



Putnam County Executive Kevin Byrne

Special Presentation of the 2025 State of the County

"The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew." – Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, 1862

Introduction, thank-yous

Good evening. Ladies and gentlemen, fellow elected officials, and honored guests: welcome to your 2025 State of the County.

First, I'd like to offer special thanks to our hosts for permitting us to provide this first-of-its-kind State of the County at this beautiful venue. Thank you to Laura Endico and the entire Endico family for providing this impressive venue as well as Donna and her team for helping us organize this event.

We have several notable guests to mention before we get into today's agenda, chief among them my friend and a guy who's done a few of these presentations himself, former Congressman and Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro. Marc, thank you for your unwavering support but most importantly your relentless advocacy on behalf of our state. I know Putnam County will have a strong partner on federal transit issues thanks to Marc Molinaro. We are grateful.

Thank you to the members of the Legislature who are here, as well as my friends and colleagues Sheriff Kevin McConville, County Clerk Michael Bartolotti, and DA Bob Tendy.

And of course, none of the accomplishments you'll hear about tonight would be possible without the hard work of our amazing Executive Office. Deputy County Executive Jim Burpoe, Director of Communications Chris Formisano, Director of Compliance and Intergovernmental Relations Jennifer Caruso, our invaluable Confidential Secretary Lisa Ranghelli, and the wonderful Barbara Reitz. As many of you already know, my longtime confidant, advisor and dear friend Matt Covucci stepped down as Chief of Staff at the end of last year. He's moved on to other endeavors, but continues to help us out in a limited capacity. And so tonight I'd like to formally introduce our new Chief of Staff, Dain Pascocello. AKA the Great Dain. Dain's been an

incredible addition to the team and has already hit the ground running. Join me in giving all of them a round of applause.

Last but not never least, I'd like to thank my wife Bri for standing by my side all these years. I couldn't ask for a stronger partner in life or a more forceful advocate for the work we're seeking to accomplish in this community every day. I know she'd be here if she could, but she's busy watching this from home with our little guy Braeden. I love you both and I will see you soon.

Friends, the state of Putnam County has never been stronger. The opportunities here are greater than any other. A future beckons in which every resident has a place in this community and the potential to contribute his or her talents. Before we look ahead it's important to understand how we arrived here, and the collective efforts of many in this room toward the unique position we find ourselves in today.

Cutting taxes and keeping services intact

Under this Administration, Putnam County will continue to present ourselves as a leader in cost-effective and efficient government that maintains a high quality of life for residents while cutting taxes and achieving robust economic growth. Our guiding principles remain unchanged. We have delivered real meaningful results, yet we remain as dedicated as ever in our shared mission to provide a more affordable, accountable, and accessible government for the nearly 100,000 residents we serve.

Since taking office two years ago, this Administration has been the most transparent in County history, a promise I've kept and a legacy I am proud of. Every year, we continue to host annual constituent forums. Last year was no different. In 2024, this administration presented one in every town, from town-hall-style gatherings to coffee meet-and-greets – even nature walks. We've already presented two new forums earlier this year, with more on the way.

In addition to more forums for the public, our Executive Office started the new practice of livestreaming its public hearings. For those unfamiliar with our County law-making process, every time the Legislature passes a proposed local law, it goes to the County Executive for approval or veto, but before that is done the County Executive must hold a public hearing to allow the public to provide their direct input. In the past, other than minutes filed with the Legislature, these meetings were never recorded or broadcast, let alone livestreamed. I changed that. If we believe in livestreaming public meetings, and trust me I do, then this Administration must lead by example and practice what it preaches. That's exactly what we did. Every public hearing on legislation held by this Administration is now livestreamed on the County's YouTube channel.

I'm grateful to the members of the Legislature who have successfully advocated for the livestreaming of their meetings. And I'm particularly grateful to Legislator Crowley for introducing it and the members of the Rules Committee who this past month voted to codify

several new transparency initiatives into their legislative manual, including the livestreaming of all legislative meetings and public hearings. Their full legislative meeting is tomorrow and I hope to see it pass. They are an independent branch of government, governed by their own rules. It's worth recognizing that this effort is a major win for transparency, good government, and the people of Putnam County. So to all the members of the Legislature who moved this forward, as a resident of Putnam County, thank you.

Our commitment to transparency also extends to our finances which is why, staying true to my promise to you, the 2025 budget enacted last year came with a brand new budget-transparency website. Our team in our Finance Department, led by Commissioner Michael Lewis, continues to ensure the data presented is accurate and up-to-date. This new website offers our residents an added layer of transparency which better enables people to know how their County government budgets their tax dollars and why.

