

Thank you, Madam President.

Good Evening. I'd like to thank those who may be viewing for your patience. We had to delay our speech because of equipment failure. However, I am told that these issues will be remedied soon. That being said, I'd also like to convey my thanks and gratitude to Minority Leader Michael Oliveri who offered to again delay his speech so I could give mine in the presence of an in-person audience. I am hopeful that by the time he gives his speech, we will be back in Council Chambers. To the council members that I serve with, thank you for this opportunity as well as your support in choosing me as your Majority Leader. I am humbled by the honor and look forward to serving alongside each of you.

I'm here this evening because the community that I represent had enough faith in me to put me in office. A girl born in "The Queen City of the Hudson," (Poughkeepsie, NY that is). A girl who as a young adult made many mistakes. A girl who has had to endure many struggles and heartbreaks, the latest of which was the loss of my dear husband, Paul. He truly was my champion and biggest supporter and right now, I would just about give anything to see the look on his face. I am also that girl who over time connected with a quaint diverse city just North of the Hudson River, bounded by the majestic Catskills and Shawangunk mountain ranges. My history with Kingston is long. My tenure dates back some thirty years. My first real job was here in Kingston. I bought my first home in Kingston and I became woven in the very fabric of the community for which I serve.

Before we reach the age of adulthood, we are often asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Most times a litany of answers follow to the tune of "doctor," "police officer," "fire-fighter," "teacher," etc.

For as long as I could remember, I watched in awe as my mother would get up every night, put on her pristine white dress, white stockings and white shoes to head out to Benedictine Hospital where she worked as a psychiatric nurses' aide. I don't know if my mother loved the overnight shift but I was amazed at her work ethic; her desire to make sure her children had a roof over their heads and food on their table. My mother was my hero. And, I want to take this time to thank all of our health care workers, fire & rescue workers, police officers and every essential worker who sacrificed their livelihoods so you and I could live safely.

As respectable as my mother's profession was, I did not follow in her footsteps. However, I knew from a young age that I had an inclination and yearning to help people. That yearning, no doubt came from my mother. You see, growing up we didn't have much, but what we did have, my mother shared with the community. I watched how she advocated for the motherless child, the man or woman dealing with housing and food insecurities. Being an eyewitness to that type of selflessness only ignited the call and desire I had to speak out on behalf of the voiceless and for the rights of the vulnerable.

I believe this is why I became a Family Law Paralegal. Helping families navigate through the difficult familial struggles was rewarding but I knew that I wanted and could do more. The thought of running for government office never occurred to me and was far from any plans I had. The old saying rings true – *if you want to see God smile, tell Him your plans*. When I was approached about running as my Ward's representative, my first thought was I don't think so – I'd have to really think about that. But then I began speaking to the people in my ward. I listened to how many felt as if they were being left out of decisions governing their lives; how they wanted safer neighborhoods and communities; streets plowed and paved. They told me they

wanted someone who looked like them making decisions for them – someone who could relate to situations in which they found themselves. So, I committed to local government.

In the state of the city address the Mayor spoke about Kingston as being resilient. *Resilience, the capacity to recover from difficulties*. Really, isn't that what we are trying to do – recover? 2020 and 2021 saw many tragedies, heartbreaks and misfortunes. We watched how Covid-19 impacted not only our city but our nation, socially and economically. We got knocked down because the world in essence shut down. Gun violence tore through our city, displacement and gentrification became common place. Last month's ice storm which left tens of thousands without electrical power and heat showed us how little control we have. But we were resilient – we hunkered down and did what we had to do to make sure we ourselves and our neighbors were safe; we organized and came up with a plan to keep our streets safe. We rallied against those who wanted to take away our voices; we watched as businesses and communities came together to help those in distress. Indeed, we were resilient.

As a result, we've seen some successes:

- Streetscape project progressing;
- Streets were paved;
- Hudson Brickyard Trail opened;
- Upgrades to our parks and rec dept.;
- Re-envision public safety task force was formed;
- The acquisition of video cameras for public safety measures;
- The formation of an Arts & Cultural Plan, and many other accomplishments for which we should be proud.

However, we cannot rest on our accomplishments but we must continue in that resilient way. How? By making sure that we follow through with the promises we have made. By holding true to the initiatives that we have laid out concerning affordable housing, community-policing, common sense tenant protections, city-wide infrastructure, fixing our zoning code and finally balancing out the social economic, educational, and environmental inequities that still continue. We also want to prioritize having an open and transparent government. Because open governance ensures an environment of **participation, sustainability and accountability**.

Affordable Housing: Housing is a basic human need. Everyone deserves a decent and affordable place to live. Studies have shown that affordable housing uplifts residents, encourages social connection, reduces overcrowding, increases adjacent property values, attracts businesses and jobs, and lowers crime rates. It is my belief that the City of Kingston should use every resource available to make sure the promise to house and keep residents in their homes is met. Toward that end, I am pleased to see the City of Kingston's recently published American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) which identified a highly-stressed housing environment and included a consensus that ARPA investments should be directed to broadly enhancing the housing environment.

Community-policing: I do want to commend our Kingston Police Department for listening to community residents and community leaders express the necessity of community-policing. We have read study after study which show how community-oriented policing improves attitudes toward police. We will continue to meet and collaborate with law enforcement to improve community relations and ensuring public safety for all residents. It is my hope that as we continue, we will begin to see a more diverse police department that reflects the diverse community it serves.

Tenant Protections: I am hopeful that the Good Cause legislation passed by this council will fundamentally protect against unfair evictions and predatory rent increases which will in-turn stabilize communities. This legislation will also curb speculation by making it more difficult for large investors to flip rental housing and hike up the rents.

City-Wide Infrastructure: We have an ambitious schedule. I am pleased that infrastructure is taking place across our city and not just held to certain areas. For too long there have been neighborhoods and communities who have felt they were not a part of the city's planning. However, as laid out in the city's budget this year, infrastructure improvements will occur in all three districts, Uptown, Midtown and Downtown.

City-Wide Rezoning: The city-wide rezoning initiative is in effect. We must keep this as a top priority as it is a tool to control growth and development. However, with control comes constraints and regulations that tend to reduce the supply of housing, including multifamily and low-income housing, causing housing affordability. And, because of those draw-backs, we must make sure the re-zoning is done correctly and see it through to completion.

Diversity Balance: I believe a better future can be obtained by making our city more inclusive. In order to do this, we must have more voices involved in the process. In the beginning of my speech I told you the reason why I am here – because of the trust and belief in the community I serve. This evening, I am also here, on the first day of Women's History Month as the Kingston City Common Council Majority Leader. Although, not the first woman to hold the position; the first person of color to hold the position. And while I am honored to be the first, it is a reminder of how far we still need to go.

This is why I implore more persons of color to get involved in your local and city government. Diversity and inclusion in local government is important because it creates more opportunities for a city to better connect with its community. If residents feel they are understood and see that they are truly being represented, they are typically more likely to participate in the civic life of their community and engage in local government activities.

### Closing

Resilience, the capacity to recover from difficulties. I can almost assure you that there will be more difficulties ahead. But if we commit to moving forward together, I am confident that we can create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive city that works for all. Thank you.