have been exposed, including Priority One in Guilderland and Dr. Lebarty at Central Med Urgent Care.

As we learned of more cases, the more things changed. More guidelines, more restrictions, more shutdowns and more quarantines. Indeed, the playing field was morphing and this virus was raging throughout the globe and right here in Albany County.

We hadn't experienced anything like this pandemic in our lifetime; but, it is something Albany County has been preparing for. As President Bill Clinton stated.

"Preparing for a far-off storm that may reach our shores is far wiser than ignoring the thunder until the clouds are overhead."

We heeded those words. We have been preparing. Our Health Department engages in yearly exercises, drills and training to respond to a pandemic. Under my direction, all of our departments have been planning, creating and implementing a Continuity of Operations Plan in coordination with Human Resources and our Civil Service Departments. Through my vision of fiscal policies, our Department of Management and Budget over the past eight years has been planning, preparing and implementing budgets and fiscal policies that increase our reserves and provide a safety net for times like these. While we were hoping and praying this would never happen, we were certainly ready when this global pandemic and fiscal crisis hit.

Our workforce needed to change and evolve to answer the call to battle. We trained over 200 workers to assist with contact tracing, I reassigned nearly 100 workers throughout the pandemic to assist our health department with response efforts, including daily quarantine check-ins. It was imperative that all of our departments join forces to form a unified front against this deadly

virus. Indeed, we would need and use all our resources available to fight this virus and keep our community safe.

As the number of cases and those quarantined increased, the need to provide food to people increased. This was a task that required many partners. At my request, we engaged the National Guard for assistance, and we worked with the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York. Our Times Union Center was used as the distribution point and over 5,600 pounds of food was delivered to quarantined individuals. A special thank you to General Shields and all of the men and women of the Guard involved. During this time, I worked with our Department for Children Youth and Families to partner with the South End Children's Café resulting in the delivery of 50,000 meals to those in need.

Many people were suffering during this time, including the restaurant industry and their staffs. Feed Albany was established to provide for these workers.

In a partnership, I worked to connect the United Way with our Muslim population to provide a donation of \$20,000.00 to Feed Albany.

There is no single or solitary way to successfully win a battle. It truly takes all of us working together, and I sincerely appreciate our partners and the continued efforts and contributions of all.

As cases of the virus increased, concerns began to rise about hospital capacity. I had seen the images in the media from around this Country of people dying in parking lots outside of hospitals, and I said to myself, “I will be damned if that is going to happen in Albany County.” We reached out to hotels in the area of the hospitals and reached agreements with them to be used for any overflow if necessary. We partnered with St. Peter’s and other local hospitals. We provided for a separate wing of Shaker Place to be used for COVID-19 patients if the hospitals needed more beds. It is these type of partnerships that are necessary to provide another weapon in the arsenal, as we unite our efforts to battle this virus and save lives.

As we continued to work with external partners, we also needed to pivot, readjust and reimagine our workforce. To be sure, we needed to continue our services, and indeed in some cases our delivery of services increased. At the same time, we needed to figure out how to do this in the new world of remote work.

The safety of our workforce was and still is a top priority, and this had to be balanced with the need and task of providing for our community and keeping our residents safe. We made significant advancements in our technology and ability to perform tasks outside of the traditional office setting. I directed the

purchase of hundreds of laptops and tablets with docking stations. This allowed for employees to work anywhere in the world there was Wi-Fi.

As President John F. Kennedy stated, during times of crisis there is danger, but there is also opportunity. In that vein we needed to take the opportunity to assess our needs department by department, not just in light of the pandemic, but also in light of the fiscal crisis, together with a view of the future. One of the plans I set in motion was an early separation payout (ESP). In partnership with Chairman Joyce and the Legislature, I reached out to the labor and discussed a potential buyout plan for employees. The ESP program provided an opportunity for employees to receive a one-time cash payout if the employee chose to voluntarily separate from service. Through this ESP plan the County was able to eliminate 80 positions in the 2021 budget and save the County taxpayers in excess of five million dollars.

Throughout this crisis, all levels of government realized the necessity to update and auto-mate systems. This requires a collaborative effort with Federal, State and local government, as many programs and systems are interwoven. We worked to implement as many online applications as possible. The State changed their platforms and provided the County with an opportunity to have our clients register for benefits in the safety and comfort of their home.