As stewards of your tax dollars, I also believe we should be adhering to the highest possible ethical standards. That's why upon taking office I invited the State Comptroller's Office to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment of our County finances – an assessment that ultimately led to the auditing of our County parks, including the County Golf Course. Bringing in the State Comptroller was a bold move but was necessary to reform accounting practices at this County-owned asset and track every dollar that passed through it. Our team learned much through this experience, updated policies and procedures, and, thanks to support received from the Legislature last year, Putnam County submitted a plan with the state to demonstrate how we are acting on their recommendations.

I have long felt that greater transparency is one of the most effective ways to build greater confidence in the work of our elected leaders. Sunshine is the best disinfectant. That's why last year I posted my own financial disclosures on the County website for the public to easily access and view, something I routinely did during my tenure in the state Assembly. And, if you like tonight's presentation, you'll be pleased to learn I plan to bring abbreviated versions of this State of the County address on the road where I will present at numerous Senior Centers across the County. These events will also be recorded and archived on the County YouTube page.

We've made great strides in making Putnam County more affordable. Reducing the cost of living helps everyone, from the weekend visitor to the young couple buying a first home to retirees on fixed incomes. I understand the struggles of persistently high inflation and its effects on family finances and the cost of doing business. The middle class is still paying too much for its necessities. We should not add to that burden, but must practice creative problem-solving without breaking the bank.

Under my leadership, Putnam County government has never raised taxes; we've consistently cut taxes, driving the property-tax rate down to its lowest level in 18 years. We've reduced the sales tax by opting into a two-year exemption permitting County residents to make tax-free purchases of clothes and shoes under \$110, an exemption I'd love to see made permanent.

Looking forward, Putnam County's Property Tax Stabilization Fund stands at approximately \$7.5 million, and it's vital to keep this dedicated fund healthy in the event of a crisis. That's why the County government needs sustainable sources of reliable revenue. Among other things, County sales-tax revenue assists counties in funding critical services, including many that are mandated by state government, enabling us to finance our current and future obligations while relying less on property taxes.

We're always working to find new ways to make Putnam County more affordable, and the overwhelming cost we continue to hear about is property taxes. We do a darn good job in County government. We've driven down the property tax rate to its lowest level in 18 years and are borrowing less, but we know we can do better. And where we can do better, we owe it to our people to deliver.

That's why, in my next budget, I intend to propose the largest property-tax cut in Putnam County's history – providing more meaningful relief to our residents.

By doing more to cut the tax burden, we will make Putnam County more inviting and more competitive, not only within our region but the state as a whole. By most independent estimates, New Yorkers pay the highest property taxes in the country, right after New Jersey. That's unfair. We have an opportunity to provide more financial relief to our residents, and we must seize it.

While other places may burden you with higher costs and outrageous fees, this Administration wants to continue its streak of responsibly cutting your taxes. A short time ago my office released the results of our online Community Tax Survey. The poll ran for a week, was answered by over 800 people, and came back with 72% of you calling on the County to pass a major property-tax cut.

You spoke, and I listened. I will present our County legislators with a budget to do just that.

We will cut your taxes, reduce the cost of living, and honor our commitments to the people we serve – that is my pledge to you.

The 30% solution

This Administration's motto of providing a more "affordable, accountable, and accessible" government will now include another A – namely, "active." Here's how. On average, for every dollar the County collects from you in taxes, 70 cents, or 70 %, goes to pay for mandates handed down by elites in Washington and Albany.

We are stewards of the taxpayer's money here in Putnam, so I take that remaining 30% you send to us very seriously. It's our responsibility to use it wisely and, whenever we can, demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of your County government.

This Administration has already overhauled the County website and launched the most aggressive budget-transparency initiatives in Putnam County history, but the commitment to the maintenance of this effort is never-ending.

Every County department and nonprofit partner using County taxpayer money now submits a standardized annual report that professionally summarizes their operations, including how much they spend to get the job done. This helps justify their work to elected officials and the public, while also helping us identify more opportunities for efficiencies and savings. This assists us in empowering department heads to work as innovative leaders while inspiring others to do the same.

Next, we're going to build on the successful ethics reforms of the past two years – including better financial disclosures and enhanced transparency through our budget-transparency website. In doing so, we will also fully fund the Board of Ethics in my budget plan later this year, removing any trace of a potential conflict of interest between board members and appropriators. This is another opportunity for us to lead, and I ask the Legislature to join me so we can deliver on this overdue reform in 2025.

2024 victories

The accomplishments of the last year have been many.

