



ALBANY COUNTY STATE OF THE COUNTY

Daniel P. McCoy, Albany County Executive

Thursday, January 24, 2019

"I am proud that here in Albany County, despite our differences and our disagreements, and yes there have been a few, we have fundamentally stayed focused on the core mission of County government – to serve those in need and to create better opportunities, economic and otherwise, for all of our residents, so as to improve the quality of life of our communities and to create a better future for our children." County Executive Daniel P. McCoy

Good evening and thank you all for joining me tonight for my 8th State of the County Message.

In 2012 when I had the honor of delivering my first address, our county was facing daunting challenges.

We were borrowing from reserves to deal with a structurally unbalanced budget.

We had experienced years of dramatic real property tax increases.

We were relying on short-term borrowings to deal with cash flow shortages.

Our nursing home was losing over a million dollars a month.

And more importantly, patient care was being effected as a result of two decades of failure to invest in necessary upgrades to our facility.

In nearly every department, dramatic cuts to personnel or programs had effected the quality of our services. And all 17 of our collective bargaining agreements remained open and unresolved creating financial uncertainty and effecting the morale of our workforce.

And most troubling, Albany County had retreated as a leader in the region and as a catalyst for development and innovation.

Daunting challenges to be certain, but together we met those challenges and today Albany County's story is a far different one to be sure.

Our reserves are at an historic high, over \$60 million; our recently enacted budget was balanced without resorting to any budgetary gimmicks or one shots, and we continued to stay under the state mandated tax cap for the 6th consecutive year. In fact, we were even able to give our real property owners a tax cut.

Additionally, we no longer amortize for new pension related expenses and we have managed our finances such that we no longer rely on short-term cash flow borrowings.

Our nursing home is on a path to fiscal solvency, patient care has dramatically improved and we are now underway to investing over \$80 million in much needed, long overdue improvements that will make our nursing home worthy of its residents and a credit to our County.

Likewise, in nearly every department, programs have been improved and expanded to serve more of those in need, particularly our seniors, our veterans, our children and those residents with physical and mental challenges as well as those dealing with the challenges of poverty, affordable housing, indigent defense and so many other needs.

Because of these accomplishments, and because of you – our County Legislators, our employees, our not for profit partners, our incredible residents – because of you, tonight I am proud to report that the State of our County is strong and that our future is bright.

How did we accomplish all of this? I believe the answer is simple. Despite our differences and our disagreements, and yes there have been a few, we have fundamentally stayed focused on the core mission of County government – to serve those in need and to create better opportunities, economic and otherwise, for all of our residents, so as to improve the quality of life of our communities and to create a better future for our children.

And so tonight, I'm here to report on the progress we've made and the successes we've achieved over this past year in service of that mission.

For many 2018 will be remembered as the year of the woman, defined by historic political victories and by the me-too movement that has fueled a revolution around the globe for women's rights.

In Albany County, at the forefront has been our Crime Victims and Sexual Violence Center. The Center continues to be a regional, state and national leader in its support of women particularly those who have been victims of sexual and domestic violence.

The department continues to win new grant funding that has literally assisted hundreds of victims, both men and women, to obtain the most comprehensive and coordinated care through collaborations developed over a decade working with strategic community partners.

The department's initiatives serve as best practice models nationally, and in recognition of this success, our Director Karen Ziegler was appointed to the State's Advisory Council for Victim's Services and to the Governor's Domestic Violence Review Team. Karen, congratulations and to you and your staff, thank you for your extraordinary and important work.

During 2018, Albany County took on a national leadership role in an epic legal battle with the pharmaceutical industry as part of the effort to deal with the opioid crisis effecting communities across the country.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, last year the number of deaths involving prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl was six times higher than in 1999. An alarming statistic, and each one of those deaths, including those right here in our County, represents a heartbreaking story of families and loved ones having their lives effected forever.

A few days ago, at my direction, our legal counsel amended our federal ligation against pharmaceutical manufacturers to additionally take on

pharmaceutical distributors, who we believe should be held equally accountable for this crisis.