As we have navigated our way through this pandemic, and have reimagined our operations and workforce, we have realized that we are never going back to “the old way”. Indeed, as President Kennedy stated, this is an opportunity and we have opened the door wide to let it in. That is why tonight I am announcing that I have directed my Director of Operations, in conjunction with the Commissioner of Civil Service and the Commissioner of Human Resources, to develop a Comprehensive Workforce Development Plan for our future. This plan will match our resources, our goals, and our needs to the abilities of our advancing technology and our skilled workforce. We have to be forward thinking, we have to be ready for the future and we have to develop our workforce to continue to provide the best services to our residents.

As President Obama said, “We didn’t come to fear the future, we came to shape it.” And so, I ask our workers, our partners in labor, the unions, and our legislature to continue to join us as we strive to work together collaboratively to find solutions that sets us on the road to future success.

We must also look at our physical workspace and reimagine that as well. This evening I am announcing the first of its kind government co. working space right here at 112 State Street. Co-working labs have been popping up in the private sector throughout the Country and right here in Albany County. My team has been reviewing all of these venues and are ready to adopt a model that

best fits our goals, needs, and our vision of the future. The co-working space model will have shared areas that can be used by any “in-the-field” employee on a daily and hourly basis, without the need for an assigned desk.

As we make this advancement in physical space, we are also making advancements in technology, including better platforms and modules that allow for more electronic processing and eliminating the need for paper. These combined efforts provide greater flexibility and allow us to minimize our total building space need for both people and paper, thus further reducing our carbon footprint. In that effort, I am challenging all of us in County government to make a pledge tonight... that we work together to adopt a paper-free policy with obtainable goals that reduce our use of paper by 50% by the end of 2025 and 75% by 2030. These are bold initiatives, and it will take all of us in a partnership to succeed. But I am very confident that we can continue with our efforts to promote the mission I set 9 years ago, to making Albany County the greenest county in the State.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank each and every one of our employees and send a special thank you for the leadership of our directors and commissioners. Throughout this pandemic our employees have been working and in many cases on the frontline. While many people were at home, they were here working, continuing to serve the residents of Albany County. The staff

has been resilient and has consistently answered the call. The residents of Albany County should feel good about that.

We have powered through adverse times. And this has made us stronger. This has prepared us for the future. This has reinvigorated all of our spirits to working as one, toward the good of the whole. So I ask that we all take a moment in this remote world to say thank you... Send an email or a Facebook or Twitter post to extend a note of gratitude to our essential workers that have continued to work hard through this pandemic.

As I said earlier, we have to learn from the mistakes of the past, and we have to ensure that as we are developing and moving toward the future, we must incorporate equitable solutions. We must be considerate of historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. We must recognize the differing challenges that occur throughout our neighborhoods in both rural and urban areas. To that end, I recognized an issue with internet access in both hill town populations and in neighborhoods within the City of Albany. During this pandemic, as schools went to remote learning, this disparity became even more noticeable. To remedy some of the issues within the hill towns, we partnered with Hudson Valley Wireless. We provided Hudson Valley Wireless with access to towers upon our land. In addition, we provided funding that allowed for a stipend to

lower the cost of internet to families in need that have children in school. Giving their children the ability to attend school remotely.

As part of my Equity Agenda, I'd like to announce tonight the "Albany County Connect Project" which in the first phase would call for a study of the technical feasibility of launching a county wide broadband initiative, to bring true high-speed internet access to every resident in the county by 2023 no matter where you live.

This engineering study would be funded by a combination of County and private sector resources. Specific recommendations must be included within the study to provide for solutions that will allow all persons access regardless of ability to pay.

There are many successes and there are so many more that I don't have the time to mention tonight, but are equally important. Throughout each and every department, we have taken great strides to making Albany County a better place to live. And in each case, we have done this always with an eye on equity to ensure inclusion and diversity. You are seeing slides that highlight some of those accomplishments.

Mental Illness is a serious disease that affects so many people within our community and continues to plague us. During these times, the struggles for many individuals have increased dramatically, and the number of people

fighting depression has grown. The inability to socialize, to go to school, go to work, to go out to dinner or to the movies or whatever activity, made for even more stressed times. COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the mental health of our society as a whole. That is why I immediately set up the mental health crisis hotline to assist those struggling with depression and mental health issues when were forced into lockdown. People needed to speak with professionals and it was a priority for me that we provided that service.

I am pleased to announce that in our continued efforts to battle mental health disease and provide the best and safest resources to our citizens, we partnered with Genoa Pharmacy to open our very own mental health pharmacy for our clients. Genoa is a nationally known and trusted pharmacy specializing in serving the behavioral health population across the country. This partnership allows for a safe and secure method for clients to receive medicine at the same place as they are receiving services. Continuing to monitor and keep clients on necessary medication through a routine regiment is not only a weapon against mental health disease, but also is a preventative tool against drug misuse, drug abuse and drug overdose.