I tasked representatives from my office and the community with re-writing the County's Mission Statement. This is what they came up with, and I am grateful to the Legislature for adopting it as the County's new official mission and vision going forward. All of our accomplishments over the past two years have been in service of the "health, safety and well-being of the public while upholding the laws of the United States, New York State, and the County."

I am fortunate, as your County Executive, to have partners throughout County government, be it in our departments, members of the Legislature, the District Attorney, the Clerk, the Sheriff, who are just as committed to making Putnam the greatest place to live, work, and raise a family. "Together, we seek to build a future that honors our past, embraces our present, and inspires generations to come." This is what we do.

In 2024 the County hosted a first-of-its-kind retail opportunity for young entrepreneurs. Over 600 visitors joined 70 youth vendors who showcased an array of foods, games, collectibles, and services. This unique event, led by our Youth Bureau Director Janeen Cunningham and supported by our community business partner Ed Santalone, brought together many County departments like Tourism, the Sheriff's Office, DPW/Parks, and IT to leverage a unique opportunity at a County-owned property and inspire the rising generation of entrepreneurs and small businesses owners. Take a look.

We are already planning the next event, and today I can announce that registration is live for youth vendors and entrepreneurs at PutnamCountyNY.gov/YBM. The date for the next event is Sunday, June 8. I was blown away by all of those who participated last year, and we hope to see more young people join us, learn, and thrive in Putnam County. This is an opportunity for our youth to hone skills and build a real business. We want these hardworking young entrepreneurs to stay in Putnam to live and work and build their future. The Youth Business Market is also a prime example of our smart stewardship of County-owned lands, utilizing our own Tilly Foster Farm in unique ways and developing this recreational space into a true learning environment.

Tilly Foster Farm is truly a beautiful place. Having the Youth Bureau there to host this marketplace was such a fun experience that it got us all talking about the future of this County-owned farm. So in line with this Administration's desire to always look for new ways to best utilize our County-owned properties, I'm very excited to announce that this year, the Youth Bureau will relocate its office space from the County's Donald B. Smith Campus in Carmel to Tilly Foster Farm. This is a move that just makes sense. There is already some great youth programming at the farm, like BOCES, so having the Youth Bureau centrally located at this educational institute is exactly what the space needs. The Legislature approved this project as part of the County's capital plan last year, and I appreciate their support. It complements existing uses of the park, but it will also pair exceptionally well with the future presence of Cornell Cooperative Extension.

We have so many great County facilities – and many have received sorely needed upgrades under this Administration. One of the most prominent is our training facility for emergency services. That's why I am ecstatic to report that later this year, we will cut the ribbon on our new Lt. Michael Neuner Fire and EMS Training Center. Named after a long-serving member of the Brewster Volunteer Fire Department and a dedicated public servant who lost his life saving others, this truly modern, state-of-the-art campus will re-open this summer. I want to thank everyone involved in this project: our crews at DPW, the contractors who literally laid the groundwork, our partners at Draeger who assembled this facility, our Bureau of Emergency Services staff, and Senator Pete Harckham who secured several hundred thousand dollars in grant funding to make this project a reality. But perhaps most critically, I want to thank Commissioner Bob Lipton for all of his hard work and advocacy to bring this to fruition. Bob has dutifully served as Commissioner since I took office in 2023, and prior to that served as Deputy Commissioner for many years. He has shared with me his intention to retire at the end of the year, and so tonight, Bob, I want to personally thank you for all you have done for the residents of Putnam County.

Commissioner Lipton's leadership was on full display last year when we declared a State of Emergency in late October due to severely dry conditions. The region was under a fire threat and we marshaled resources and acted quickly. Not knowing what would happen each day but preparing for the worst, our Administration issued a protective order to prevent natural disasters like the destructive Kent brush fire that swallowed 33 acres in flames. Our Bureau

coordinated with more than 10 fire agencies to contain the fire and protect life, homes, and property. To fight this wildfire, the Bureau also enlisted the help of DPW led by Commissioner Feighery and the Kent Highway Department, led by Superintendent Richie Othmer. Because of the nature of the blaze, these crews actually went deep into the woods and using heavy construction and highway equipment, dug a fire line trench to prevent the fire from spreading even further. Thanks to everyone's courage, quick thinking, and collaboration, no homes or structures were damaged, and no one was seriously injured during the Kent brush fire.

Between October 23 and November 18, 2024, the 911 center received 152 fire-related calls. Our local volunteer fire agencies were dispatched 29 times, and every single local agency responded multiple times to incidents throughout the County.

