

2025 BUDGET MESSAGE FROM COUNTY EXECUIVE DANIEL P. McCOY

Albany County continues to face challenges such as rising inflation and global economic shifts as we adapt to the “new normal” posed by a post-pandemic economy. Our communities have shown remarkable strength in the face of adversity; and now, as we look forward, we must focus on a recovery that is inclusive, sustainable, and forward-thinking. That is why we have made strategic investments in key areas that will not only provide short-term benefits, but will also set us up for even greater success in the long term.

This budget represents more than a decade of decreasing the effective property tax rate and we will once again see a slight decrease in 2025. This was done without cutting programs or services, and despite the challenges posed by unfunded mandates from the state and federal governments. We maintain this lower effective tax rate by embracing programs and ideas that improve county government and make us more efficient and cost-effective.

Through a partnership with Health Insurance Solutions, Inc., during 2023 and 2024 we saved a cumulative \$5.7 million in employee prescription drug costs. In 2025, we expect over \$4 million in annual savings. We will continue work with statewide and nationwide associations that bring partners like HISI into the county that provide real solutions and savings. Keeping a low tax rate is also a factor of stronger revenues, a direct result of a strong local economy. Economic development and job creation continue to be top priorities for Albany County in this budget. Through our partnership with the Advance Albany County Alliance, we are seeing a dramatic increase in private investment, including Regeneron’s development in Menands, Atlas Copco’s \$40 million expansion in Voorheesville, and Bilinski Sausage Co.’s growth in the Town of Colonie. Additionally, we continue to make progress on important redevelopments, including the AI Tech Steel site, the former Ann Lee Home site and the Central Warehouse demolition.

Our economic growth must go hand-in-hand with environmental responsibility, which is why I have also made green investments a core part of our strategy. Through the Sustainable Technology and Green Energy (STAGE) Program, we have provided \$3.65 million in grant support for clean technology-focused manufacturing expansion projects to date. This is in addition to another round of funding totaling \$3 million that will be available in 2025.

When critical institutions collapse, the ripple effects are felt throughout the community. That is why I championed the creation of the Albany County Pine Hills Land Authority in an effort to preserve the legacy of the College of Saint Rose and will ensure that the public can utilize these facilities for years to come. The Authority will attempt to lead efforts to acquire, preserve, and repurpose the campus in a way that maximizes public benefit. Albany County will continue to be a strong partner to preserve and protect our communities and thriving economy, and this budget is reflective of this commitment.

Workforce development is a key component of economic development, and we have placed an emphasis on utilizing American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds on underserved communities. Accordingly, we awarded fifteen grants totaling more than \$2.2 million to leading organizations to support new and expanded training opportunities that will support industries like health care and manufacturing. These funds make a meaningful difference, improving people’s lives and creating a pipeline of talent that attract more great companies to our County.

Commitment to our residents and workforce also means that we must be committed to the men and woman employed by Albany County that work hard every day for our residents and visitors. We have an incredible county workforce and that is why we have continued to invest in policies and programs that strike a work-life balance and create a more enhanced working environment, as well as implementing salary increases. These efforts continue to show positive results. Now, staffing levels are returning to pre-pandemic levels.

Two years ago, we boosted coverage for eyeglasses, hearing aids and dental care. This year, we created more generous versions of paid parenting leave and continuing health coverage for surviving spouses, greater liquidation of vacation accruals upon separation, and an expansion to the donated leave program. Additionally, I am proud to say we have settled nearly all our union contracts. Another innovative way we are working to retain and recruit top talent is our new Little Sprouts at Shaker Place Rehabilitation & Nursing Center. This state-of-the-art children’s daycare center is available to county employees at a subsidized rate. All of these efforts ultimately translate to better and healthier workforce and work environment for our employees, which in turn allows us to continue to provide the plethora of indispensable services and programs to our residents.

The social services and programs offered by County government and local nonprofits play an equally pivotal role in ensuring a full economic recovery. Access to childcare and housing assistance are what make it possible for vulnerable populations to fully participate in the workforce. Food insecurity remains a top issue in our region, and that is why I committed \$250,000 to the Regional Food Bank and United Way of the Greater Capital Region to fight the hunger gap. Included in the 2025 budget is an additional \$250,000 to continue this critical initiative.

The benefits of investing in addiction recovery are clear: it strengthens our labor force, reduces public costs, and improves the overall health and safety of our County. Albany County was one of the first in the state to take on Big Pharma in court for their role in the opioid epidemic. We recently awarded \$2.3 million of Opioid Settlement Fund Community Grants to twelve organizations. These monies fund treatment, recovery, prevention, and education programs so that we can stop more of these tragedies from ever happening. Additionally, nearly \$800,000 has been dedicated to expanding County programs and services to bolster these efforts. Future opioid settlement funds will allow us to build off of this progress and drive down the number of opioid overdose deaths.

I would like to thank the County Legislature, Comptroller Susan Rizzo, Sheriff Craig Apple, Sr. and Clerk Bruce Hidley for their cooperation during the budget process. When we work together, we are able to provide the highest level of services at one of the lowest tax rates in the state. It has not always been easy, but we remain disciplined and stay the course for the benefit of all. This budget continues to utilize best practices in governmental accounting and finances and firmly positions ourselves for prosperity in the future.