

SOTC: State of Workforce and Economic Development

Good Afternoon and thank you for joining me for my third of four addresses comprising the 2024 State of Monroe County. Today, I am delivering the State of Workforce and Economic Development address.

Monroe County is home to a diverse economic landscape, with globally known corporations alongside hometown entrepreneurs growing small businesses. Legacy and emerging industries ranging from farms and agribusinesses, to photonics and semiconductors.

As much as our economy is about business it's also about the people who power them, be they skilled trades workers, advanced manufacturers, or part of a growing healthcare workforce. That's why today's speech is taking place at Monroe Community College.

Our region is fortunate to be home to world class centers for learning, and when it comes to community colleges, MCC tops the lists. Dr. Burt-Nanna, thank you for welcoming us to your incredible space, and thank you for your continued and ongoing partnership.

MCC INVESTMENTS

Almost every local business owner I spoke with in the last few years has shared with me the same concern: difficulty finding trained workers to fill the jobs they have available.

Investing in workforce development is a priority of my administration and a priority for many organizations across the county.

As a County, we've invested in a significant number of organizations and programs, and our partnership with MCC has been a throughline among our efforts to build and train our workforce.

During the State of Public Health address, I recognized MCC's contributions to the healthcare workforce through our American Rescue Plan investments. MCC and the Finger Lakes Performing Provider System (FLPPS) are training Certified Nursing Assistants, Home Health Aides, LPNs and RNs through a Long Term Care Workforce Program and a Nursing Pathways program. Together, these efforts will train 862 individuals by the end of 2026.

At MCC's Brighton Campus we're going to bid on a new Applied Technology Center. This \$55 million project is jointly funded by the County and the State and is supported by a \$3.5 million HUD grant. This project also contains a Project Labor Agreement, or PLA, to ensure the project is finished on time and on budget.

The new ATC will modernize, co-locate and integrate MCC's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programs - and focus on practical hands-on training that will lead to certificates or associate degrees in fields like automotive technology, HVAC, and solar thermal technology.

This year, Monroe County will also invest in the expansion of MCC's optics program, matching a \$1.3 million state grant to build

out the optical systems technology micro-credentialing lab, and building on the \$500,000 COMIDA grant provided last year that assisted 244 individuals receive optics training.

As industry continues to evolve with new technologies, MCC is keeping pace with those changes and ensuring our workers have access to training for the jobs of tomorrow.

That happens right here at MCC's Downtown Campus, which is home to the Finger Lakes Workforce Development Center (or forward center) and the innovative mPower program.

MPower is a partnership between MCC and Monroe County that prepares students for numerous career paths including information technology, manufacturing, healthcare and skilled trades. MCC uses its current instructors, equipment, and facilities to fill jobs available in our community by working with employers to provide custom training.

The program is supported by a three year \$1.5 million commitment from COMIDA, which splits the cost of training with employers. To date, 659 individuals have been trained for in-demand jobs, including 230 in healthcare.

RETAIN

MCC is just one of the institutions of higher learning providing world-class educational services in Monroe County. Every year, around 19,000 students graduate from one of our outstanding colleges and universities.

Too many of our students come to Monroe County for their education, and then leave after they complete their degree.

Two years ago we piloted the Rochester Emerging Talent and Innovations Network or RETAIN Program, providing incentives for top-tier talent to stay in our region after graduating.

The pilot program connected eligible college graduates with a \$2,000 grant if they took a job within Monroe County for at least one year after graduation.

Now CampusROC, an initiative of the Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce and ROC2025 are seeking to partner with COMIDA to expand the RETAIN program.

Under this program, CampusROC will recruit students for and administer the RETAIN program. Working with a network of 19 partner colleges and universities, CampusROC will double the grant support to recent graduates to \$4,000 and support 25 students in its first year and 50 students in its second year.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT FUND

This innovative initiative was born out of COMIDA's modernization in 2022. As part of this modernization, COMIDA committed to supporting more workforce development and targeting outreach for Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprises or (MWBES) and small businesses.

A commitment that is paying dividends.

The focal point of COMIDA's modernization was the creation of a workforce development fund. This fund re-tooled the way COMIDA invests the fees it receives from developers, by dedicating them to workforce training.

Since 2022 COMIDA committed:

\$920,000 to the Young Adult Manufacturing Training and Employment Program YAMTEP - where 120 individuals received advanced manufacturing training, with 80% of participants placed in jobs at the end of their training.