As the struggles with mental health escalated during the pandemic, we also saw a sharp rise in opioid overdoses and deaths. Unfortunately, we are in a

tragic situation of an epidemic within a pandemic. This has been a continual fight for years and I have made this battle against opioids a priority.

We partnered with Catholic Charities to provide training and overdose reversing medication throughout our community.

We established an opioid task force with many participants to work collaboratively on all fronts to ensure that we are not leaving any resident behind and that we are providing resources and services to all those in need.

I have been a leader in the battle against Big Pharma and their role in this opioid crisis and played an active role in the federal litigation. We must continue to hold these companies responsible for the unnecessary deaths, the lingering effects and the lasting devastation their opioid distribution decisions caused throughout our communities. And please know that I will not let up and I will not rest until justice is served.

For far too long we have seen those with mental health issues being arrested and sent through the criminal justice system, instead of finding solutions and treating the underlying cause. In many cases, incarceration was not the answer. At my state of the County address 5 years ago, I set forth the idea of a mental health court to divert persons with mental health issues from incarceration in cases dealing with nonviolent low-level crimes.

In 2020, we finally were able to convince all of our partners to coordinate and move this forward. I am happy to announce that in partnership with New York State Office of Court Administration, our Department of Mental Health, the Public Defender's Office, the Department of Probation and the District Attorney's Office, our mental health court opened this month, with Albany City Court Judge John J. Reilly presiding over the matters.

This past year we worked to secure a 900,000 dollar grant for the Countywide LEAD program. This diversion program brings partners together to remove the racial injustices that has occurred for generations in throughout our criminal justice system. This program now has new life and a rekindled commitment of moving forward in a collaborative effort to ensure that the past injustices are not repeated.

Another major accomplishment in light of COVID-19, was the completion of the 80 million dollar project at our nursing home, now known as Shaker Place Rehabilitation and Nursing Center. This state of the art facility creates a living environment that provides an excellent level of comfort and pride to our residents and to their loved ones. The nursing home is a warm and friendly place to call home. I am so incredibly proud of this accomplishment. Thank you to our County Legislature and to all that were involved.

Our Shaker Place Nursing Home staff during this pandemic has been truly remarkable. For so long, our residents could not visit with their families. Our staff provided compassionate care as a surrogate family member. Thank you.

Timely and transparent communication to our citizens is a vital resource to keep our residents informed. As information was changing on a daily and hourly basis, I decided to hold daily press briefings. It is imperative that people knew the severity of the situation.

We participated in daily Regional Control Room calls to discuss the changing guidance and matters, as well as calls with the White House, calls with NYSAC and calls with County Executives of America and the National Association of Counties. I had a duty to provide this updated information to our citizens and advise of the steps that we were taking in keeping our communities healthy and safe.

These briefings provided an opportunity to bring in partners to discuss with the public what was happening in their respective fields of expertise. The DA and Sheriff discussed reports of scam activity and efforts used to combat this. We brought in partners that assisted in PPE, testing and vaccination. We brought in our partners in medicine, including Albany Medical Center and St. Peter's Hospital. We brought in legislative leadership to share information on economic stimulus programs. We brought in partners in the restaurant

industry to speak of the realities and the needs. And of course, we had our Commissioner of Health, Dr. Elizabeth Whalen at these briefings on a consistent basis to provide a comprehensive scientific lens to the numbers and statistics we were sharing. We cannot get through this pandemic without all of these partners working together.

I can't be more proud of this collaboration and the opportunity to share with our community all of our achievements through the many partnerships that have been developed. It is truly inspiring.

This past December we were facing the bad news of a second wave of the virus. This time we would see more cases and more deaths in Albany County. At the same time, we were receiving the great news of a vaccine being approved and ready to ship. This was going to be the sword in our battle to deliver the final blow. At last, we could see the light at the end of the tunnel.

However, the vaccine roll out of Pfizer and Moderna began slowly with many restrictions and limitations on who was eligible to receive it. There was high demand for the vaccine, but the supply wasn't there.