Very Importantly, Judge Polster, who is overseeing this historic litigation, just issued an important order denying the industry's motion to dismiss.

In his opinion in our favor, the Judge stated, "This opioid epidemic is a man-made plague twenty years in the making. The pain, death and heartache it has wrought cannot be overstated. It is hard to find anyone who does not have a family member, a friend, a parent of a friend, or a child of a friend who has not been affected."

A few days ago, the Washington Post ran an incredible story concerning Purdue Pharma, one of the major pharmaceutical companies named as a defendant in our federal litigation.

The Post reports, that as parents were writing to Purdue about their children who had died of OxyContin overdoses, and as federal prosecutors were reporting alarming increases in deaths connected to that powerful opioid, Richard Sackler, a member of the family that founded Purdue devised a plan for how to respond to this crisis.

In a confidential email that was obtained through discovery motions made in our federal lawsuit, Sackler wrote, “we have to hammer the abusers in every way possible. They are the culprits and the problem. They are the reckless criminals.”

Well Mr. Sackler, we have news for you. We have our own hammer; it’s called the law. And we are going to use it on your company as well as all the other manufacturers and distributors to insure that you are all held accountable for the deaths, the heartache and the pain your reckless and negligent actions have caused to so many individuals and so many families across our nation. That is my pledge to you tonight!

I also pledge that we will do everything we can as a County to deal with this crisis.

Already, we are working with a number of strategic partners and law enforcement agencies to implement innovative policies to comprehensively help addicted victims and their families.

Every month our county departments of Health and Mental Health have hosted free trainings to teach the public how to spot the signs of heroin or opioid addiction and how to use NARCAN to save victims lives.

We are also in the process of training field staff in several County Departments to administer this antidote. A recent Stanford University study

estimates wider availability of NARCAN could prevent as many as 21,000 deaths over the next decade.

Most recently, we have received grant funding that will be used to share real-time data between public safety, public health and behavioral health officials who are part of my Albany County Opioid Taskforce to identify areas where overdoses are more prevalent and to respond to local needs faster.

As president of County Executives of America and as co-chair of its Opioid Task Force, I have made the opioid crisis our number one national priority. And as the president of County Executives' Association of NYSAC, I have done the same on the State level.

I am pleased that my leadership role in both of these organizations has allowed me to share with other County Executives initiatives we have implemented in Albany County, initiatives that are now being replicated by other counties across the state and nation.

Conversely, I have been able to learn what is working in other communities that can be implemented here in Albany County. One such initiative that we will introduce in the coming weeks is from Dayton, Ohio, an initiative called GROW – Getting Recovery Options Working.

We will dispatch assistance from our Mobile Crisis Team, to the homes of individuals who have overdosed to provide those overdose victims with treatment opportunities and ongoing support and as part of GROW we will include as members of the team former addicts who have been trained to provide counseling and peer support.

We will also provide scholarship funding to attract and encourage these former addicts to participate and we will provide them with the training and certification required for this peer support initiative.

Complimentary to our efforts to provide services to those trapped in cycles of addiction, it is important that we also begin efforts to prevent vulnerable individuals from becoming addicted in the first place.

So also, as part of GROW and toward that goal, we will begin working with physicians, school nurses, coaches and others in contact with young people potentially behaving in a way that could lead to addiction.

Screening tools exist that can be employed to identify these individuals before they become addicted, helping service providers intervene early on to redirect them to a more successful path.

This proactive approach will hopefully help us end the current epidemic and prevent the next from ever occurring.

In addition to our departments of Health and Mental Health, our County Attorney, our Department of Law and my executive staff have been instrumental in our efforts to deal with the opioid crisis, so tonight please join me in thanking them for that effort.

How we address issues like addiction, domestic violence, and mental illness, experts tell us, can serve as a barometer of a community's overall health. How we care for those who are most vulnerable and most at need defines us as a community.