But obviously wildfires don't respect County lines, and so when our neighbors in Orange County were being ravaged by significantly larger wildfires than ours, the Bureau coordinated the response for seven of our local volunteer fire departments during a 12-hour period. Please join me in giving a huge thank-you to everyone who assisted during last year's drought and brush-fire season.

Our Department of Public Works continues to impress month in and month out with their commitment to maintaining and improving County property. In the winter months we are always grateful for their round-the-clock work to keep our roads plowed and safe. And in warmer weather, we are thankful for their efforts to build and maintain a safe transportation network.

Perhaps no project of theirs has had more attention than Peekskill Hollow Road. Those of you who have followed this issue remember the County's struggles with the previous contractor. It led to painful delays, uncertainty, and unfinished construction across a vital stretch of the County's longest road. I am pleased to announce that Commissioner Feighery and his team have advised me that all the bridges, including the span by two Putnam Valley schools, are now complete and the remaining phase of the Peekskill Hollow Road project will end in time for Mother's Day, welcome news for moms, dads, and everyone else who has patiently awaited the removal of those large metal plates and an end to this nightmare.

I want to say thank you to everyone who worked on this project, from County Legislator Bill Gouldman to Supervisor Jackie Annabi to the Law Department to DPW to our contractor ELQ and the engineers. But most importantly, to the public, especially the residents of Putnam Valley: Thank you for your patience.

Our County Law Department was instrumental in getting the Peekskill Hollow Road project started again. They've done a lot of incredible work over the past two years, led by our County Attorney Compton Spain.

As many of you may or may not know, shortly after I took office, the County was exposed to the single largest liability we have ever faced – and I'm not talking about Peekskill Hollow Road.

Putnam County was being sued for tens of millions of dollars over a painful and controversial case dating back to the mid-1990s.

No county executive enjoys spending taxpayer money on any settlement, yet I recognized that I had a fiduciary responsibility to address this issue. Now that the lawsuit is finally settled, I can share that the County had been previously notified by its insurer that actions taken before my term jeopardized the County's insurance coverage, placing us in an unprecedented situation with massive financial exposure.

Thanks to the hard work of County Attorney Spain and Risk Manager Mat Bruno, our Putnam County team navigated this very difficult process. They went to bat for us, and instead of having to pay one individual tens of millions of taxpayer dollars that would have destroyed our County finances, we were able to pay a deductible of only 1%, with our insurer paying 99% of the settlement.

There is another very important item on the Legislature's agenda tomorrow that we have been working toward for many, many months. As I announced several weeks ago, my Administration has come to a five-year contract agreement with our friends in CSEA, and tomorrow the County Legislature will have the opportunity to approve that final agreement. For the first time in years, all four of our unions will be working under multi-year contracts.

This administration is committed to ensuring that we have the strongest possible workforce, best suited to serve the people of Putnam. I am honored to go to work every day with our incredible County employees and I'm always excited to highlight our exceptional workers. Two years ago we reinstated our Employee Recognition Program to acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of our dedicated County employees. Each year an honoree is scored and selected by a committee consisting of union members who review the applications submitted.

The nominations to the committee are redacted heavily to make sure that no one knows who nominated the individuals, the nominees' names, and what exactly their job is. This is to ensure that the individuals are judged purely on their merits. Following that disclaimer, I have the privilege to announce that the 2024 Putnam County Employee of the Year is none other than Correction Officer Ismael "Mickey" Mathias.

In the words of a colleague, "Mickey's uncompromising selflessness, kindness, thoughtfulness, and unwavering commitment is the reason why members of Corrections enlist his support and advice on nonwork related issues. He is well-spoken and versatile in his duties. No matter the adversities, he is always positive, optimistic, and a problem-solver. He wears the uniform with pride."

Mickey's name will be added to the Employee Recognition plaque that hangs in the main lobby of the County Office Building year-round. Please join me in recognizing Mickey as 2024's Employee of the Year!

We are committed to investing in the County workforce. We now have fiscally responsible agreements that meet the needs of our hardworking employees. These agreements provide fair compensation and benefits while ensuring the continued safety of the public. When I was elected your County Executive, every countywide union was operating without a long-term contract. We changed that by getting in the room with the relevant stakeholders and talked about the best interests of Putnam County's workforce and a deal that was fair and responsible for taxpayers.

Thanks to the concerted efforts of our negotiating teams led by Deputy County Executive Jim Burpoe and Director of Personnel Paul Eldridge, our dedicated County employees will be working under solid agreements for years to come.