More than \$1 million in combined investments in the skilled trades which includes:

A targeted multimedia campaign for young people attracting them to apprentice programs conducted in partnership with the Rochester Building and Construction Trades Council;

Funding for the Multi-Craft Apprentice Preparation Program or (MAPP);

And a three-year investment in the Training Rochester Adults in Construction Skills, or TRACS program with Rochester Careers in Construction and Unicon. TRACS, approved just months ago, will provide pre-apprenticeship training and apprenticeship placement with wrap-around case management services for low income youth.

Additional investments include - \$1 million to support bilingual job training with the Ibero-American Action League.

\$300,000 for 1199 SEIU to train Certified Nursing Assistants, Patient Care Techs, Phlebotomy Techs, and Pharmacy Techs.

\$400,000 for a “no-code” software developer program with Nextcorps embark program.

\$450,000 with RochesterWorks to upskill workers and connect people impacted by substance use disorder to careers.

\$300,000 to support the creation and certification of new In-Home Childcare providers through the Rochester Childfirst Network; and \$200,000 with BOCES to support a Commercial Driver's License Program.

All told, COMIDA has invested \$5.3 million in workforce development that did not exist before 2022.

COMIDA's modernization is having a dramatic effect on the development of our workforce, especially when coupled with our American Rescue Plan Act Investments.

APRA WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

We invested \$5.8 million with Encompass Resources for Learning to provide academic support, behavioral health services, job training, and job placements for young people. They've already exceeded their target of youth contacts - more than a year-and-a-half early – they did it by partnering with organizations like: Black Men Achieve, the Boys and Girls Club, Teen Empowerment, and Hub 585.

This week we will join REOC (Rochester Educational Opportunity Center) at SUNY Brockport as they unveil their Mobile Welding Lab. This initiative trains new welders - a position that is in high demand.

We've seen great success through the Urban League of Rochester's Workforce Development Program for Under- and Unemployed individuals.

This program certifies participants to become Mold Abatement workers, Asbestos Handlers, Lead Abatement workers, or receive OSHA certifications.

Listen to this success story -- Jomaine (Joe-Maine) Johnson completed his training with the Urban League and has already opened his own demolition company, Royal Ron Services.

Mr. Johnson's business is thriving, and as a thank you, he is now volunteering with Urban League, and looking to hire graduates from the same program that trained him.

DHS RGRTA PARTNERSHIP

Stable employment is a stepping stone to self-sufficiency and upward mobility. While we focus on training our future workforce, we understand that many of our residents face barriers to seeking and maintaining stable employment. One of those barriers is reliable transportation. We are re-imagining how DHS clients can access the dependable RTS bus service while looking for a job.

Thanks to the innovative work of our team at the Department of Human Services and the Rochester Genesee Regional Transportation Authority, or RGRTA, we will soon launch a pilot program to help eliminate this transportation barrier for those job seekers.

A pilot group of DHS clients will soon be able to ride RTS buses using their Electronic Benefit Transfer, or EBT card. For individuals participating in eligible programs, this will eliminate the paper bus passes and reduce the number of lost or stolen passes. Those in the program will be able to swipe or tap their EBT card to ride the bus.

While the initial partnership with RGRTA and DHS is focused on transportation for public benefits recipients seeking employment, it has the capacity to grow to include transportation for eligible clients mandated to attend medical and behavioral health treatment, or training and apprenticeships as part of their Public Assistance requirements. We expect the program to grow and eventually serve an estimated 800 to 1,000 clients monthly.

Monroe is the first County in the state to engage in this innovative effort, and we believe it could become a model program across New York.

A reminder that this is a pilot program, and any impacted client who will be enrolled in this program will be contacted by DHS.

This program illustrates the modernization and innovation we are implementing with the focus on providing all of our residents an opportunity for success. We must not only help create jobs and help train the workforce for those jobs, we must also work to remove barriers that prevent people from getting and keeping those jobs.

This is another example of how we are modernizing county services to better and more reliably serve the public. Join me in recognizing...

COMIDA

We are making considerable investments in our workforce, training individuals and helping them develop new skills to acquire good paying jobs. In doing so, we are also signaling to businesses both large and small that Monroe County has a

vibrant workforce that is ready to support new and expanding businesses.