Statistics tell us that mental illness will touch 1 in 5 individuals over the course of a lifetime. Faced with this reality, Albany County's Department of Mental Health has prioritized the behavioral health needs of our residents through innovative programming and strategic partnerships.

The success of its efforts are reflected in a number of key accomplishments, including a more streamlined delivery of mental health services to patients utilizing our mental health clinic.

Additionally, the department has engaged in a systemic effort to reduce unnecessary institutionalization and in 2018 expanded its Mobile Crisis Team to provide services 24/7.

The demand for behavioral health and treatment continues to grow and our Mental Health Department continues to ensure that residents dealing with mental health challenges attain meaningful improvement in the quality of their lives, renewed connection to our community and lasting recovery.

For all of their efforts, and success they have achieved, we thank Dr. Giordano and his entire department.

During 2018, the County's Department of Health was again a national leader in efforts to promote health equity to residents and communities throughout our County.

The department has been one of the most active in understanding and implementing the equity agenda goals I initiated as a countywide policy 2 years ago.

As part of that effort, the Department's Family Health Program provides outreach to offer early prenatal and obstetric care, as well as maternal and child health services to assure that infants and children receive comprehensive health care in those critical formative years .

I recently had the honor of being the first County Executive in the nation to be named as a Hunt-Kean Leadership fellow based in Washington, D.C.

At the very first meeting of this fellowship – which includes governors, state attorney generals and congressional leaders, focus was on the topic of equitable education and life outcomes, and the need to consider, as we have been doing here in Albany County, how infants, toddlers, and families are supported.

We now know that early learning support, starting with prenatal care and continuing to school entry, is an integral part of a successful development continuum for children.

Toward that goal, our Department of Health plays a leadership role with the Maternal and Infant Community Health Collaborative to provide the support and care mothers may need for successful outcomes for themselves and for their children as part of that development continuum.

For the past 2 years, the department has worked diligently to achieve national Public Health Accreditation, an arduous process that only a small percentage of county health departments have achieved.

This year we are hopeful that the department's innovative efforts to prevent disease; to protect against environmental hazards, to promote the health and wellness of our citizens and to prepare us for public health emergencies will be recognized by the National Accreditation Board.

Already two of the department's initiatives, Complete Streets and Project Orange, have received national and state recognition for being model practices for other communities to emulate.

Dr. Whalen and staff, thank you for all you do every day to promote the health and well-being of our county.

Our county's Department for Children, Youth and Families works with hundreds of families and literally thousands of children to help them create safe, nurturing environments in which children can grow, thrive and reach their full potential.

In 2018 the Departments' division for Children and Family services handled calls involving over 10,000 children and its Prevention Unit provided services to thousands more to reduce the risk of foster care placement as well as to expedite permanency for children.

As a response to my call to action last year, the department created a Foster Care Taskforce with the goal of developing better solutions to deal with the crisis of so many children entering the foster care system, many as a result of the consequences of the opioid epidemic.

The department is also working closely with our Probation Department and County Attorney's office on the implementation of Raise the Age, which went into

effect in October of 2018 and which will affect thousands of youth who will be diverted from the criminal justice system.

In that regard, our Youth Bureau managed nearly 60 community-based programs aimed at engaging young residents in positive activities so as to keep them out of harm's way.

In the coming year, the bureau anticipates that over 20,000 county youths will benefit from these important programs and nothing that we do is more important than creating these supportive opportunities for our youngest residents. So Commissioner Gail Geohagen and your incredible staff, thank you for your remarkable achievements.

Our County's Department of Probation will be the most impacted by the new Raise the Age legislation and the department remains committed to expanding new and innovative ways to deliver services and to best provide the resources necessary for reducing risk factors and offering those on probation a greater opportunity to live law abiding and productive lives.

Toward that goal, in 2018, the Department again received national recognition from the National Association of Counties for its programming.