At the start of my term, Deputy County Executive Burpoe assured me that we would get all four contracts settled within two years. Jim, we barely missed the mark, but credit to you and the team for your assistance in making this a reality. A lot of folks didn't think we could get this done, but we did it.

Putnam County is fortunate to have Jim's experience and expertise in County Government. Besides his work to secure County contracts for our employees, he was instrumental in producing large savings for taxpayers early on in our administration, and he, along with our Director of Compliance and Intergovernmental Relations Jennifer Caruso, lead our ARPA Review Committee to ensure that not one dollar of federal funds awarded to Putnam County would be wasted.

As of December 31, 2024, all of Putnam County's federal stimulus ARPA money – \$19 million in total – has been committed. All dollars have been accounted for and are being spent to benefit you. Had we not acted the way we did, we could have been on the hook for millions. I've just returned from the annual New York State Association of Counties conference in our state's capital where we confirmed, once again, that Putnam was the sole county in the state to provide this stimulus funding to local governments, on top of what local governments had already received directly from Washington, D.C.

Coordinating this ARPA financing not just for County projects but down to the various town and village levels was critically important to our fiscal future, and we got it done. I want to thank our partners in the Legislature who were flexible and accommodating in the waning days of 2024 to ensure we remained in compliance.

That being said, one of the major projects that our Administration had sought to be funded as an ARPA expenditure was the renovation of Camp Herrlich's Schweiger Hall. Last year's Legislature did not agree with the Administration's desire to spend ARPA money on renovating this County-owned asset, but did acknowledge it needs to be addressed. And so it begs the question: What are we going to do about Camp Herrlich?

I am committed to securing the funding needed to support this magnificent children's campus. At a minimum, know that I will include this project as part of next year's capital plan, and I hope that we can rely on the Legislature's support for such a worthy effort. Camp Herrlich provides affordable childcare services that are worth far more to the parents of Putnam County than we could ever understand. This location provided childcare to the children of first responders and other essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic when other facilities were closed or shut down. It's past time we repaid their generosity, honored our obligation, and did more to support their continued mission.

Providing opportunities and programs for our most vulnerable should always be at the heart of public service. Stepping up to assist children, families, and those with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities is a bipartisan calling that transcends party and strengthens us all. This is why Putnam County is proud to be a ThinkDIFFERENTLY community.

With this in mind, over the past two years, we have renewed Putnam County's solemn commitment to ThinkDIFFERENTLY, and made our County facilities and operations more open, equal, and accessible to every resident. One of my earliest decisions as your County Executive was to make it a priority of our capital plan to fund sorely needed ADA-accessible improvements.

Our own County Office Building, the place I go to work every day, the location where the Legislature meets, had no fully accessible ADA bathroom. Previously, if you wanted to merely get into the County Office Building, and you had trouble with stairs, the only entrance accessible to you was through the back of the building, buzzing in through the maintenance entrance, walking across a dark basement hallway where paint and building materials were stored, and finally taking the elevator.

Now, thanks in part to funding secured by Senator Harkham with support from our Clerk Michael Bartolotti, we finally have an accessible ramp at the main entrance of the County Office Building and a fully accessible ADA bathroom. I know this may seem like a small thing, but for the people with different abilities that it affects it's a big deal.

From the moment I became County Executive I encouraged everyone to reassess their work, and challenged them to ThinkDIFFERENTLY about how we do business. That's why we decided to take a hard look at one of our most critical services: preschool special education. At the moment, we spend millions of dollars transporting and educating many children outside of the County to obtain critical services and schooling. We have special needs children below the age of six sitting on buses for multiple hours per day just to get to a facility that can properly meet their needs. As a parent of a four-year-old, I can't imagine having to deal with that for my son, or any child for that matter.

Our Executive team, along with the Health Department, spent months re-evaluating and developing a plan to create what is referred to as a braided model with our school districts to

provide pre-K services. If enacted, this program will save taxpayer dollars, cut transportation times, and produce better educational outcomes.

And so today I'm thrilled to announce our intention to partner with Community Based Services (CBS) to create a ThinkDIFFERENTLY pre-K education campus at InterArts in Patterson. This Administration believes in developing an inclusive and comprehensive early-learning facility that supports preschool special education at no extra cost to taxpayers.

Last month, we met with all stakeholders and are moving forward to reach a conceptual framework with Carmel and Brewster school districts to establish this much-needed campus. In this endeavor we could have no better partner than Community Based Services, who we are working with to build out their facility to the exact specifications and needs of our population.

