ALBANY COUNTY
STATE OF THE COUNTY

Daniel P. McCoy, Albany County Executive

Thursday, February 29, 2024

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Mike McLaughlin, for your kind words and introduction. You have been with me since the start of my tenure as County Executive and you are a valuable part of this team.

As we enter into 2024, my 13th year as the County Executive, I want to share with you all we have done and what we are planning for this year and beyond.

The best way to do **that** is to actually show you. Please focus your attention on the screens.

The video may be viewed at www.albanycounty.com/sotc

As you can see from that video, the state of our County is strong. And our strength is measured by the health of us, as a community, as people, and as a government. They are all linked so the health of one impacts the health of all. And our health is not solitary, but a combination of our physical health, mental health, social health, and financial health. Here in Albany County we have broken down walls, broken down barriers and broken down silos to ease access to government services, to stimulate economic growth and to strengthen our communities.

The great Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Of all forms of inequity, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhumane". That statement was made nearly 60 years ago. The greater tragedy about that statement is how it still rings true today, 6 decades later, in many of our communities. We cannot, I will not sit by idly. Rather, we must be committed to ensuring that our resources are places in programs and neighborhoods that need it most to develop solutions to the multigenerational disparities and inequities created by past discriminatory practices. That is why, throughout my administration, we have committed resources and adopted policies to seek out those in need and address the root causes of these inequities.

One of the growing health concerns being stressed in the news is food insecurity.

Food insecurity and food deserts are a reality in this Country and even more pronounced since the pandemic. We are moving in the wrong direction in this Country. This is a horrific fact for a country that has the amount of riches that we have in these United States. Hunger and food insecurities are completely preventable. Let me repeat that. Hunger and food insecurities are completely preventable. Here in Albany County, we are taking action. But, there is more to do. We must work together, as a County, as a State and as a Country to address

systemic problems that are the root causes of the determinants of health, including underemployment, family and housing instability, inflation and generational discrimination. It takes more than just writing a check to impact the root causes.

It takes partnerships to get it done. We have worked with the United Way, and its CEO Pete Gannon and the Food Bank of Northeastern New York (Tom Nardacci), as well as nearly 60 food pantries and soup kitchens to get healthy food to families within our neighborhoods that need it most. We have committed $250,000.00. We also provided $109 million in SNAP benefits to 19,000 families throughout the County through our Department of Social Services.

Prior to my taking office, Albany County did not have a Parks and Recreation department. This needed to change. For us to be successful in keeping our residents and visitors healthy, we needed to invest in spaces, facilities and programing. And over the course of my time as County Executive, we have done just that.

Our Albany County Rail Trail runs from the Village of Voorheesville to the City of Albany, with hundreds of thousands of users every year. The rail trail is used for many races throughout the year; the annual Family Fall Fest and 5K at the Slingerlands Trailhead was a huge success and we look forward to continuing the tradition this year with more partnerships and events creating great times and great memories through healthy activities.

During this past year, we also continued to improve one of the jewels of Albany County, and that is our Lawson Lake Park. We have invested heavily in infrastructure and upgrades to the upper camp, ensuring that this vital greenspace is ideal for recreation, exercise, and relaxation. We shall continue to work with community partners to provide access and transportation to this gem of a park. In addition, our Parks and Recreation Department shall increase programing, and work with other resources to provide activities, for our youth, seniors, at-risk community members and the public at large. A huge shout out to MVP Health Care, their CEO Chris Del Vecchio and his whole team who have made a substantial commitment to our mutual goal through the Innovation Fund, and the commitment to restoring this astounding park for all to enjoy.

We are providing opportunities for all different ages and all activities. We built 2 new pickleball courts next to our hockey facility. Most recently, we entered into an agreement to purchase a fitness and aquatic center located in Cohoes. We are looking forward to having this facility as a resource as we expand our portfolio of activities and offerings for our residents and visitors. But there’s more.