By example, the Department was part of a multi-disciplinary team that took part in a Georgetown University Program focused on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

For its participation, the Department received special recognition from Georgetown by being awarded a prestigious membership into the Children's Juvenile Justice Fellows Network. And just a few days ago, Director Bill Connors received an award for Leadership from the NYS Department of Criminal Justice.

All of us are so proud of the important work that Director Connors and his team do every day and we congratulate them on their remarkable service.

Last year I shared with you the exciting news that Harvard University recognized the Department's Juvenile Accountability Program as a cutting edge best practice and presented the department with its "Bright Idea Award".

Like Project Growth - which teaches probationers a vocational skill, as well as the importance of restitution, the Department's efforts, like its first in the state driver education initiative and its Dress for Success program, are geared toward helping probationers find a better path for life.

With the implementation of Raise the Age, and the repurposing of our Juvenile Detention Facility to a facility that will house juveniles that previously

would have been sent to adult detention, I believe more needs to be done to divert youth from entering the juvenile legal system in the first instance.

So tonight, I am announcing a new initiative, modeled after King County, Washington that will be a road map to Zero Youth Detention. “Research shows that youth have a better chance at positive adulthood when they don’t interact with the juvenile legal system.”

Like King County, we too will take a public health approach to juvenile detention to advance this goal. Leading this effort, will be Director Connors, Commissioner Geohagen, Dr. Whalen, Dr. Giordano, as well as our County Attorney, our Public Defender and our Alternate Public Defender.

They will engage partners from law enforcement, the health and not for profit community and others to develop Albany County’s own road map and report back to us with tangible objectives in the next several months.

I am grateful and honored to announce that Dr. Alice Green whose own life’s work has been dedicated to this mission has agreed to chair this important effort and to help us insure its success. Thank you, Dr. Green.

Every child in this County deserves the opportunity to reach his or her full potential and to achieve their dreams. Zero Youth Detention will be dedicated to

the mission of helping them realize those dreams by helping ensure interaction with the juvenile detention system is avoided.

It is an ambitious goal, but so to was the initiative I announced just four years ago, to get New York State to recognize its obligations under Gideon v. Wainwright to improve the quality of indigent defense in New York State. You may recall that at that time, New York State largely passed on the cost of indigent defense to county government, and counties had very different commitments to the Constitutional requirement of adequate legal representation.

Largely as a result of our effort and as a result of legislation we submitted, the New York State legislature passed and the Governor signed a 2017 Budget Bill that provides for a dramatic phased-in increase in funding for indigent defendants in counties statewide.

Additionally, the change in funding caused the NYS Office of Indigent Legal Services, located here in Albany, to appropriately grow in significance as the chief administrators of state aide to counties.

They have been terrifically supportive of our Public Defender and Alternate Public Defender's Office as well as our 18B Administration. As a result of our efforts, by 2023 when the Budget Bill is fully phased in, NY State will spend an

additional \$250 million annually on indigent defense to ensure that the promise of Gideon is finally fulfilled.

I want to thank Governor Cuomo and the members of the NYS legislature for their support, as well as Bill Leahy and his staff at the Office of Indigent Legal Services.

Tonight, I also want to recognize and to thank the Office of Indigent Legal Services for supporting our efforts two years ago to establish Albany County's Office of Immigration Assistance. When I announced the creation of the office at that time, I don't believe any of us could have predicted the important role it would play given what has happened on a national level during the past two years.

The office now provides training and support to defense attorneys representing non-citizens over a 14 county region and over the past two years has provided assistance to counsel in more than 415 cases involving individuals from over 100 countries.

When the Trump Administration began its immigration enforcement policies, our Immigration Assistance Office immediately began conducting outreach to colleges, universities and community organizations in an effort to better educate non-citizens about their rights.

And this past summer, when the Trump Administration transferred over 300 immigrant detainees from the Southern border to our Correctional facility, our office, pursuant to my executive order, helped coordinate attorneys from all of our legal dependents, as well as outside attorneys to offer effective legal assistance to dozens of detainees.