Early on in my remarks, I referenced the need for equity, and have made it a priority of my administration to make sure there is vaccine equity in Albany County. To ensure this, we are partnering with many community stakeholders and bringing vaccine to the people. We have partnered with the Alliance for

Better Health, who has provided technological assistance in identifying, preregistering and scheduling diverse members of our population. We also worked with the Albany Housing Authority and other housing authorities to bring the vaccine right to the homes of eligible residents. To make this possible, we partnered with Mohawk Ambulance, which in turn has provided more resources and reach throughout the County. Mohawk Ambulance has been a great community partner for generations, and I am grateful for their continued commitment to Albany County and the entire Capital Region with this new initiative of vaccination.

Our Health Department reached out to our volunteers, the Medical Reserve Corps. This group of individuals have dedicated thousands of hours volunteering to put shots in peoples arms. I cannot thank you enough. Each week our Health Department sets up what was one POD, and now has grown to 3 PODs, per week vaccinating thousands of our residents. This would not be possible without your assistance, so thank you to all the volunteers in our Medical Reserve Corps and thank you to our team at the Health Department.

As we began to schedule appointments at the PODs we made it a priority to carve out appointments for our minority community. My Office reached out to members of our Legislative Black Caucus to ask for their assistance in

recruitment of individuals within their communities that are eligible and interested in receiving the vaccine.

As more vaccine came in, we began to work with partners to establish smaller PODs, while continuing our PODS at the Times Union Center. These smaller PODs allowed us to get the vaccine to specific neighborhoods. We reached out to religious organizations. Having vaccination PODs at churches where people come to worship provides another level of comfort and confidence with the vaccine.

Additionally, we have worked with our rural leaders in the “Hill Towns” and have successfully been able to vaccinate many of our elderly population that reside there.

We also worked with senior housing facilities, our Department for Aging and Rite Aid Pharmacy, in a partnership to coordinate vaccine resources to seniors in need of shots. The program put together by Commissioner Riitano has been a huge success and is now being replicated throughout New York State. Thank you Deb.

Vaccine hesitancy is a reality. Unfortunately, this hesitancy has been seen at higher levels throughout minority communities and historically disadvantaged neighborhoods. We have created two public service announcements that have been aired on television. These PSAs provide useful information and are

designed to lessen vaccination hesitancy. We continue to speak with a diverse cross-section of community leaders. We ask that they continue to spread the message – don't hesitate, vaccinate. When it is your turn, take the vaccine. We continue to ask and challenge our community leaders to find locations that we can set up these smaller PODs.

The light is at the end of tunnel, and indeed, we can see it and the light is getting brighter. But now is no time to slow down, and no time to relax, we are still battling this disease. There is no time for COVID-19 fatigue. There is no time for us to lessen our vigilance. Until we get to that 70% herd immunity, we must continue to be safe, wear a mask, clean our hands, cough into our elbow and remain 6 feet apart.

Our infection rate is below 2% and President Biden states that by the end of May there will be enough vaccine distributed to vaccinate all adults interested. These are encouraging words. As we move toward spring, we see signs of hope. We see the rebirth of our economy with more and more operations and businesses opening. And as we are getting shots in our arms to keep us healthy, our economy is getting a shot in the arm with a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package. This stimulus relief provides for real dollars to local municipalities. Here in Albany County, it means in excess of 50 Million dollars. It also means over 170 Million dollars for our towns and villages within the County.

As we begin the process of reopening our economy, we must turn our vision toward economic development. Last year at the State of the County Address, I announced that we had convened the Albany County Business Advisory Council to work with nationally recognized consultant Camoin Associates to work cohesively on developing a strategic plan for economic growth in Albany County.

As we all know, just after this announcement, the pandemic hit and the world changed. While we had to shift resources and focus our attention on COVID, I recognized that we could not pause our efforts and plans. Indeed, circumstances were changing and we needed to recognize the environment and challenges that come with such changes.

While the initial plan set us on a good course to continue our progress and work toward achievable goals that are designed to enhance the quality of life and accelerate economic development, we also needed to develop strategies for economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19.

Although a tremendous effort was necessary to respond to COVID, this past year our local development corporation was formed, the Advance Albany County Alliance. I am extremely happy about this accomplishment. This could not be possible without the partnership of Chairman Joyce, Majority Leader Feeney, Minority Leader Mauriello, Leader of the Black Legislative Caucus Bill

Clay, and the entire legislature. I sincerely appreciate your commitment to this continued endeavor.

One of the first initiatives of our LDC was to establish a program that provided grants of up to \$5,000.00 to local businesses in need due to the fiscal crisis brought on by COVID-19. Through a partnership with the Alliance, the Albany County Legislature and the Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region, we were able to award a total of \$500,000.00 to 132 businesses throughout the County, and I am proud to say that more than half of these grants were given to minority, woman or veteran-owned businesses.