This year, we are announcing that we will build a state-of-the-art sports complex that will provide so many opportunities for our residents regardless of the weather. Basketball, volleyball, baseball, golf, soccer, football and indoor walking/running track. Recreation should not only be available to those with deep pockets. For the sake of our entire community, our youth, seniors and disadvantaged populations, we must provide opportunities regardless of income. This state-of-the-art facility will be available at no cost to these groups.

I have made access to health and recreation a cornerstone of my administration. We have pushed the envelope and will continue to push even further to ensure that health is not based upon the size of a person's bank account. Indeed, health is a fundamental right and we must continue to work with all community members to identify the needs and find solutions in delivering the services to fulfill that need. I remember growing up in neighborhoods amongst the "have nots" and I am forever committed to make changes that level the playing field.

While we talk about the physical, we must also consider and strengthen the mental.

But, to do this fairly and equitably, we must remove the stigma. Often, people hide or deny interactions with mental health and behavior health specialists and providers. This is truly unfortunate and contributes to the disastrous effects that mental health has on our society. Preventative mental health classes should be commended and encouraged. Just as we drive children and adults to exercise, and promote annual visits to their physician, we should be encouraging preventative mental health visits for everyone. An ounce of prevention beats a pound of cure. We must start at the beginning and tackle root causes. We must give people the tools to handle situations.

Here in Albany County, under my administration and leadership, we have substantially increased mental health services. This is not done alone; this is done in concert with several partners and partnerships throughout the region. Many of you know some of these great programs like LEAD, MOTOR, and ACCORD and this year we are adding more. We are adding a street outreach program. In partnership with community partners, we will begin reaching out to the most vulnerable on the street to try and stabilize them and get them into housing and services.

Indeed, these are challenging circumstances, but we cannot turn our backs on vulnerable populations. To do so would be to make things worse. We need to

continue to provide more tools and to think outside of the box and this is one of the programs that does just that.

We also need to reach out to children. Last year, we worked with our school district to develop curriculum for their mental health in education. We need to continue to work with our leaders in education to provide the foundation for our youth and our future leaders.

The intersection of health, mental health and the opioid epidemic is beyond crucial and we have taken great steps toward curbing the overdose epidemic here in Albany. One of the major contributors to this epidemic was the drug manufacturers pushing these into the markets. In a partnership with other county leaders across this country, I led litigation against Big Pharma. We are starting to receive millions of dollars in funds from the various settlements that have occurred as a result of that litigation. Now, we are using these funds strategically to save lives and battle against the growing number of overdoses from fentanyl and other opioids. In addition, we will enhance our chemical dependency services system.

We also partnered with the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports OASAS, Deterra, community leaders and pharmacists to get fentanyl test strips out to the public and to provide drug deactivation bags that are environmentally safe. We continue to work with this and other public private partnership that will engage the largest amount of people and provide the most opportunities for success.

President John F. Kennedy said, “If more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place in which to live." He further commented, “There is a connection, hard to explain logically but easy to feel, between achievement in public life and progress in the arts.” All of life is intertwined; WE are intertwined. Progression of our communities and society hinges upon our growth socially through expression of oneself. This should be fostered, not stifled.

One of the hardest hit industries that never made a full recovery after the pandemic was the arts industry. We need this for our soul, the health and mental health of our being. Through the ARPA process, we made a commitment of 1.5 million dollars to the arts. We are committed to continuing necessary funding for arts programs, particularly ones that engage our youth and open their, eyes, ears and hearts to the expression inside of them.

For us to be strong and for us to be healthy, we must be fiscally secure, and we are. In order to preserve fiscal strength, we must invest when we have the opportunity, and we have done just that. We have grown our fund balance. We have strengthened our balance sheet; we have invested in new programing, all at the same time as we have lowered our tax rate. But long-term fiscal strength in a community requires partnerships and a commitment to economic development that looks to the future not the past, and that provides jobs that pay good money. We need to ensure that we are working together to incentivize companies to grow here in Albany County so that our families have an opportunity to earn a rate of pay that is sustainable for the future, at a career that will not become obsolete.