Our screenings of detainees allowed us to quickly learn that most of these individuals were seeking asylum in the United States due to the persecution or torture that they had experienced in their home countries.

We learned of individuals who were separated from their loved ones, and in one case where a grandmother was separated from her 8-year-old granddaughter. Our office worked tirelessly to have her reunited with her family in the United States.

This case like so many others, made the trauma and immoral policies coming from Washington suddenly very real in our own County.

Because of partnerships Sheriff Apple and my office put into place, partnerships with the US Commission on Refugees and Immigrants; with the Legal Aid Society, with the Empire Justice Center, with the Legal Project; with Albany Law School, Albany County was able to provide guidance to hundreds of vulnerable individuals.

For this important and incredible effort, please join me in thanking Sheriff Apple, and the staff and partners of our office of Immigration Assistance.

I am proud that here in Albany County our priorities and values are focused on compassionate and progressive government.

Priorities like: support for paid sick leave; support for our equity agenda; support for our many green initiatives to make Albany County the Greenest County in America; support for our battle against big oil and for increasing rail safety standards to ensure a safer environment for our residents; and support for the long overdue creation of a Mental Health Court for individuals dealing with mental health challenges.

Priorities such as these help define us as a caring community as does the great work being accomplished by so many of our departments.

By example, in the past year, our County's Social Services Department began a new initiative, one based on our equity agenda, called Bridges Out of Poverty to address the effects of poverty at the individual, institutional and community level.

Last year, the Department processed over 17,000 SNAP cases, over 19,000 Medicaid cases and nearly 6,000 individual temporary assistance cases monthly.

Our County's Department for Aging, and its Age Friendly Albany County Initiative, focused on underserved populations within the County, including immigrants, refugees, minorities and low-income seniors. And the department has continued to expand its outreach to younger healthier seniors to encourage recreational lifestyle choices to enable them to remain active and to age in place.

Likewise, our County's Veteran's Bureau, also expanded its community outreach and has established new collaborations and partnerships to provide more assistance to our remarkable veterans and their families.

Tonight please join me in thanking Social Services Commissioner Michelle McClave, Aging Commissioner Deb Riitano and Veterans Director Ken Secor, and their staffs for their great work on all of these critical initiatives and for making Albany County Cares more than just a slogan, but a very tangible reality.

As I said earlier, nothing is more important than creating a community that provides every opportunity for helping our young residents. Toward that goal, our county Department of Recreation has in just a few short years created opportunities for thousands of youngsters to take part in a variety of sports through a first of its kind relationship with the National Amateur Athletic Union.

As a result of that collaboration, the Department now provides in partnership with the Sheriff's Department, AAU sanctioned recreational opportunities in skating, hockey, track and field, baseball, lacrosse, flag football and karate.

At the same time, the Department has expanded recreational opportunities at our Lawson Lake, and on our Rail Trail.

Tonight, please join me in thanking and congratulating Commissioner D'Antonio and his staff for all their efforts.

Lawson Lake and our County Rail Trail have become major destination attractions in our region and these facilities, along with our beautifully renovated Times Union Center, our new Capital Center, our County owned airport which is now in the process of a major renovation, all contribute to making the Albany County metro area one of the top 50 places to live in the nation according to U.S. News & World Report.

I often think that we don't take enough pride in the beauty of this place and all that we have to offer.

We have one of the most highly educated and skilled workforces in the nation; one of the lowest unemployment rates and one of the lowest property tax rates in the State.

We have world-class institutions of higher learning; world-class medical institutions; world-class cultural institutions and cutting edge entrepreneurial industries.

And this summer we will host the first Aurora Games, an international sporting event featuring and promoting world-class women athletes.

Athletes, like Nancy Kerrigan, Nadia Comaneci, and Jackie Joyner Kersee, along with ESPN will be here to highlight young women athletes from around the world who will be competing right here in our county.

We intend to build a festival around this event that will also highlight and celebrate women in literature, music, academia, and government. And we hope to make this event a bi-annual celebration of women and our region.