CBS's InterArts campus already provides great services and learning opportunities for those of all abilities and ages. When we approached them with this opportunity, they could not have been more excited and supportive of the project. Please join me in thanking those here from CBS tonight for their commitment to Thinking DIFFERENTLY and their commitment to every individual, regardless of ability, in Putnam County.

I believe in this initiative, but I cannot do it alone. For this project to succeed, we need all the stakeholders involved to come together: our school districts, the Town of Patterson, and the County Legislature. We need their help.

Another exciting project that has long been in the making starts soon. Our Planning Department, led by Commissioner Barbara Barosa, spent much of last year analyzing our public transit system and the access challenges posed by a suburban landscape of winding, narrow roads. This study culminates in the launch of an innovative ride-on-demand pilot program in the towns of Patterson, Southeast, and Carmel. Putnam On-Demand is an app-based public transit system where residents can book rides for the price of a regular cup of coffee and get door-to-door service Monday to Saturday. This is an important start, and my Administration continues to work diligently to identify gaps in access, which includes paratransit services, and explore creative ways to best serve our residents.

We are always trying to find ways to improve the health and safety of our residents. Putnam County continues to be one of the safest counties in the country, and consistently ranks as the healthiest county in New York State. I always give credit, first and foremost, to the people who call Putnam County home. You are what makes this place so special and so great. But I would be remiss if I did not also credit the incredible men and women of the Putnam County Sheriff's Office, led by Sheriff Kevin McConville. At last year's State of the County Address I recognized Sheriff McConville and his team for submitting their application for accreditation. This year, I'm proud to announce they have received it, reaching an important milestone and recognizing the

department's commitment to excellence and professionalism. Congratulations, Sheriff, to both you and your remarkable team.

Volunteer first responders are equally vital to our County's public safety. They perform their lifesaving duties free of charge and make our budgeting less reliant on taxes, saving you more money. Two years ago, this County implemented an important tax exemption for our volunteer firefighters and ambulance workers, but it was imperfect. Our partners in state government have since passed additional legislation that allows us to extend the tax exemption to volunteers who serve outside of the town in which they reside. This will encourage more people to serve, and addresses a loophole which unfairly excludes first responders who call Putnam their home. When you sacrifice your time and potentially risk your life here in Putnam County, I believe you deserve a break on property taxes. I am hopeful we can work with the Legislature to get this done.

We spent much of 2024 revamping plans to open the first-ever Stabilization Center in Putnam County. After a lot of public feedback and discussion, we are continuing to support our partners at PeopleUSA to open this mental healthcare facility. While this facility will be open 24/7, let me be clear, it is not an in-patient facility like an Arms Acres. It is designed to be a calm, relaxing place, for those who need mental health support.

We are providing options for individuals and their families, allowing people to rely less on the costly and overburdened healthcare and criminal justice systems for their needs. This is intended to be the first stop on their journey to getting healthy. In the same way that an urgent care facility may recommend you follow up with a specialist, those working at the Stabilization Center will work with you to treat your symptoms, and then connect you with other services to help.

PeopleUSA CEO Steve Miccio, Commissioner Sara Servadio, Director of Mental Health Paul Tang, and everyone at the Department of Mental Health and Social Services have been working diligently to make this project a reality. I am thankful for their hard work and I hope that we can make real progress on opening this facility in 2025.

Two other departments that are always essential to the well-being of our residents are our Office for Senior Resources (OSR) and our Department of Health. After many years, both Departments will be under new leadership in 2025. Late last year we announced the promotion of Marlene Barrett to be our next Director of OSR after having served as a caseworker and then Deputy Director. Marlene has been a consummate professional and has been taking care of our seniors as Acting Director for the past few months. I've been encouraged by many of the plans and innovations developed under her bold new leadership.

One particular program I'd like to highlight is a partnership between our Office for Senior Resources, the Sheriff's Office, and our Youth Bureau: the Youth Council's Senior Tech-Connect. This program brings together two important groups in our community, our seniors and our youth, to bridge the digital divide. Marlene invited them into the Carmel Friendship Center,

where members of the Putnam Youth Council dedicated their time to helping seniors navigate today's technology, from learning how to FaceTime with family to using essential apps that keep them connected. It's a simple but powerful initiative that strengthens intergenerational bonds, builds confidence, and fosters a sense of community. I want to personally thank these incredible young people for sharing their knowledge and their kindness. Their enthusiasm and willingness to give back prove that the next generation of Putnam County is stepping up in a big way to serve others. This is what community is all about.