Thank you Kevin O'Connor, our Director of Economic Development, Alan Goldberg, Chairman of the Alliance, Linda MacFarlane from the Community Loan Fund, Chairman Joyce and all of those involved in this much needed program.

The fiscal crisis of COVID-19 has dealt a devastating blow to many businesses throughout our County. Some of these businesses may never reopen or recover and for many others, it will take years to regain lost ground. We must provide opportunities to these businesses that will allow for a recovery and for people to return to work. At the same time, we must keep our eye on the future and look at the industries of tomorrow and create an environment here in Albany County that will attract these industries.

Here in Albany County, we are ready! Tonight, I am announcing a five point Albany County Economic Recovery Plan (ACER). Here are the preliminary components of the plan:

First, we will make Albany County the Upstate Manufacturing Hub for New York State's Offshore Wind Program by (1) partnering with the County and Local IDAs to drive private investment in our ports, (2) ensuring our existing manufacturers are included in the offshore wind supply chain.

Second, as mentioned earlier, we will launch a countywide broadband initiative. This availability will be one of many initiatives that will create an attractive environment for small businesses and workers; and as such further acts as a catalyst toward growth.

Third, we must continue to support our local businesses. The County will issue a challenge grant to the local technology sector to develop an online marketplace that connects shoppers to local businesses. I am also issuing a challenge to the thousands of Capital Region residents who would usually be commuting to Albany County every day. Please support your favorite Albany County restaurant or retail establishment now, so that it is still there when you return to the office. We will also work with local employers in the County to support their efforts in bringing back employees.

Fourth, in partnership with the County Legislature, we will continue to invest in the newly created Advance Albany County Alliance, work to secure permanent funding for the organization, and grow it into a fully developed one-stop-shop economic development organization for Albany County.

Fifth, develop a workforce development pipeline. This must be done in coordination with several partners that will prepare high school and post high school students for real jobs here in our community by training and developing skills in technologies of our growth industries. I look forward to working with the County Legislature and our partners in labor, Capital Region BOCES, the College of Saint Rose, our many high schools and other partners to make this a success, and to do so in a way that is equitable for residents of all neighborhoods.

Helping those who have been victims of crime or sexual violence has been a priority in my administration. During this pandemic, the need for these services continued to grow. People being confined to their homes has caused tension and anxiety.

Children were not in school where they could talk to teachers and be seen by those trained in identifying potential abuse.

This created a tragic situation where there was significant underreporting, and even further tragic that the victims were remaining all day and night with their abuser.

During this time, the Albany County Crime Victim and Sexual Violence Center worked harder than ever to get the message out that they were and are here to help.

No man, woman or child should fear for their safety. Everyone should feel safe and be comfortable in reaching out for help. And, we should not rest until we are doing everything within our power to make this so. This is my moral compass and one that shall guide my principals in my administration. For we should remember the words of General Patton, “moral courage is the most valuable and usually the most absent characteristic in man.”

We must ensure that every victim has a safe place to go that is private and where they feel secure and protected when reporting to us.

That is why tonight, I am announcing an initiative that Albany County will be providing that space so that our crime victims’ advocates will be able to have that private interview space at times when those who are vulnerable need it most. Albany County has a property that has been identified and shall remain private for the safety of our clients. This property will be updated and

renovated to include a safe, warm and inviting atmosphere where staff members can work with client victims.

Tonight, I am making a wonderful announcement. Albany County is in discussions with the United Way and other private partners to invest up to a million dollars in the property. This investment is necessary to create a true retreat for crime victims.

We will provide updates and renovations of the facilities necessary to provide a comfortable setting for these people.

As I began this address, I spoke of the pandemic and the war on COVID-19. And while we are continuing in this battle today, let me assure you that the end is near and we will be victorious against our enemy.

I am confident of this and I am confident in the strength of our County. Indeed, the State of the County is strong. We are strong because of our leadership. We are strong because of our partnerships. We are strong because of our communities. We are strong because of our compassion and caring. We are strong because of our experiences. We are strong because of our successes. And, we are strong because of our hope.

Hope is not blindly following an idea or ignoring the challenges that we face. Hope is more. It is not accepting that there is only one path to success; but rather, having the courage to reach out beyond our comfort zone and to accept

the changes needed and to take the actions required to create a better world for our future and the future of our children.

So I ask you tonight - to join me - to stay strong- to have hope and to work together as one to finish this war on COVID and to bring our County and our State into a bright future.

Thank you. May God bless you and may God bless our great County of Albany and this great Nation.