Monroe County's economic foundations were laid by the innovators who harnessed the Genesee River to power the flour mills of our past, and furthered by industrial visionaries like Chester Carlson, George Eastman and Kate Gleason.

We are renowned for our ingenuity, adaptability and excellence, and Monroe County continues to build on this proud legacy.

Based on every measure Monroe County's economy is growing. According to a 2024 Wall Street Journal and Moody's Analytics report, our region is now the 40th hottest job market in the United states, up 40 rankings from last year. This study reviewed 380 metro areas, comparing unemployment rates; labor force participation rates; changes in employment levels; size of the workforce; and wages.

Rochester was ranked the 5th best city in the United States for remote workers.

Our unemployment rate is 3.7%, a half point lower than New York State and under the national average.

Innovative companies are investing in our community at record levels.

Through COMIDA support, leaders in hospitality, technology, photonics, optics, imaging and cutting-edge food and beverage production have invested more than \$4 billion in our economy over the past four years, retaining more than 5,000 jobs and creating 4,000 more.

Here are some of the standout examples:

Amazon built three significant distribution and sortation facilities – in Gates, Greece and in Ogden – with a combined investment of \$541 million. We celebrated the grand opening of the 2.6 million square-foot distribution center in Gates on Friday, and the Ogden facility will open in coming weeks. These projects bring a total of 1,200 new jobs to the county.

Constellation Brands relocated its global headquarters to Rochester with an \$83 million investment in the Aqueduct Building that will bring at least 300 new workers to downtown. We will cut the ribbon on this building next week.

fairlife broke ground last month on a monumental \$660 million project in Webster that both nods to our agricultural roots and firmly cements Monroe County as a leader in modern food production and sustainability. This state-of-the-art dairy processing plant is the largest industrial development project in our county's history and will be the largest facility of its kind in the Northeast.

Thanks to Governor Hochul, COMIDA received the first FAST NY Grant, securing \$20 million to add critical infrastructure components on Tebor Road, creating a shovel-ready site that helped us win the bid for fairlife, which was also considering sites in other states.

During its construction, fairlife will generate 500 construction jobs and upon completion, will create 250 permanent positions. Additionally, it will directly impact 850 dairy farm workers, significantly benefitting agribusiness throughout the Finger Lakes and Western New York.

Notably, the fairlife project was recognized as the New York State Economic Development Council Project of the Year and was named one of *Area Development Magazine's* top 15 manufacturing projects in the nation in 2024.

I'm sure you've heard - **Topgolf** is coming to Brighton! They are investing \$40 million to build an entertainment complex in CityGate that will include 80 hitting bays for high-tech driving range games, a full-service restaurant and bar and event space.

They considered building in Buffalo, Syracuse, even Victor, but decided to construct their new facility in Monroe County. We join Long Island as the second Topgolf in New York State. The nearest other facilities are in Cleveland, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Drawing Topgolf to our community is a big deal. These are the types of amenities that we want here.

Attention from companies like Topgolf sends a broader signal to other retailers and businesses, as Brian Sharp reported earlier this month for WXXI, Topgolf is a magnet for other investments. The "Topgolf effect" is taking place at CityGate - construction has already started on a \$42 million, 191-room hotel there that wouldn't have been possible without Topgolf as a draw.

CityGate's developers are finalizing plans for a new restaurant at the site, and are in talks with numerous other businesses seeking space there.

Topgolf hasn't even broken ground yet and it's already spurring additional development, because where Topgolf goes, other businesses follow, and I look forward to seeing the CityGate site achieve its full potential.

These large scale investments are significant, but it's equally important to recognize the essential role of small businesses. They remain the core of our local economy. Small businesses provide unique goods and services, employ our friends and neighbors, enrich the diversity of our marketplace and contribute to the vibrancy of our community.

As we have modernized COMIDA to emphasize the importance of investing in workforce development, we are also enhancing our economic development efforts to better recognize and support small businesses. Last year, with \$5.8 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds we established the MicroAdvantage Small Business Loan Program. These loans, administered by the Monroe County Industrial Development Corporation (MCIDC), provide qualified small businesses with access to loans of up to \$50,000 to serve as gap financing when other sources of capital are not available.

So far, nearly two dozen small businesses have qualified for \$1 million of these loans, and 70% of them are certified Minority and Women Owned Businesses, including Shining Stars Childcare Center owned by Martecia Kelly.