At the Health Department, after a long, long search, we have finally found a suitable successor, not replacement, for our own Dr. Michael Neshiewat, because no one can replace Dr. Mike. And while I will be sad to see my friend Doc Mike leave his role as commissioner, I am honored to announce tonight that Rian Rodriguez has accepted the position as Public Health Director of the Putnam County Department of Health. Rian, you have big shoes to fill, but we are confident in your abilities and we look forward to seeing what you do in the years to come. With Doc Mike staying on as the County's medical consultant, I know you will have an ally in your corner with tons of experience and knowledge.

I was thrilled to see that both Marlene's and Rian's nominations were reported out of the Legislature's committee and look forward to the Legislature considering their final approvals this week. Both of these appointments have my full and complete support.

I like to think that few in this County are bigger fans than me of this wonderful place we call home. However, our Tourism Department excels like no other at promoting all things Putnam.

Led by Director Tara Keegan with a lot of help from former Director, now part-time employee Tracy Walsh, they have done great work to show the rest of the world what Putnam County is all about. In fact, just last year, we had multiple major projects filmed right here. Two highlights were Netflix projects for the movie "Knives Out 3" filmed in Cold Spring, and a miniseries called "The Four Seasons" starring Tina Fey, Steve Carell, and Coleman Domingo which was filmed in Philipstown, Putnam Valley, and Kent. We highlight these because, yes, it's exciting to see Hollywood come to Putnam. But it's also a signal to others that we are here, we are on the map. Just ask any Hulkamaniac who will be at Carmel ShopRite on Wednesday to see Hulk Hogan promote his new beer.

According to recent reports, in 2023, Putnam County generated \$86 million from traveler spending, an 11% increase from the previous year, and the largest increase in the Hudson Valley region. That's more money in the pockets of the many family businesses here in Putnam. Tourism money also generates tax dollars: tax dollars that we don't have to ask our own homeowners to contribute. Lord knows they already pay enough, in part thanks to unfunded mandates from the federal government and New York State.

One of the most recent and egregious money grabs from New York State has of course been congestion pricing. As a commuter County, Putnam's residents depend on affordable access to New York City for their livelihoods. The unfair congestion tax punishes those who live outside the city and does little to address the inefficiencies and mismanagement at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). We are here at Ace Endico Headquarters, the County's largest private employer, and as a high-quality, specialty food distributor, a tremendous amount of their business is done in New York City, specifically deliveries to Manhattan. Our economic development team estimates that the congestion tax alone would cost this great, family-owned company over \$250,000 a year.

That's why on January 21, one day after he took office, I sent President Trump a letter outlining my concerns with the congestion tax, and offered some solutions on how to end it. Fortunately, his administration listened to the concerns expressed by me and others and took our advice. On February 19 Transportation Secretary Duffy sent a letter to Governor Hochul rescinding a key federal approval that's needed for congestion pricing to operate.

While we expect this issue to be litigated further, we are hopeful this intervention will lead to the eventual end of the congestion tax, and serve as a meaningful victory in our ongoing fight to make this state more affordable.

Never before have we had such strong representation at the federal level. Yes, we have our incredible Congressman Mike Lawler, who has been the single most accessible Congressman for Putnam County in my lifetime. But we also have advocates like Marc Molinaro who has reportedly been tapped to lead the Federal Transit Administration. Marc is a dear friend. I know that he will stand up for Putnam County's commuters and taxpayers and provide the kind of thoughtful representation that is presently lacking at the MTA.

Our active advocacy doesn't stop with the congestion tax. Earlier this year I was selected to provide testimony at the Joint Budget Hearing on Transportation in Albany. While I did address the congestion-tax issue, my focus turned to ensuring that our local roads receive full funding in the coming state budget. Last year, Putnam County received \$1.2 million from the CHIPS program that was directly used to resurface County roads. Any cut to this funding would cause significant stress to County, town, and village budgets.

I also made sure to voice my concerns about the number of state roads in our County that are in desperate need of attention. Sections of state routes 301, 311, 312, 164, and Route 6 are overdue for repair and resurfacing.

Of course, we have our own projects to take care of as well. I mentioned Peekskill Hollow Road earlier, but we also have major road-construction projects at Sprout Brook Road in Philipstown and Fair Street in the Hamlet of Carmel, right next to the County Office Building. We are committed to ensuring the safety and reliability of our County's infrastructure. And for these two projects, we recognize this has been and will continue to be an inconvenience for residents during construction. We appreciate everyone's understanding.

Our commitment is not only to improve Sprout Brook Road and Fair Street, but to keep our community informed every step of the way. That's why we held constituent forums for each of these projects. But of course, our communication with residents doesn't end with town halls. We have our DPW projects website that periodically updates residents with the status of major road and bridge improvements.