We have a great leader and partner in Senator Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and I thank him for all of his advocacy, commitment and delivery of funding. The announcement of $10 BILLION dollars in investment to nanoscience technology is beyond huge for our area, coupled with the $1.5 billion to Global Foundries, will further solidify the Capital Region as a hub for semiconductor research, design and manufacturing.

The Albany County International Airport is one of the Capital Region's most important assets, as it is a catalyst for job creation, tourism, and investment.

That is why we have been hard at work making a series of enhancements to key infrastructure all around the Albany County International Airport. Made possible by a landmark $60M state grant, the largest in airport history, these enhancements aim to streamline travel, heighten passenger comfort and convenience, and make every trip through our gates a truly exceptional experience.

With the announcement by Avelo Airlines to offer a direct flight to North Carolina's "Research Triangle," we are opening the door for other businesses to join Albany NanoTech as we bring the future of Advanced Semiconductor Research & Manufacturing to the Capital Region.

This year, we will also see our shovel ready sites near the airport turn into responsible economic growth through partnerships and in keeping with the character of the area. The former Al-Tech Steel site and our former Ann Lee nursing home site are prime locations for future development not just in nanotechnology but other strategic industries like life sciences and alternative energy.

As important as all of this job creation is, we also need to make sure our residents have the skills to fill them. That is why we are working with our workforce development partners to build a pipeline of talent in the County. Just two weeks ago we awarded more than $2.2 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant funding to 15 organizations providing training in Albany County. This represents the biggest investment to date by Albany County in workforce development grants that will expand training programs and support wrap around services in the County. It will result in hundreds of new training opportunities in the County that will help meet the needs of high demand industries like health care and manufacturing. We will ensure that workers have access to the technical training and education they need to succeed in this ever-changing labor market.

There is another important factor to consider when it comes to our overall health, the health of our environment. Climate change poses significant risks to economic growth, impacting various sectors and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities. I have long argued that economic development and responsible environmental policy are not mutually exclusive; rather, they can be powerful allies in fostering sustainable growth and prosperity.

We continue to stand committed to being the greenest County in New York State and have lived up to that goal. This year we gained designation as a Regional Leader in NYSERDA's Clean Energy Communities Program through the completion of climate change and sustainability action items. This designation creates the opportunity for the County to gain more funding to use for sustainability projects and allowed us to become a member of the Green Purchasing Community through New York State's Office of General Service GreenNY initiative.

In September, we broke ground in the Town of Colonie on a five-acre solar photovoltaic (PV) ground-mount array, the first of its kind in Albany County. Once complete, this solar farm will be able to replace the equivalent carbon emissions of 252 homes and will provide the County with 2.6 million kilowatt hours of clean, renewable electricity. Thank you to our partners at the New York Power Authority (NYPA) and Siemens for making this project a reality and for sharing our dedication to renewable energy.

While we have made significant progress there is more work to do. We have a commitment to zero emissions fleet by the year 2030. This year we completed a full County fleet inventory and electrification study to establish best practices for vehicle utilization, fuel consumption, driver and pedestrian safety, and the

transition to a fully electric fleet. That transition is moving full speed ahead with the County adding 8 new Chevy Bolts and 4 new Ford Lightning trucks to our electric vehicle inventory. To support this new fleet, we are expanding electric vehicle infrastructure through the purchase and installation of new electric vehicle charging stations at several County facilities and locations that previously did not have charging stations allowing for increased flexibility and convenience in managing our fleets.

We will also explore the newest technologies, including AI, making services more accessible, efficient, and user-friendly for residents.

2024 holds the potential to be our most transformative year yet. This next chapter is not just a new beginning but a commitment to building on the progress we have already made. By embracing innovation, making strategic investments, and working with our partners we will continue to protect the overall health of the community. We must remember that success is not a destination but a continuous pursuit, as we work together to shape a better, brighter future for everyone who calls Albany County home.

Thank you. May God Bless You and the great County of Albany.