We have incredible assets, so much to offer, and I think we in Albany County government can and must do more to promote these assets, by making sure Albany County is recognized as a leader in economic development; a catalyst for more growth and for more opportunities for our children as well as more opportunities for those who may be interested in locating here.

So, with that goal in mind we have engaged the highly regarded consulting firm Camoin Associates to prepare a new strategic plan for Economic Development for our County. I want to thank Kevin O'Connor who has chaired a

group of business leaders who have been working with my office to develop the baseline scope of that plan.

Camoin will do a “deep dive” analysis of our local and regional economy. And through a collaborative planning process that will engage a broader base of stakeholders, they will identify long lasting growth opportunities and development strategies for our community.

Opportunities and strategies that will include a focus on developing a green economy and greater economic justice as we seek to both eliminate inequality and protect our environment, a new green deal, if you will, for all of our residents.

I believe Albany County can use its leadership to effect transformational change - look at what we’ve accomplished with our Landbank.

With our support over the past four years, the Landbank has grown to become one of the largest in New York State.

In the past year, buyers invested nearly 12 million dollars in property purchased from the Landbank.

This is a remarkable accomplishment that is helping to stabilize and even renew neighborhoods in communities throughout the County. We can take pride in our substantial role in this success story.

Initiatives like this are within our grasp and are the type of development strategies we look forward to Camoin recommending as we work collaboratively to make Albany County the most livable County in the nation.

At the beginning of this week we celebrated the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King and we recalled his iconic “I have a dream speech” that was such a defining moment in our nation’s history.

A moment that spoke to our better angels. And that was so different than the divisive and dysfunctional leadership coming from today’s White House. Leadership that I believe threatens the very unity of our nation.

Leadership that has resulted in the longest government shut down in our nation’s history. We all want to make sure our borders are secure – but let’s stop penalizing our federal workers; let’s not jeopardize programs that are essential to our most vulnerable fellow Americans – Let’s reopen our federal government while we work toward an acceptable compromise that achieves a common goal.

Mr. President, end this government showdown now!!!

Let’s do it in honor of Dr. King’s legacy and in the spirit of what he taught us, that hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.

When Dr. King was a young college student at Morehouse College, he attracted the attention and the friendship of Dr. Benjamin Mayes, the college’s

president and the two became such close friends, that Dr. King would later refer to Dr. Mayes as his spiritual and intellectual father.

When Dr. King was assassinated, Dr. Mayes was asked to deliver the only public eulogy given at Dr. King's funeral.

Aware that he was speaking to a deeply divided, troubled and grieving nation, Dr. Mayes reminded us of something we at this moment, should bear in mind as we continue to celebrate Dr. King's legacy.

Martin Luther King, Jr., he said, believed first and foremost "...in a United America...He had faith in his Country. He died, striving to integrate America ...to the end that this great nation of ours, born in revolution and blood, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created free and equal will truly become the lighthouse of freedom where none will be denied because his skin is black and none favored because his eyes are blue; where our nation will be military strong but perpetually at peace; economically secure but just; learned but wise; where the poorest will have bread enough... and to share; where no one will be poorly housed; each educated up to his capacity and where the richest will understand the meaning of empathy, this was his dream and the end toward which he strove."

In Albany County, this too is our dream. It is fundamentally our core mission- to build and support such a community.

I know that each and every one of you shares that dream and supports that mission, even when we may disagree on our approach or on the road to get there.

I also know that you share my love and my passion for this County and for its residents and for that and for your continued efforts and support, I thank you and I look forward to working with you as we set out to make 2019 our best and brightest year yet.

I also want to thank all of the departments I did not specifically mention this evening, but that are equally important to our mission – our Departments of Public Works, General Services, Information Services, Human Resources, Civil Service, and our Water Purification District and to all of the terrific employees in each of those departments – Thank you for your remarkable service.

And lastly, I want to thank all of the residents of our County – who support our efforts and who inspire our mission. God bless all of you and God bless our Nation, our State and our great County of Albany.