



ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION

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Criswell Calls for Unity & Collaboration Amidst Uncertainties

(Kingston, NY) — In Legislative Session on Tuesday, Peter Criswell delivered the annual Chair Address and highlighted the challenges Ulster County faces and opportunities for collaboration and consensus to address the needs of our community.



2025 Chair Address

Peter Criswell

Good evening, colleagues, staff, and members of the public.

I want to begin by thanking you for the trust you have placed in me once again as Chair of the Legislature. It is an honor and a responsibility that I do not take lightly. I am grateful for the dedication and hard work of every legislator in this room, regardless of party or perspective. Each of you brings valuable insight, passion, and commitment to the work we do, and I look forward to continuing our efforts together.

I want to recognize Vice Chair Megan Sperry for her partnership and support, as well as Majority Leader Uchitelle, Deputy Majority Leader Levine, Minority Leader Roberts, Deputy Minority Leader Lopez and our committee chairs and deputy chairs—your leadership is the backbone of this Legislature. And, of course, our dedicated legislative staff whose efforts often go unseen but are absolutely essential to everything we accomplish.

As we step into this new year, we do so in uncertain times. There is a very real possibility that federal funding we have relied on to support critical services will be reduced or disappear altogether. Economic instability, inflation, and shifting policies at the national level will have direct impacts on our ability to serve our constituents.

And beyond the financial challenges, there is something deeper—a sense of fear and uncertainty that many in our community are experiencing. There are families worried about losing their homes, neighbors struggling to afford rent, groceries, and medical care, parents desperate for access to mental health and addiction services for their children. There are community members who fear that their very existence—their rights, their dignity—may be denied or stripped away.

These are not distant issues. They are here, in Ulster County. And while we may not control the national conversation, what we do here—at the local level—matters.

This Legislature has always understood that government is not just about policy—it's about people. It's about how we care for our neighbors, how we support families, how we make our communities places where everyone has the opportunity to live, work, and thrive.

In the year ahead, we will continue to address some of the most pressing challenges facing Ulster County:

We must remain steadfast in our efforts to address the housing crisis, ensuring that people can afford to live in the communities they call home. Safe, affordable housing and reliable transportation are fundamental to a thriving community. By addressing the housing crisis and improving public transportation options, we can ensure that all residents have access to stable living conditions and the mobility they need to work, learn, and engage in daily life.

We must continue strengthening emergency services & public safety. We must bolster our emergency response services so that every resident can feel safe and supported in times of crisis. Ensuring the safety and well-being of all residents is a responsibility we take seriously. We must support our law enforcement and first responders while also upholding the values of fairness, dignity, and community trust. In these uncertain times, we must remain committed to protecting the rights of our residents and fostering a safe, inclusive Ulster County for all.

We must work to strengthen access to healthcare and mental health services. These are critical services, and we must recognize that mental health is just as important as physical health. The much-anticipated opening of the Ulster County Crisis Support Center will be a major step forward in providing immediate, compassionate care for those experiencing mental health crises, ensuring that no one is left without the support they need. Additionally, the efforts to establish new warming centers in various parts of the county will offer refuge to those facing housing insecurity during the harsh winter months. These initiatives reflect our commitment to a safety net that prioritizes dignity, care, and accessibility for all residents.

We must invest in economic development & workforce development programs that help people build careers, support their families, and contribute to a thriving local economy. This means not only expanding job opportunities but also ensuring that workers have the skills and training needed to succeed in an evolving job market. We must make Ulster County an attractive place for small businesses to start, grow, and thrive by reducing barriers, fostering entrepreneurship, and supporting local businesses with the resources they need to succeed.

A key part of this effort is working closely with our partners at Ulster County Community College to ensure that our workforce is prepared for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Additionally, we must pursue innovative workforce development initiatives—from apprenticeships and vocational training to expanding access to trade skills and emerging industries—so that everyone in Ulster County has a pathway to economic security and success.

As stewards of Ulster County's natural resources, we must continue advancing policies that promote clean energy, protect our environment, and combat climate change while ensuring sustainability remains at the heart of our decision-making.

Investing in our infrastructure is essential to the safety, efficiency, and economic vitality of Ulster County. We must continue prioritizing critical projects, from road and bridge repairs to facility upgrades, ensuring our public assets serve our residents effectively for years to come.

We must champion arts, culture, and community well-being programs that enrich our communities, knowing that quality of life is about more than just economics—it's about connection, creativity, and a sense of belonging.

Responsible financial stewardship is the foundation of effective governance. By continuing to carefully monitor the county's budget, ensuring fiscal responsibility, and making strategic investments, we can maintain essential services while preparing for future economic challenges.

This is not about ideology. It is about our shared responsibility to serve the people of Ulster

County. No matter what challenges come our way, I know that if we remain committed to collaboration, compassion, and pragmatic solutions, we will continue to move this county forward.

These are uncertain times, but uncertainty should not lead to fear—it should lead to action. It should remind us why we do this work, why public service matters, and why we must continue to show up for the people who need us most.

I am honored to serve as your Chair, and I look forward to another year of working together to build a stronger, more resilient, and more compassionate Ulster County.

Thank you.

Video of the Chair Address can be viewed at youtube.com/@UlsterCountyLegislature.

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