Also in our capital plan is the new Veterans Museum that will be completed this year to honor the past and inspire the warriors of our future. After years of neglect in prior budgets, our current museum has fallen into severe disrepair, and we needed strong financial support to open and operate a new Veterans Museum. Thanks to Assemblyman and Naval Reservist Matt Slater, we've received a major grant that will help us pay for this important project.

Looking ahead

In the new year we are laser-focused on bringing businesses of all sizes to Putnam County and creating additional jobs and opportunities for our residents. Thanks to the leadership of IDA Chairman Bill Nulk and President Kathleen Abels of the Economic Development Corporation, we've had multiple business success stories, with more on the way.

For example, our host Ace Endico completed its 60,000-square-foot, multi-million-dollar expansion, where we gather this evening. Elsewhere in the County, Magazzino Italian Art completed its expansion in 2024. The Lincoln Logistics warehouses and distribution center on Pugsley Road are completed. A healthy choice popcorn company from Connecticut named Lesser Evil is leasing one of the two buildings. Finally, Brewster Yards, a multi-sports complex, has received its County approvals, an exciting development. This will create additional demand for restaurants, hotels, and other lodging in Putnam County, something I'm thrilled about.

Putnam County was farmed by families and the Wappinger Indians who called this place home before it was officially added to the map, contributing to the Hudson Valley's reputation as the breadbasket of New York. Our commitment to agriculture and the dignity of family farms continues today.

This Administration's goal, in consultation with stakeholders, is to foster the responsible growth of farms where they are likely to succeed as economic enterprises while respecting the rights of local homeowners to maintain their communities according to a shared vision of growth. Today I am prepared to announce that this Administration will host an Agricultural Forum and Farmland Roundtable in Putnam Valley in the near future. The purpose of this roundtable will be to explore administrative updates and solicit feedback from our invited family farmers, municipal stakeholders, and elected officials, all of whom will have a hand in contributing to a discussion about the future of farming in Putnam County.

Making history together

Here the past is alive, and continues to inspire. Partnering with our County Historian Jen Cassidy, along with local historical societies and town historians spanning Putnam, my Administration is actively working to make the 250th anniversary of our nation an occasion to remember.

I want to thank and recognize two remarkable, well-known Putnam County residents who have agreed to step up and serve as our Putnam County Rev250 Committee's volunteer co-chairs, the Honorable Governor George Pataki and long-time community advocate George Whipple. I know we'll be able to rely on their leadership and advice to implement our plans to commemorate the story of America's independence.

The past is too important to stick behind glass like a museum curiosity: We owe it to our ancestors to engage constructively with those who came before us so that our love for the past and its contributions to our free and equal present can be more fully appreciated. With that in mind, the 2025 Putnam County Fair will host a dedicated exhibitions tent over two days, Saturday and Sunday, with American Revolution reenactors. Stop by to learn about some of these dynamic figures from our revolutionary past.

Or visit the Whipple-Feeley Chapel at Veterans Memorial Park, a beautiful structure named for two Putnam County veterans which we hope to have fully renovated soon. There will also be a series of free public offerings around Putnam County beginning this year and into next, culminating on the Fourth of July 2026.

Under my Administration, Putnam County will never abandon its notable figures of the past. Sybil Ludington raced 40 miles through the thick Hudson Valley countryside atop her loyal steed Star in a driving rain to warn Patriot militiamen about an impending Redcoat attack.

Ludington's act of bravery deserves to be told to a new generation of New Yorkers, and we will tell it with pride. To do so, we must pursue a new mission: that is, to Save Sybil. We intend to repair and restore her statue located on the shore of Lake Gleneida in Carmel. With some hard work, community spirit, and, yes, financial support, Sybil Ludington will ride again.

Conclusion

Last month, along with County Clerk Bartolotti, Legislature Chair Sayegh, and several community members, I had the privilege of attending the County's most recent naturalization ceremony at our Historic Courthouse. Together we spent a special morning welcoming dozens of new Americans. Despite hailing from many nations across the globe, each was united in his or her commitment to our Constitution and the founding ideals of liberty and equality for all. Each saw a brighter future here than where they came from. It was an inspiring moment.

People with different ideas, views, and backgrounds always have an opportunity to work together to achieve a common goal. Tonight, you've heard some successes and goals of my Administration. None would be possible without your support. I believe we can pass the largest property-tax cut in County history, lower the cost of living for everyone, care for and support our most vulnerable residents, and build on our victories to invite a better, more prosperous tomorrow. There is only one Putnam; one New York; one America. Let us, then, continue this important work together. Thank you.