

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



RACHEL MAY
SENATOR, 53RD DISTRICT

Chair
Aging
Legislative Commission on Rural
Resources
Committees
Agriculture
Cultural Affairs, Tourism, Parks
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Dear Constituent,

A few weeks ago, my fellow legislators and I wrapped up a very busy and highly productive legislative session in Albany. I wanted to share with you some of the key highlights from that session.

My own bills

As a freshman senator, I am proud to have introduced several bills of particular interest to the 53rd Senate District and Central New York. They included:

- The **Finger Lakes Community Protection Act**, a unanimously approved measure banning construction of trash incinerators in the Finger Lakes watershed.
- A bill to include **toxic fracking waste** under current regulations governing hazardous waste disposal.
- A bill to create a **young farmer apprentice program**, as part of BOCES, to recruit young farmers, keep farm lands in production, and promote agriculture.
- A bill, supported by the New York Farm Bureau, that creates three licensing levels related to **industrial hemp and hemp extract**.
- A **senior entrepreneurship bill** to support persons age 50 and older who want to start their own business venture.
- A bill to create a **Syracuse STEAM school** in downtown Syracuse. The school will provide classes in science, technology, engineering, arts and math to students from high schools across Central New York.

Electoral reforms

We passed several bills that will **make voting easier**, more convenient and more consistent with voting laws in a majority of other states. These reforms create an early voting period; move state and local primaries to the same day; modernize ballots to make the voting process less confusing; and give voters until February 14 to switch their party enrollment prior to the June primaries. I am hopeful these changes will reverse New York's abysmal voter turnout rates, which typically are among the lowest in the nation.

On the campaign finance side, we **closed the LLC loophole**, which allowed essentially unlimited donations from those who set up multiple limited liability companies. We also approved the appointment of a **commission to develop significant campaign finance reforms**, beginning the process toward more significant reforms yet to come.

Environment

We passed the **Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CCPA)** to reduce greenhouse gases while supporting the people and communities that are most threatened by climate change. This bill is the most ambitious climate change legislation in the nation. Importantly, it also includes attention to workforce development and other steps to support our economy and create new jobs.

Along with the CCPA, we passed a **ban on single-use plastic bags**. These bags have become a serious problem for our communities, our waterways and our wildlife. Plastic bag bans have already proven to be a great success in the cities, counties and countries that have adopted them. This is an important step toward reducing waste and protecting our state's waters, wildlife and lands for future generations.

Agriculture

In what has stirred strong feelings on both sides, we passed the **Farmworkers Fair Labor Practices Act**. I supported this bill as a hard-fought compromise to an earlier version that would have required farmers to pay overtime to farmworkers who exceed 40 hours a week. I agreed with farmers in my district that this would strain their budgets and potentially discourage farm laborers from coming to New York, and I worked very hard with the sponsor to develop a version allowing for 60 hours per week.

This compromise grew out of what we were hearing from both sides, including from many of my own constituents who spoke up at a public hearing we held in Madison County. We have more work to do on this legislation. But I believe this act strikes a balance between standing up for the rights of farm workers while helping farmers stay in business in a very tight farm economy.

We also passed many farm-friendly bills, such as:

- Establishing the **New York Task Force on Agricultural Investment** to develop policy recommendations for supporting farmers throughout the state.
- Creating a process to **certify CBD products** in order to continue growing New York's hemp industry.
- Requiring that **foods advertised as local** must have originated in New York.
- Establishing new grant awards criteria specifically to **support small-scale farms**.
- Creating a **Farm to School and School Garden Fund**, funded through voluntary contributions, to help schools create gardens and promote healthy eating among students.

Criminal Justice Reforms

We passed legislation to **decriminalize marijuana** and establish a process for clearing records of past convictions. Young people of color are far more likely to have faced arrest on marijuana possession than any other group, so this is a step toward righting an unjust system. It will probably also lay the groundwork for legalizing marijuana, which I support as long as we do it right, including addressing concerns about public health and safety.

We also **ended cash bail** for persons accused of misdemeanor and nonviolent, low-level offenses. Bail was designed specifically to make sure a defendant shows up for trial, but it has been used to keep many people behind bars who have never been convicted of a crime. This can ruin their lives, even if they are innocent, and it is very costly to taxpayers.

Those are just some of the highlights from a six-month stretch that has been both incredibly busy and thoroughly exhilarating. Through it all, I have worked very hard to listen to you and to make sure Upstate interests are heard in Albany. I am pleased at the gains we made and the degree to which my colleagues from downstate have taken our concerns seriously.

I am grateful for the opportunity you have given me to serve as your senator. And I look forward to continuing our work together on behalf of our communities, our region and our state.

Sincerely,



Senator Rachel May
53rd Senate District, NY