Another microloan recipient is Halligan Creative Arts Therapy, which specializes in working with individuals with disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder and PTSD.

Ms. Halligan's story is a testament to the program's impact. After applying for a MicroAdvantage loan, she worked closely with our economic development team and learned she qualified for a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan. She applied, received

that loan and then purchased her own building and expanded her services.

(acknowledge Ms. Halligan and Ms. Kelly if they are in attendance)

There are many individuals in our community who have a dream but just need a little investment to bring it to fruition.

Today, I'm pleased to announce we are cutting interest rates on MicroAdvantage loans to a fixed 5%. That's not all: for businesses certified as Minority and Women Owned (MWBE) or Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned, the reduced rate is even lower at a fixed 4%, and this reduction is retroactive, so it will also impact our existing loan recipients.

Previously, the interest for these loans was tied to the prime lending rate, which is currently 8.5%. Over the 5-year term of a \$50,000 loan, a typical borrower will now save nearly \$5,000 while an MWBE or Service Disabled Veteran Owned business would save \$6,300. With lowered borrowing costs, these MicroAdvantage loans will further support even more of our entrepreneurs as they strike out on their own.

Creating equity and opportunity for businesses is essential to a healthy and successful economy. In 2022 our Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion launched a certification program for MWBEs. This program has been wildly successful and to date, we have certified 557 minority and women-owned businesses.

Working with the City of Rochester, county and city staff provide ongoing support for MWBEs, including access to training, a new annual MWBE conference, and increased MWBE utilization.

The County established MWBE utilization goals for public works projects a number of years ago, this helped to ensure a diverse workforce was included in the construction and building trades. In 2022 we expanded our MWBE utilization goals to service contracts across all departments. Service contracts include everything from window washing and janitorial services, to architecture and engineering, to security services.

In 2022, 35 Minority owned businesses and 11 women owned businesses received a total of \$11.6 million in contracts. Through intentional efforts, we have seen considerable growth in the number of minority and women owned businesses that receive prime and sub county contracts. This is evident in our 2023 numbers, where 56 Minority owned businesses and 26 women owned businesses received a total of \$31.1 million in contracts. That's almost a \$20 million in growth in just one year.

For too long, benefits such as sales or use tax exemptions were only accessible to big, multi-million dollar operations, like the ones I talked about before, and not to our small and medium-sized employers.

Therefore, we have launched an innovative sales and use tax exemption program designed specifically to support small business owners embarking on small capital projects. This new initiative aligns with COMIDA modernization, allowing it to be more inclusive of the small business community and offer substantial financial incentives for job-creating projects.

As part of COMIDA modernization, these benefits are now within reach for businesses like a small 50-person machine shop looking to grow and become more competitive by investing in new

technology, or a small trucking business that's seeing a boom and wants to upgrade and invest in its fleet.

Under this pilot, projects with total costs under a half-million dollars will be eligible for those lower fees and a sales tax exemption up to \$100,000. This will open more doors, create more jobs and encourage more people to take that chance to follow their dreams.

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We are seeing remarkable new business developments in our region, reflecting the confidence industries have in Monroe County. Companies like Amazon, Constellation Brands and fairlife are investing billions in our economy, creating new jobs and laying the foundation for sustained growth and prosperity. Innovative ventures like TopGolf are enhancing our community's appeal and drawing in further investments.

Monroe County's economy is an intricate ecosystem that requires balance and attention. Our strategic investments are designed to support every facet of this ecosystem, from large-scale enterprises to small businesses.

We are committed to the people who drive our economy forward, modernizing educational facilities and providing direct support to budding entrepreneurs.

Each of these initiatives seeks to remove obstacles that hinder progress. From workforce training to microloans for small businesses to helping our MWBE's access government contracts, every action we take is aimed at fostering a more inclusive and

equitable economy where every resident has the opportunity to succeed.

The challenges of the future demand we become ever more creative, collaborative and determined. We must continue to break down barriers, provide equitable opportunities and empower community members to achieve their dreams.

Our progress as a county is not measured just by the economic numbers, but also by the lives we uplift and the communities we strengthen.

Monroe County is a place where innovation thrives, businesses flourish and every individual has the opportunity to succeed.

Together, we are building a more prosperous Monroe County.